

Volunteers and ICT teaching: E-com 45, written by FNP-CISL and YSBF

Abstract

This paper presents the awareness of the digital divide on an international level, showing how, over the last 20 years, public authorities, international organizations and the tertiary sector have faced this challenge.

This paper also presents the main initiatives implemented to resolve this problem with particular reference to volunteering.

This paper compares the volunteers in Italy and Estonia, showing how in Italy the work of volunteers is widespread and covers several activities such as ICT teaching, whereas in Estonia volunteers are only dedicated to some specific activities of charity.

This paper is a contribution to the “2011: Anno Europeo del Volontariato”.

In Italy, the work of volunteers is often active work or is carried out in order to acquire some other transferable skills. For instance, many young people with learning difficulties entering the labour market, dedicate part of their time to volunteering, therefore acquiring skills and knowledge enabling their future employment. Moreover, often non-profit volunteer associations are, mostly small and horizontally structured, as the decisions are taken in-group and the roles are rather well defined in a non-functional and spontaneous way as determined by the cohesion of the group. These features tend to favour empowerment of volunteers in an educational organization.

The paper concludes with some reflections.

Key words: A13 - Relation of Economics to Social Values, D71 - Associations, L31 - Non-profit Institutions

The awareness of the digital divide at international level

The interest in responding to the digital divide came about in the 1990s in the USA and spread around the world.

The United Nations introduced the concept of "network age". The new generation is called Millenium Generation and is able to use ICT whereas the older generations are isolated. Therefore, the UN created Unites (providing services for ICT diffusion).

Over the last 20 years numerous initiatives at international and local level have been implemented in order to reduce the digital divide.

The Italian case study

In Italy, the main bodies interested in reducing the digital divide and implementing low costs or frees are:

- Public authorities (i.e.. City Council)
- Non profit organizations (i.e. A.I.Re.C in Lombardy)
- Virtual communities created by citizens to spread the use of internet (<http://tvdigitaldivide.com/digital-divide/>).

These bodies, actively involved in reducing the digital divide phenomenon, focus on the following missions to:

- Improve its expansion and reduce the costs of adsl (i.e. www.antidigitaldivide.org)
- ICT training courses (literacy)
- Improve the awareness that ICT may improve the quality of life (domotic)
- Internet access (wifi and free use of pc with internet in public areas)
- Digitalization of bureaucracy (the first case in Italy represented by Iperbole introduced in 1995 by the Bologna Municipality and Po-net established by the Prato Municipality in 1996 to provide services to citizens and simplify public administration).

Regarding ICT teaching, most common good practice, but unfortunately not so frequently diffused to guarantee a permanent service over all the Italian territory there are the following:

1) Intergenerational exchange: young people teach ICT to older ones. i.e. (Province of Vicenza that organizes these courses with the support of the schools. The students then become ICT teachers).

2) Volunteers and ICT in the trade union (many trade unionists are volunteers and often do not have good ICT competences, therefore the trade union at local level organizes courses and tutorship to help new members become confident with computers and with the internet.

3) The tertiary sector, public authorities at local level and religious centres offer human resources support or the premises where to hold ICT basic courses or the free use of computers and the internet.

The above mentioned activities are often supported by volunteers in order to keep costs down. The following session outlines how volunteering is widespread and works around Italy.

Associations in Italy

This session presents the percentage of people involved in volunteering in Italy. In accordance with the data of the National Institute of Statistics Istat, more than 15% of people aged 14 and over finance the tertiary sector by volunteering and around 10% of these are volunteers in an association in 2010.

There are numerous variables which influence the choices of individuals to become volunteers in various activities of social economics. In 1993, Smith¹ identified these as: environment and organization; personal and social background; personal behaviour; the situation in which a volunteer is located and a volunteer's perception.

There are therefore numerous types of volunteers, on the basis of the different factors which generate their participation in various socio-economic activities and different factors which lead to their satisfaction.

