Teaching people over 55 in order to fight digital divide, written by UMA and E-Seniors

1. INTRODUCTION

Population projections in every nation point to an increase in the number of elderly citizens, thus setting a trend for an inversion of the population pyramid.

In 1999, the United Nations declared The International Year of Older Persons as "a society for all ages". This proposal served to show that a collective, even if it does not participate in the labour market, can and should be able to maintain its potential at this later stage of life. A person who maintains his or her mental and physical capacities, who is capable of assisting other family members and who is healthy, should not be neglected or excluded when it comes to helping and contributing to the rest of society.

Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) differentiates between older persons and the oldest old—people over 80. When this tendency is generalised, quality of life cannot be established in terms of longevity, but rather in terms of complete physical and mental well-being and social welfare. Social sciences are charged with the study of cognitive, motivational and educational factors, such as those being developed within the framework of our Grundtvig Project. Logically, biological factors fall under the domain of other scientific disciplines.

Over the years, cognitive processes decline. Memory, as a cognitive capacity for storing, elaborating and recalling information, changes. For example, the capacity for keeping or storing information decreases. Above the age of 30, fluid intelligence or fluid reasoning (solving problems quickly using logic, for instance) reaches its limit. However, so-called crystallized intelligence, which makes use of skills, knowledge and experience, grows and functions more so because of educational and social, rather than physiological, factors.

Motivations for the elderly to remain active are diverse. Morstain and Smart (1974) based their investigation on Houle's trichotomy (1961). They identified six underlying motivational factors: social relationships, external expectations, social welfare, professional advancement, escape stimulation and cognitive interest. All of these are important because they serve as an antidote to social, cultural and personal characteristics of old age, known as the stage of inactivity, where the physical, mental, personal and social dimension decreases.

All of them share the educational function and the use of information technologies in their instrumental phase. Results are projected in the middle and long term. These initiatives ensure an educational activity for people who didn't have the opportunity to learn them in their youth or, on the other hand, make possible the continuity or the development of new skills to collectives of people who have received training in other areas of competence. It is also a proposal and a specific field of specialization called educational gerontology. This field of investigation has the objective of increasing and applying education on aging in order to extend and improve life in the elderly (Peterson, 1980: 68). Etymologically, it derives from the Greek, "geron" (old age) and "ago", as a verb, or "agony", as a substantive (lead), which means "to lead an old age". So, the 'age' feature is different in gerontagogy from that in pedagogy. Following this statement, aging means a process of optimization of opportunities of physical and mental well-being and social welfare through life cycle in order to extend life expectancy.

In addition, in the Information and Knowledge Society, technology exceeds what is productive and is incorporated into leisure and sociability, having a social transformation effect. Even from a deficit situation of exclusion in our collective or from

unknown obstacles, we propose social integration in order to attain self-enrichment and intergenerationality. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to train in learning, access and use of ICTs. The proper phases are first, for education, then, information and last, participation and social interaction provided by ICTs.[1]

Once defined, the use of scientific knowledge applied to reality, the initiatives analysed and the proposal of a series of good practices are inherent to an investigation that requires reflection and practice. Defined as investigative action, it has a participative dimension when identifying an active social collective with an objective of illustration, recognition and, consequently, emancipation. In addition, the community takes part in its own reality in the investigation and promotes a social transformation to benefit participants who wish to modify life conditions. Beyond the assessment results, it is very important to highlight that the participants—initially considered as inactive people—became autonomous, responsible and active in improving their social welfare.

2. Grundtvig Initiatives (Actions)

In order to compare our proposals and actions, we have collected every Grundtvig project and experience that links the variables 'age' and 'the use of ICTs'. In the last two years, there have been 13 initiatives developed as a consequence of demographic, technological and economical changes. Based on the results of these experiences, we have created a scheme of good practices highlighting the empirical: based on a particular **need** (direct application), positive results achieved have demonstrated **effectiveness** and **usefulness** in a concrete context.

These experiences have been developed by bilateral agreements with different countries. Germany leads the list with three projects. Other countries involved are Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France and the United Kingdom. This central-European concentration has determined the intercultural aspect of these projects, related to citizen and historical interests. These experiences promote agreements and approaches between north-south and east-west regions: the United Kingdom with Spain; Italy with Hungary; Turkey with Poland, and; Germany with Poland. These agreements promote a new configuration of borders.

