



SASSI
Later-life Careers

Ambassadors' Stories

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I INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Ambassadors is to promote the advantages of mobility and work experience for career redirection and CPD amongst older workers, unretirees and job seekers. Innovative approaches to the provision of work experiences are seen as a tactic for stimulating career revitalization and change.

From the total of 99 older workers who took part in the plotting of the SASSI LLC methodology, a group of 14 was selected to take part a 5-day Design Thinking Workshop for entrepreneurs held in Vienna, Austria from 27th of November to 1st of December 2023. The workshop was hosted by the Austrian partner die Berater.

The workshop was conducted in two separate groups with the guidance of two facilitators. The primary objective of the workshop was to provide participants the chance for a transnational mobility entrepreneurial learning and work experiences. During the workshop, they had the opportunity to apply the design-thinking method and develop a prototype for a transnational entrepreneurial opportunity.

As a result of attending the local trainings and international workshop, the lives and career paths of participants experienced significant change. The following collection presents some of their stories.

2 AMBASSADORS' STORIES

2.1 Keeping busy, keeping bees (Austria)

I'm E. (71 years old) and I spent most of my life as a chemistry teacher at schools and universities. A few years ago, I retired and, while I generally enjoy this phase of my life, I often find myself wanting to be active again (like many others in my age group as I found out). It's not just about staying busy—I want to feel like I'm creating something meaningful, contributing in some way. After all, I'm still in good health, and I believe I have more to offer.

In November 2023, I had the chance to participate at a design-thinking workshop organised by the SASSI Project. It was a great experience to be surrounded by other motivated people, all with their own ideas but similar feelings of wanting to do something purposeful. The atmosphere was inspiring, and the energy of the group gave me a sense of motivation that I hadn't felt in quite some time. I definitely felt eager to start something new afterwards.

After the workshop, I was ready to act on the ideas that had come up during the session. But as often happens in life, distractions come along. Family obligations, other priorities—I ended up losing track of that energy.

One day, I met with an old friend, and during our conversation, something clicked. It reminded me of how I felt after the SASSI workshop. When I got home, I knew it was time to finally start following a dream I had for a long time: becoming a beekeeper.

I'm now taking a beekeeping course and connecting with other beekeepers in my area. It feels great to be learning something new and to see my passion come to life. Thanks to the SASSI project, I found the push I needed to start this new chapter. I've discovered that it's never too late to pursue something meaningful.

2.2 Blogging to help others (Austria)

I'm P, 60 years old, from Vienna. For about 30 years, I worked as an engineer, but in my mid-50s, an accident forced me to stop working in that field. What followed was a tough period where I struggled to find a new job and felt labelled as "unemployed" for very long. This had an effect on my self-confidence as well. I lost my feeling that I had something valuable to offer.

During the Sassi workshop that I was invited to attend, I learned to look at my life from a different perspective. For the first time in quite some time, I stepped out of the mindset of being long-term unemployed and rediscovered myself as an expert. I realised that despite my challenges, I still had a wealth of experience, knowledge, and a strong will to take control of my life again. The workshop made me feel seen and valued.

After the workshop I didn't want to lose the momentum. I spent some time going through the Sassi materials and found myself drawn to the Ambassador manual. I knew that I wanted to share this change of mindset with others, especially those who, like me, had lost confidence due to job loss or early retirement. I've seen first-hand how easy it is for people in our situation to feel like they have nothing to offer, and I wanted to change that.

I'm currently starting a blog with a friend. Our aim is to create a space where we can share our experiences and help others who are in the same boat - people who feel stuck at a later stage in life, stuck in a vacuum, unsure of what to do with the rest of their professional life. We want to provide a platform where peers can connect, share their stories and support each other on their journey of rediscovery at a later stage in life. I don't know yet if this project will be a success, but what I do know is how rewarding it feels to work on something that gives me purpose. It's been a way for me to rebuild my sense of identity. Now, when someone asks what I'm doing, I have something meaningful to share—it's empowering to be able to say that I'm working on a project that matters.

2.3 A Fresh Perspective (Bulgaria)

Hi I'm M. I've always had a passion for the arts — whether it was entertaining at children's parties or helping guide young people through creative projects. But life has a way of changing things. As I turned 50, I found myself in a new role as the caretaker for my mother, and my career took a backseat. The creative work that used to fill my days became sporadic—just a small job here and there. I started to feel disconnected from the person I used to be, the one who could bring joy through performance and connection.