Four different types of volunteers have been identified as follows:

- group A: *"would like to do something good, they want to feel good, but they don't expect too much"*,
- group B: *"would like to pursue their ideals in a stimulating and gratifying working environment"*;
- group C: *"volunteers with interests"*;
- group D: *"volunteers by choice, conscious and generous"* (Marino, Michelutti, Schenkel, 1999²).

Volunteers, therefore, are not a homogeneous group. Often, many young people become volunteer ICT teachers in order to gain work experience. The low rate of participation in the labour market favours the participation of young people in voluntary service and cultural volunteering enabling people to gain human capital.

In accordance with a Leonardo project research called Fair Trade³, managed by the University of Parma and carried out in several European countries, it emerges that active volunteering

¹ Smith, D. J. (Ed.) (1993). Volunteering in Europe: opportunities and challenges for the 90s. Voluntary Action Research, Second Series, Paper No. 4. The Volunteer Centre, UK. Smith D. H. (1993) "Determinants of Voluntary Association Participation and Volunteering. A Literature Review", Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 23, pp. 243-263.

² "The Attitudes, Motivations and Satisfaction of Volunteers", see www.dies.uniud.it/index.php/working-paper-diec.html?page=3...

³ Livraghi R., Pappadà G. Noworl Czeslaw, (eds.), 2008, "Fair trade", Journal for perspectives of economic, political and social integration, special issue Vol. XIII, no. 1-2, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin, Poland.

allows for the acquisition of tacit knowledge, which, in certain cases is transferable to other contexts and, in other cases, is specific a certain sector, where volunteers work.

The Fair Trade project proves that in almost all the interviewees there is an awareness that volunteer work has enabled the acquisition of interpersonal and communication skills; and, in some cases, the acquisition of transferable skills, such as organizational, technical and manual skills, flexibility, cognitive ability, and abilities in problem solving, coordination and carrying out of several functions, all skills usable in other contexts.

The motivational aspect plays a relevant part in this, in some cases there is strong motivation to learn to gain work experience.

The history of volunteer organizations in Italy

Volunteer activities in Italy are often implemented in organizations registered with the regional Volunteer Register .

In 1991, an Italian Law on volunteering was introduced. In these last 20 years, many volunteer organizations were set up and awareness activities implemented in order to inform citizens. Ageing society and subsequent increase of families' personal needs has required a big effort on the part of the non profit sector. The public sector that used to provide services to families can not guarantee that anymore, therefore the tertiary sector has assumed a more and more important role, supporting the public one. In the second half of the 1990's, the tertiary sector s, in fact, exploded.

Volunteer service centres, launched and developed disparately, today make up a common system, spread and organised by services and support, development and Volunteer promotion in order to aid development and independence. To conclude, it could be argued that the tertiary sector is very well structured and widespread in Italy.

The new challenges of volunteer organizations

In accordance with the conclusions raised during the Volunteers Assembly promoted by the Tertiary Sector Forum and the centres of services for volunteers federations CSV net and Con Vol in December 2009 in Rome, the priorities are:

1) the Volunteer organisation should be an expression of citizenship in favour of solidarity and subsidiarity and to be recognised in terms of **citizen promotion**, such as social training where any individual may develop his/herself pursuant to the Constitution (art. 2) and reiterated by the Constitutional Court (sentence n. 75 1992).

2) It is necessary to promote and reinforce **joint and plural volunteer representatives**.

3) Public Authorities, on application for subsidiarity, pursuant to the Constitution (art. 118), must relegate appropriate work areas and equipment where the volunteer organisation can carry out its tasks in order to participate in the programme and adhere to public policy checking pursuant to Law. 328/00 "Outline law for the creation of an integrated action system and social services".

4) It is necessary to draw up permanent comparison tables to simplify the tertiary sector outline law.

5) It would be useful to promote the creation and development of communications networks in order to share data and experiences. Individual differences in interactive systems that can act globally to find effective solutions in order to avoid excesses in overlap and conflict would be included.

Volunteer FNP and ICT

This session explains the role of the FNP.