Related to the use of ICTs, the main initiatives highlight audiovisual utilities (video, digital photography, etc.) and 2.0 tools. In these experiences, not only the use of these facilities by seniors is important, but also the collaboration with young collectives—digital natives—in the role of helping and encouraging. In addition, it is important to add that the use of traditional mass media—especially radio, written press and TV news—is a common activity in our target group, as developed in the project, **Habiter l'Europe! Vivre l'Europe!** (France, 2010).

Initially, the initiatives had a cultural dimension, but also a social projection oriented towards the recuperation of the historical memory of the participants, like in the project **Knowing each other by learning from biographies** (Turkey & Poland, 2009) or **Digital Storytelling** (Finland, 2009). There were also projects with involvement of the participants like **Active Ageing through Volunteering by Older People: an Anglo-Italian Peer Learning Programme (**United Kingdom and Italy, 2009) with an area of volunteering involving the disabled, or **Silver Spanglish** (United Kingdom and Spain,

---

[1] VILLAR POSADA, Feliciano "Personas mayores y TIC". Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, 2001. http://personales.ya.com/fvillar/principal/pdf/2001b_personas_mayores_tic.pdf

2009), with the objective of encouraging bi-lingual learning in places like care and retirement homes.

In addition, there are other projects with the objective of improving personal skills and living conditions like **Entrepreneurs developing personal strategies in times of globalisation** (Germany 2010) with exchanges with local SMEs and networking with local small entrepreneurs combined with cultural issues and **Digital Storytelling** (Germany, 2009) where participants create one's own stories by participating in the "Fürstenfelder Bildungsfest" promoted by the Bavarian Broadcast; or **Habiter l'Europe! Vivre l'Europe!** (France, 2010) in order to allow participants to become active citizens and to share their European ideals.

Grundtvig Projects on Seniors and ICTs. Compendium 2009/2010

Project Title	Country participant(s)	Target group	Strong points of the experience	Website
Knowing each other by learning from biographies	Turkey and Poland	Senior volunteers, adults, teachers and adult educators	The integration of socially marginalized persons or groups, especially women, into society. Primary aim of the planned partnership is the motivation of women to participate in lifelong learning activities.	www.efka.org.pl www.targed.org
Senior Volunteers as Cultural Ambassadors	Hungary and United Kingdom	Seniors	The exchange between Hungary and the United Kingdom will ensure that the senior volunteers' cultural awareness and expression is developed. The seniors volunteering will write a diary of their trip which will be evaluated.	www.bmknet.hu www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/conted
Active Ageing through Volunteering by Older People: an Anglo-Italian Peer Learning Programme	United Kingdom and Italy	Seniors	The volunteers will share good practices in active ageing and will create opportunities in their local community. The reciprocal exchange lasting three weeks helps senior volunteers to learn from the experience of other cultures.	www.csv-rsvp.org.uk www.cesavo.it

Silver Spanglish	United Kingdom and Spain	Retired teachers, care workers and volunteers	This project improves the knowledge of volunteers in charity and is focused on improving the self-esteem of the seniors. This activity also involves other people like unemployed adults and young people on vocational training programmes. Among the activities, this project organises summer and bi-lingual camps for teenagers and parents and care support in local care homes and retirement homes	www.virgendelosremedios.net
Volunteering in Europe: Lifelong learning through intercultural, intergenerational, and Internet-based collaboration	Germany and Poland	People aged over 50	A new form of mobility to European senior citizens Learning and sharing knowledge and experience in a European country other than their own.	www.vile-netzwerk.de www.3wiek.uni.lodz.pl
Streaming, Sharing and Learning – The options for and the use of interactive video over long distances in adult education	Austria	Innovators in adult education, who are specifically interested in the use of video communication for group learning to bridge large geographical distances to widen the scope of local educational offerings.	Work on practical examples presented by participants with emphasis on learning in rural areas.	www.give.at
Web 2.0 Multimedia & Presentation Skills : empowering IT skills for today's job market	Belgium	Unemployed adults	Learn how to use computers in order to prepare guest lecturers (or presentation in their native language) about their own country in a centre for adult education in Flanders.	www.letslearnit.org
Welcome to the Czech Republic	The Czech Republic	Any adult learners from eligible countries (LLP) wishing to improve their ICT skills and English and interested also in photography, various European cultures, the Czech Republic and its culture.	Combination of ICT sessions with courses focused on practical usage of English with strong intercultural exchange.	www.goas.cz