When I was invited to join the SASSI Later-Life Careers project's Design Thinking workshop in Vienna, I wasn't sure what to expect. I thought, *Why would someone in my situation need design thinking?* But from the moment I stepped into that room, surrounded by peers from four different countries, I realized something—this was a space where age didn't matter, where our experiences could transform into something valuable.

We split into groups and began working on our own project ideas, following the Design Thinking process. It was a revelation: not only was I reminded of my creative strengths, but I also found myself connecting with others who were navigating similar life changes. The collaborative process brought me out of my shell again. I realized that my background in arts, in engaging and connecting with people, was more than just a skill—it was an asset.

The workshop reignited something inside me. I started to think of myself not just as someone taking care of their parent or doing odd jobs, but as someone with the potential to create something meaningful. The way we worked through problems, brainstorming, prototyping, and refining ideas gave me a clear vision of how I could use these tools to shape my future.

Now, I'm looking into turning my creative work into something more structured—maybe even a small business. The experience in Vienna opened up a world of possibilities, showing me that it's never too late to start something new. I'm more confident in my ideas and in myself, and I've learned that even at this stage of life, I can still make an impact—both for myself and for others.

2.4 From Facebook posts into a writing career (Bulgaria)

Hi! I'm I. My work always meant a lot to me, and I changed a lot of professional fields over the course of my long career. All of them had one thing in common – conducting some kind of research, finding out something new. I ended up with a vast body of knowledge, not quite knowing what to do with it. When I eventually retired, I didn't know what to do with all the time I found myself having.

I was initially sceptical about attending a Design Thinking course – I saw the methodology as a tool for potential entrepreneurs, and I had no intention of starting my own business. The experience itself was a pleasant surprise – I found myself enjoying the interaction with peers from different countries, many of whom shared the same questions that I did. We have so much to share, but how and with whom? We ended up working on this very challenge together and came up with interesting ideas.

I came out of the course with the understanding that a job is not necessarily the only way to feed useful and to communicate with others. I started writing long Facebook posts on various topics that interested me (linguistics, ethnography, history) and sharing them with my friends. Eventually, one of them came up with the suggestion to turn all that content into a book. So, I reworked the posts, turned them into articles, and gave them an overarching structure. Now I'm in the last stages of working with my editor prior to publishing.

How will my journey continue? Will other books follow the first one? I don't know yet. But I'm thankful for trying our something new. It is always a good idea to

take the first step along an unknown road – maybe you didn't know where you were headed initially, but it will always be an interesting new place!

2.5 A Growth Journey: From Learner to Empowerer (Germany)

Hi I'm S. When I joined the SASSI project, I was looking for direction in my life after a long career. As someone in my 50s, I wasn't sure what the next chapter held. The turning point came when I became a SASSI Ambassador and participated in a series of transformative trainings, including a Design Thinking course in Vienna. There, I connected with other Ambassadors from across Europe. Their experiences and encouragement showed me that age wasn't a barrier—it was a strength.

The training gave me the tools to approach life transitions with creativity and confidence. But what truly inspired me was the support from my peers. We shared ideas, and together we learned how to make a positive impact in our communities. I returned home with a sense of purpose and a desire to use my new skills to empower others.

That opportunity came when I met P., a 49-year-old adult educator from the Neighborhood Centre in Göttingen. He was eager to explore his career development pathway but hesitant about participating in international projects and conferences. I saw myself in him—unsure and looking for direction. Drawing on the methods I had learned, I guided Peter, helping him realize his strengths and build his confidence for the journey ahead.

For me, this experience came full circle. The SASSI project equipped me not just with tools but with the confidence and inspiration to help others navigate their own transitions. It reminded me that growth and contribution are always possible, no matter the stage of life.

2.6 A Voice to be Proud of (Germany)

S. was always a proactive person. Inspired from the discussions with the other SASSI participants, she decided to try out a new venture: to organise dancing and singing events for older adults and make that into a business. She gathered a few friends aged 55+, and together, they started brainstorming. Their goal was to develop a concept that would not only entertain but also foster community and personal growth among participants.

But generating a promising idea was not enough. The group explored various venues and event types, selected appropriate software for playing music, developed a logo, and created promotional materials. They also considered the legal aspect, seeking legal advice to address music licensing issues. Then, a test event was held with family and friends to ensure the concept worked in practice and to gather initial feedback.