Digital Storytelling	Germany	Adult learners explicitly interested in intercultural contexts, lifelong learning or local/regional development as well as in expressing themselves by using images, photos, films, movies. Adult learners coming from other countries, who have adapted themselves to the new countries or cities where they live now. Young learners interested in using new technology to create their own images in order to reflect and express their own situation in a different way.	Work creation and building of experience within a real work environment and a professional context	www.bildungsagentur-fuerstenfeld.de
New Media in training European citizens for building a cultural net	Germany	Adult learners from universities of the 3rd age and from similar institutions as well as trainers and others persons from the field of seniors' education – volunteers, professionals, disseminators. They should be interested in this topic and like to learn more about it. Esp. people from eastern and south-eastern European countries are invited to join this workshop.	The focus is on the methodology for the use of new media in seniors' education, especially practicing new interactive tools (i.e. Chat, Skype, Moodle and virtual interaction (mind mapping).	www.ileu.net
Entrepreneurs developing personal strategies in times of globalisation	Germany	Owners of small companies, entrepreneurs, consultants and business people of different trades from countries all over the European Union and Turkey with medium knowledge of English.	Strong focus on exchanges with local SMEs and networking with local small entrepreneurs combined with cultural issues	Email: soldinerkiez@gmail.com
Digital Storytelling	Finland	Life-long learners would like to learn to use modern technology for telling their life story (discuss and make visible their thoughts, feelings and experiences about their personal growth)	Progressive work with a very strong focus on interaction and effective confidence building	www.opeko.fi
Habiter l'Europe ! Vivre l'Europe !	France	Target group with as many different people as possible. It must be a debate between ordinary citizens.	5 days with 5 different European topics (from history, languages, through food and culture, health and media and information).	Maisoneurope56.org

Improving Language and Discovering Culture Using ICTs	United Kingdom	Middle-aged and senior individuals who are reluctant to embrace technology—those for whom technology seems too onerous, complicated, or confusing and who believe that technology requires specialist skills.	Strong accent put on web creation in English.	Email: khawar@yhdc.co.uk

Most of the initiatives have a self-referential component and a rediscovery of proximity, which improves self-esteem of the participants thanks to the knowledge and experiences developed. At the same time, these projects allow comparison with other similar realities, facilitating meetings among different collectives or different cultural traditions.

Finally, the use of ICTs by seniors in these projects makes possible relationships with young people, as we have mentioned before. These intergenerational meetings are equal for seniors and young people. While the first group offers contents, the second group offers technical skills.

3. GOOD PRACTICES

As we have proved the utility and efficiency of the projects analyzed, we propose a list of recommendations for the design of learning programmes. In general terms, we propose:

1. Concerning group composition: having people with the same age guarantees several skills like previous experience with computers, educational experiences, interests, language, etc. This context facilitates interaction among participants at an initial phase.

2. The meetings between different generations facilitate cooperation and encourage mutual learning, which improves cooperative learning and relationships among the participants.

3. Every project analyzed lasts a year or an academic course. We agree this time limit is appropriate for achieving results and for programming an optimum schedule of objectives, avoiding intensive work sessions.

4. Concerning duration of the sessions: we recommend a maximum of one-and-a-half or two hours, avoiding a decline in attention level. Every session should start by recalling what has been learnt and by advancing the objectives of that session, in order to facilitate global comprehension of the contents.

5. None of the methodologies applied are completely virtual. Blended learning is the most usual activity. From our target group, blended methodology helps in following the course without losing personal contact.

6. It is necessary to express previous experiences in order to establish connections between new knowledge and skills with those who already have them, which facilitates fast learning, knowledge transfer and integration.

7. It is important to make the senior student aware of the learning achieved, and to emphasize that their effort has resulted in a real return.

8. For achieving complete use of ICTs, practical learning is very important.

9. As a review tool, the edition of work materials is essential: for example, a practical and illustrated guide on how to use a tool, step-by-step.

10. It is important to transmit the acquired knowledge to the community of origin.

Concerning access to modern technologies, we propose a list of recommendations to augment the experience of adult education organizations in terms of improving access to modern technologies for seniors. Enabling access to modern technologies means removing the different barriers that could prevent it, solving cost problems and offering various training programs. Here you can find tips, advice and recommendations on how to solve different problems concerning access to modern technologies for seniors and how to improve related services.

A)   Access to hardware

General comments:

Problems with accessing hardware can be found in most partner countries. Generally, hardware is expensive and difficult to obtain for senior citizens and organizations which do not have many solutions to this problem.

Improvement:

· the possibility of obtaining **second-hand recycled computers** (computers from big companies like banks, government or town structures). This is recommended mainly for non-profit organizations.

· seniors usually do not have appropriate information on how to buy computers. It is advisable to arrange a seminar, workshop or discussion club for seniors about buying a computer (where to buy it, how to do it, what to avoid). People can be informed about this type of course with the help of flyers not only in the organization, but also at **doctor's offices, hospitals, in churches, senior clubs or senior residences, or at hairdresser´s**. These places were recommended by seniors themselves.

Other comments:

Here are some other appropriate computer recommendations for seniors or for people with health problems:

· some people acquire MACINTOSH computers (mostly upon recommendation of their family using these computers in graphics businesses): these computers are quite aesthetically attractive, easier to use than normal PCs (once a person has undergone a bit of initiation), have no virus problems, BUT they are more expensive and it is difficult to find teaching courses as demand is very low.

· A company called ORDISSIMO proposes a simplified computer (based on LINUX —also no viruses!) for seniors where there are only prefabricated buttons (one for mail, one to surf, and one to write a letter). This can be useful for Alzheimer's patients to simplify access and avoid problems.

A) Internet Access

General comments:

Internet access is, in some way, a real problem. The costs in most European countries are still very high. Seniors also have problems with choosing the type of Internet connection and they are afraid of security problems (e-banking or making purchases on the Internet).

Improvements:

· **a list of free Internet spots**—informing seniors about spots with free Internet access: public libraries, universities, municipal houses, seniors clubs, cyber cafés —is advisable, and the list can be distributed around places mentioned above. It could be mentioned that this is a very good marketing activity. Moreover, it is possible to **prepare a special lesson** (or part of a lesson) with the topic "searching for points of Internet-access".

· some towns or cities offer special projects for free Internet connection (initiatives for free wifi hotspots, etc.)

· to avoid security problems (when e-banking or making purchases on the Internet) it is advisable to arrange courses or training sessions (for e-bay, e-banking, etc.) with the help of experts.

B) Basic ICT training (for low-cost participation)

General comments:

Older people are afraid of computers and training programs and it is necessary to arrange courses especially for seniors (otherwise, they won't feel free to ask and to learn). Unfortunately, low-cost courses are possible in all countries only with volunteer teachers.

Improvements: Types of courses

· Courses for beginners where everything is explained step by step—preparation for a normal computer course (this course need not be long: 16 hours in group courses is enough)

· Courses that seniors are most interested in: special courses for using digital cameras; training in using communicators (Skype, ICQ); digital banking; use of cellular phones; "Do not be afraid of computers" (course for those who have never used one); English with computers; IT vocabulary (meaning of unknown words: e.g. chat, discussion forum, forum, multimedia)

·   Courses within the framework of governmental policies (e.g. in France, a government policy for "Personal services"—especially for older persons staying in their homes. Government help comes in the form of an income tax reduction of 50% of the price paid for private lessons. For example, if a senior pays 45 euros to an organisation, they will get back 22.50 euros through paying less tax or, even if they pay no tax, they will still receive this money, up to 1000 euros per year). For people finding themselves in difficult situations, French organizations provide free service at home with volunteer help.

·   Courses in different locations—cooperation with public cultural or social centres (having different locations enables activities to be spread around one's town or city).

Other comments: experience on courses for seniors

·   Senior courses are in the afternoon (no need to go out in the dark)

·   Courses are very slow, no theory, a lot of pictures and practice

·   Courses are for small groups, not more than 4 students per teacher

C)   Basic training for new technologies (telephone, Skype, etc.)