The feedback they received was very positive – participants loved singing seeing the lyrics on the wall, they found it easy to participate in a well-organized event

and had great fun. One of the participants even shared that the event reignited her passion for singing and dancing, leading her to consider joining a local choir.

Will S.' initiative turn into the next big business phenomenon? It is early to tell. But it is clear that it is already impacting people's lives. It did not require a significant investment of money – just passion and knowing what to look for, and now it is a growing reality on the local stage in Göttingen.

2.7 Caring for others, caring for oneself (Germany)

C, from Göttingen, cared for her mother, who had dementia, for 10 years. When her mother passed away, C. made it her mission to continue caring for other people with dementia, as she was already unable to work her regular job. In her new role, she discovered that it is not always easy to keep calm and manage to keep everything in balance. During her interactions, she realised that when you're caring for "strangers" rather than relatives, it is really important to develop a personal connection with them.

First, C. attended a training for family carers. She found it very interesting to share experiences with others in the same situation, leading to the realisation that she is not alone. In hindsight, that is something she would have liked to have had while she was caring for her mother. If one doesn't feel too lost and alone, it is of immense help.

The workshops spurred C. to seek other opportunities for development. As a follow-up, she attended the SASSI design thinking course in Vienna. She realised that one can achieve much more if one works in a team. Therefore, people should always try to get help so as not to lose themselves as a person.

C. would like to tell other carers to definitely take a positive approach to their new phase of life and to keep an open mind. In order to help them, she became an Ambassador for mobility in later life. In the SASSI Conference in Peniche, Portugal, she relayed her own experience to her peers – how making a new start can seem, and indeed often is – hard – but it can always be very rewarding.

One should not only focus on the people who need care. The people who remain active in later life should also remember their needs – to grow, to develop, to feel useful. Travelling, and learning together with peers, is one of the best ways to do so. This is what C. teaches her peers both at home and abroad.

2.8 A Bridge for Migrants (Germany)

D. has been working in the social sphere for many years, and notices the challenges faced by those engaged in helping others. The resources are never enough for all. And yet the needs of the people remain.

One of the groups that D.'s attention was focused upon was the one of the migrants. Having legal rights is all well and good, but how to guarantee them if one does not know they exist? Funding schemes may exist, social support

organisations, and much more – but how to find out about them, especially with limited knowledge of the local language?

And yet, there is a group of people who have both the knowledge and the time – the retired. Can there be a way that these two groups could assist each other? Together with a mixed group of participants from both sides, D. worked on this challenge and came up with an idea.

What if the locals, who are already retired, could become agents for integration – something like social mediators? They have the opportunity to be useful, to help others, and this will relieve overburdened state resources. The idea quickly developed in a concrete concept, then a project proposal, which hopefully will find its concrete implementation together with the team that developed it.

2.9 A Career Shift Through Volunteering and Mentorship (Portugal)

Finding New Purpose through SASSI

Hi, I'm D., and I spent over 35 years working as a project manager. By the time I reached my early 60s, I was feeling burnt out and increasingly disconnected from my work. The long hours, high pressure, and the physical demands of the job were taking their toll on me. Although I wasn't ready to fully retire, I knew I needed a change, something that aligned more with my desire to use my skills differently.

I wasn't looking to start a business, but I was drawn to the idea of transitioning into something more meaningful in this new phase of life. I didn't know exactly what that would look like, but the resources and community offered by SASSI seemed like the perfect place to explore my options.

Transitioning into Volunteering and Mentorship

I decided to focus on volunteering within my local community. I began working with a charity that supports underprivileged youth, helping them develop life skills and career guidance. The organizational skills I honed over decades in construction management proved to be incredibly valuable in this new role. I was able to simplify their programmes, introduce new workshops, and even mentor young people who were looking to enter the workforce.

What surprised me the most was how fulfilling this work was. The impact I was making in the lives of young people brought a sense of purpose that I hadn't felt in my previous career. The mindset shift I had developed through SASSI helped me see that my value wasn't tied to a specific job title or salary but to the positive change, I could bring to others.

Finding a New Role in Employment

In addition to my volunteering, I enrolled in a part-time role as a mentor and advisor for a local vocational training center. This role allowed me to use my professional experience to guide others, while also giving me the flexibility and work-life balance I had been craving. The skills I developed as a SASSI Ambassador, such as creative problem-solving and leadership in community engagement, made me a natural fit for the role.

Through the mentoring programmes at the vocational center, I have been able to support individuals looking to change careers, much like I did. I help them navigate their transitions, sharing the tools and resources.

Looking Ahead with a New Mindset

Now, I spend my time giving back to the community through my volunteer work and mentoring, all while maintaining a part-time role that allows me to stay active in the workforce. I no longer feel burnt out or disconnected; instead, I am excited about the future and the positive contributions I can continue to make. I've learned that it's never too late to embrace change.

2.10 From Corporate Finance to Artisan Baking (Portugal)

Hello, I'm Emília, and after nearly 30 years working in corporate finance, I reached a point I no longer felt the same passion for my work. My job had become routine, and the joy I once found in it had faded. At the same time, I had always had a love for baking—whether it was making bread for my family or experimenting with new recipes on the weekends. The idea of turning this passion into a business had been in the back of my mind for years, but I wasn't sure how to make the leap from finance to baking. That's when I discovered the SASSI project, and everything started to change.

Developing New Skills and a Business Mindset

Through the resources offered on the SASSI Hub, I gained the practical knowledge and confidence needed to turn my baking hobby into a business. Although I had extensive experience in finance, managing a small business required a different approach. The SASSI provided me with insights into how to create a business plan, market my products, and manage in a way that was sustainable for a small, artisan bakery.

I started small, testing my products at local markets and receiving feedback from customers. This not only helped me refine my offerings but also gave me a better understanding of what my local community wanted. I used this feedback to adjust my menu, focusing on organic and locally sourced ingredients, which aligned with current consumer trends and my own values of sustainability.

Building Confidence

The transition from corporate finance to running my own business wasn't without its challenges. At first, I was nervous about leaving behind the security of my long-established career. However, the community of like-minded individuals, gave me the confidence to push forward. The networking opportunities were invaluable, and I found myself inspired by others who had successfully reinvented themselves later in life.

One of the key lessons I took was the importance of viewing setbacks as opportunities to learn. For example, when my first attempt to launch an online store faced challenges with logistics, the contacts I made in the project's events helped me re-evaluate my strategy. I participated in a workshop on e-commerce that provided me with practical tools to better manage my supply chain and customer service. Within months, I was able to launch "Pastelaria Artesanal da

Emília" as a fully functional online store with a strong online presence, connecting with customers through social media and digital platforms.

Looking to the Future

This career change has brought me a deep sense of personal fulfilment. I wake up every morning excited to get to work, knowing that I am building something meaningful with my own hands. I've discovered that it's never too late to pursue a passion and create a fulfilling second career. I am now looking forward to expanding my business even further, exploring the possibility of opening a physical bakery and continuing to grow my community of loyal customers.

2.11 A Fresh Start in Sustainable Farming (Portugal)

Hi, I'm H., and after spending over 25 years as a civil engineer, I reached a point in my mid-50s where I felt increasingly disconnected from my career. While I had achieved success in my profession, the work no longer gave me a sense of purpose or satisfaction. I found myself yearning for something that aligned more closely with my personal values, particularly my growing interest in sustainability and the environment. I wanted to feel that I was making a positive impact, but I wasn't sure where to start.

That's when I came across the SASSI project. I immediately felt a connection to the project's spirit, which viewed age as an advantage rather than a limitation. Through SASSI's resources, particularly the "Guide to Becoming an Olderpreneur," I was able to see how my skills as an engineer—such as project management, problem-solving, and resource planning—could be transferred to a completely different industry: sustainable farming.

Applying SASSI's Practical Knowledge

Through the various SASSI modules on business planning, entrepreneurship and mindset development, I began to develop a comprehensive plan for starting a small organic farm in my garden. The materials helped me to break down the overwhelming task of starting a new business into manageable steps. I started small, transforming my garden into a productive space where I could experiment with growing organic vegetables.

By the beginning of 2024, I had successfully set up a small organic farm. I started selling fresh produce to my local community and the response has been incredibly positive. In fact, demand has outstripped the capacity of my garden, and I am now planning to move to a larger plot of land to expand my operations. This next phase of growth would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago, but thanks to the confidence and knowledge I have gained, I now have the vision and skills to make it happen.

Overcoming Doubts and Building a New Life

One of the biggest challenges I faced in this transition was overcoming my own self-doubt. It's not easy to walk away from a career you've spent decades building, especially when the new path is so different.

The support network I built through SASSI was also invaluable, namely with the partnership/mentors.