General comments:

Organizing cellular (mobile) phone courses is one good idea, but runs up against some problems—the biggest being to persuade seniors to use cell phones—they often don't as they cannot remember or see the long telephone numbers, buttons are too small and sometimes they can't hear correctly. Below are some tips on how to make mobile (cell-phone) courses more effective.

Improvements: Advice on developing mobile (cell) phone courses

·   Asking participants to bring their respective operating manuals, as telephones are often very different from one other, is very important

·   Hands-on learning only is effective

·   Proceeding very slowly and repeating several times is crucial

·   Teaching the use of short numbers motivates learners

D)   Free volunteer assistance: finding and training volunteers for home computer assistance and training (for ex., for those who are disabled and cannot attend group courses)

General comments:

Volunteers are crucial for most participant organisations as it is sometimes the only way to arrange free or inexpensive courses for seniors—but finding volunteers is also a challenge for all organizations.

<u>Improvements:</u>

·   Young people as volunteers—a possibility to offer didactic courses for young people on how to train older people. These courses should be free and young people should be able to obtain a new qualification. There is also the possibility to cooperate with universities—experience in teaching seniors could be taken into account while applying for university studies or taking exams (student motivation)

·   Cooperation with local schools (secondary schools or other educational centres).

·   Other incentives for young people (Europass)

E)   Finding sponsors for hardware or different grants for adult education

<u>General comments:</u>

Finding sponsors and grants is the biggest challenge for all partner countries and there are no new recommendations as the ways are similar in all countries: EU and governmental grants, cooperation with NGOs and sponsors.

F)   State of the art in France

<u>Hardware, software, Internet</u>: the cost of hardware has decreased in France. Most middle- and upper-class seniors can afford to buy a computer (generally a laptop). In many cases, parents buy their children computers for Christmas and this, incidentally, pushes them (the parents) to begin to learn ICTs, themselves! As a non-profit organization, we are able to obtain, nearly for free, second-hand, recycled computers. We then give and install these computers free of charge to either: private individuals who cannot afford to buy their own; to public activity centres where we give our courses, when these centres do not have any or enough themselves, and; to welfare organisations. In France, the cost of Internet access is approx. 30 euros/ month. This is true for all providers (ADSL-providers such as Free, Wanadoo, Neuf Telecom and Alice, as well as for cable-access providers such as NOOS/Numericable). Some people cannot afford this cost when their retirement income is low.

<u>Training</u>: As for learning how to use these tools, which is one important aspect of access to modern technologies, there are two possibilities:

·   private lessons:

We provide this service within the framework of a governmental policy called "Personal services"—intended especially for older people living at home. Government assistance comes in the form of an income tax reduction of 50% of the price paid for private lessons (for instance, a senior who pays 45 euros to our organisation gets back 22.50 euros by paying that much less tax or, if no tax is owed, still gets this money refunded—up to 1000 euros per year. Of course, this is still a very high price for a lot of people. So, for people encountering particular difficulties, we provide free service at home with the help of volunteers.

·   group lessons:

We provide lessons in public cultural or social centres in different venues in Paris where there is a dedicated computer room. On average, there are 4 to 8 computers per room. Our courses are given in small groups, not more than 4 students per teacher. The cost is, of course, less than that of private lessons, especially because we are obliged to grant large discounts to people encountering financial difficulties through agreements we have with the public centres who allow us to use their computer rooms.

Other: Our association must constantly look for financial assistance from government, regional, town and local authorities and from private sponsors, because the income we receive from group courses does not cover the real cost of a teacher's salary, even if we have the help of volunteers—because the cost of having one teacher for only 4 students is very high.

REFERENCES

HOULE, C.O. (1961). The inquiring mind. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
LEMIEUX, A. (1997) Los programas universitarios para mayores. Enseñanza e investigación. Madrid: IMSERSO.
LEMIEUX, A. y VELLAS, P. (1986) L'éducation universitaire des personnes âgées, in *Perspectives*, vol. 22, nº 1. Montréal.
MORSTAIN, B.R & SMART, J.C. (1974). Reasons for participation in adult education courses: a multivariate analysis of group differences. In *Adult education*, 24.
PETERSON, D.A. (1980). Who are the educational gerontologists? In *Educational Gerontology*, 5.