Looking to the Future

This career change has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It has allowed me to contribute to my local community in a meaningful way. I'm excited about what the future holds as I continue to grow my farm, and I now see my age as an asset rather than an obstacle. I've built a new career based on my values, and I've proven to myself that it's never too late to pursue something new. The confidence and skills I've gained have not only transformed my career but also my outlook on life. I'm looking forward to what lies ahead as I expand my farm and continue this journey.

2.12 From Layer into a Hotel Manager (Slovakia)

Hi, I'm A, a former lawyer from town of Prievidza in Slovakia. I am 56 and I have a successful 25 year long career of a lawyer behind me. I am happy it is already behind me... During the pandemics, things started to go wrong. I developed health problems and environment had also changed. Also due to political changes Slovakia has become extremely unpleasant environment in general. I felt I had to make a dramatic change in my career as I lost all my motivation to continue to be a lawyer and I knew that ideally I will also manage to move out of the country. There was no way I could continue this way. I wanted to do something completely different. I had an idea but at the same time I was full of doubts.

In 2022 I met D.I.. We met by accident at an ordinary workshop related to legal issues. We became friends and he mentioned he worked as a consultant in business development activities. D. consulted couple of my cases and in 2023 and in the meantime, we discussed my situation. I revealed my current thoughts and vague plans to D. and then he came up with an idea that I could get involved with him more intensively as a client. I had no idea I was already becoming part of the SASSI LLC project.

With D. we carried out several sessions and analysed my current situation as well as my future plans. This process brought about number of different perspectives. First, I realised my fears and how much they hindered any potential progress. Second, he helped me to break down my plans into smaller steps and helped me imagine concrete actions I could realistically undertake. All I knew was that I was determined to end my lawyer career and very much wanted to do something in hospitality business.

We focused on two main areas: 1) building my confidence and 2) formulating my goals and planning concrete steps. I never thought that one's uncertainties could be so strong. And with age they become even stronger. I did not believe I was capable of making such a dramatic change. I somehow lost a large part of my confidence. This was a big topic we discussed with Dušan continuously. What helped me a lot was turning my rather "vague" ideas into something more concrete. Even formulating my fears brought me closer to formulating solutions. We continued step by step, one by one.

My ideas became actually reality. I started working with D. in spring 2023. In summer I was already managing a simple hotel owned by my former client and a friend who due to sudden changes needed a new managing director very fast. And I was there. This was a great start in a rather safe environment as I knew the owner and his activities very well. At the same time another former client of mine was working on developing on new investments in Europe. At the moment he is buying few properties in Northern Italy with a plan of developing a small resort. Using my lawyer knowledge, I helped him with legal issue and thanks to my newly gained experience in managing a hotel I am involved in development plans in Italy. If everything goes well, I will leave Slovakia and move to Italy in spring 2025.

Working with D. has been incredibly valuable. We even became good friends. He took the time to understand my peculiar concerns and needs and provided personalized guidance every step of the way. Thanks to his support, I was able to transition into a new career that aligns perfectly with my interests and dreams.

2.13 From Unemployment Office to Own Business (Slovakia)

Hi. I am M. I worked in maintenance in a sugar producing factory. I always believed that I will not be made redundant. Losing my job in my fifties was a bit of a shock. I was not prepared to register at the employment office and become unemployed.

After my first meeting with Z. I was sceptical. We discussed a lot and surprisingly, everything started to change slowly. We managed to acquire better overview of the most relevant points in my situation which at first I myself found rather puzzling. Slowly I could feel that I was capable of things I would not even have thought before. What helped me most was becoming more aware of things I could really do and breaking down my plan into logical manageable steps.

I have never had too much confidence in working with IT. I was really thrilled when I had managed to opened my business electronically and started to enjoy the dynamics and opportunities it provided. I opened my own small business as a locksmith. With help of Z. I manage to organise everything necessary, even hire an accountant. I never wanted to do office work and it is relaxing to have someone who helps me with paperwork, numbers and legal issues such as insurance, tax, etc. Comparing my self-confidence now and at the time I lost my job it is an incredible change. I am enjoying my life much more than I expected a year ago.

I was never prepared for any kind of business at school. I was worried and scared about it, and the counsellor, by analysing my abilities, skills and practice, made it clear to me what a quality person I am, what I know, and that only fear limits my steps and possibilities. She helped me open a business, I cooperate with two companies for which I perform locksmith work. I am glad that I was able to go to my counsellor and I recommend her to others."