The volunteer FNP is a retired member of FNP - CISL (RETIRED PENSIONERS' NATIONAL FEDERATION), an organisation at the service of citizens (members and non members) who accepts, incorporates and responds to citizens' needs (fiscal, social and health..)

The FNP is interested in the use of new technology to promote the work of the union and organizes at least 1-2 courses per year aimed at political leaders, workers and volunteers.

It is important to talk about the use of new technologies for political communication relevant to the FNP. One of the most interesting themes is certainly the Internet and how to use the new related technologies to reach as many people as possible.

FNP courses are located in a well-equipped computer room where each participant can have the use of a computer. Usually the FNP organize two kinds of skills courses :

- 1) basic computer courses aimed at operators or volunteers
- 2) advanced courses regarding the use of new technology to promote the activities of the union and FNP.

The use of computers and Internet is essential today in all sectors such as professional, social and private. The computer is present in all the FNP structures and being proficient at it is fundamental to volunteers too.

The volunteer is aware of the importance of using the pc to store and manage data, finding useful information in real time, to communicate, update and exchange information in the organization and also to inform people and share services outside.

For this reason all our courses are defined by an active methodology based on the analysis of real cases, comparisons, guided discussions and exercises. We think that the best way to learn is to exercise with the help of an experienced teacher.

We are aware that many adults find learning to use computers hard.

In Italy there have been many studies carried out on elderly people and their relationship with the Internet, but there are not many places where they can actually go and learn. There are many IT training centres but they are mainly for professionals. An elementary course costs from 300 euro upwards. This is quite expensive for the individual who does not need a PC for his/her job and not feasible given the recent economic situation.

We need to establish continuity in learning, using methods and language appropriate to adults. The most important thing is to promote the importance of sharing experiences with other adults. Our most important objective is learning to use computers and the Internet to establish a network between us and other partners: for example with other cultural Organizations who are involved in life-long learning all over Italy and in Europe

VOLUNTEERING AND ICT-TEACHING IN ESTONIA

Voluntary work

In the rest of the world voluntary work has long been a normal phenomenon, yet in Estonia it is still quite unknown. Gradually the different age groups are starting to show interest and to take charge of voluntary work and community service. Apart from personal benefits of volunteering in the community it may set an example of helping others. Voluntary actions open new opportunities to gain experience, knowledge and allow to expand people's horizons. Recent introduction of EU-funds in many fields of life also means that EU-funded projects have much more possibilities of attracting participants and of providing better training than voluntary projects. The adverse effect of EU-funding is that often potential voluntary projects are overshadowed by well-financed EU-projects, which means that people first think of possibilities of getting their project financed by EU rather than a possibility of doing this project on voluntary basis.

What could be the motivation for the voluntary teaching of IT?

- Obtaining practical experience

- Testing oneself and obtaining courage
- Introduction to IT programs, that promotes them more
- Hobby, when living away from other interesting hobbies
- Contacts with people in different fields
- The need for communication
- The most valued volunteering experience - making new friends and acquaintances, the time spend in meaningful and important - the feeling that you've done something good.

Does intergenerational learning function on a voluntary basis when teaching IT?

To some extent intergenerational learning works in Estonia. An example: the young teach to older generations basic computer skills (Word, Excel, Internet)

Intergenerational ties should definitely not be underestimated. Both young and old can teach and help each other in different areas - the old teaching the young and the old teach the young. Young might teach their computer skills to older generation and older share their experience in another field (eg, crafts, baking). Probably most of intergenerational learning in IT happens within families.

ADULT LEARNER WEEK – *TÄISKASVANUD ÕPPIJA NÄDAL (TÕN)*

This event has become a good way of introducing adult education and learning opportunities. TÕN focuses on human learning and professional development throughout their lives - personal and social development is considered a fundamental precondition to cope with a changing world.

TÕN is creating positive image for lifelong learning and everything, which is related to adult learning and development.

Activities of TÕN

Various events – information days, free lectures or courses, consultancy and informational activities – are a part of Adult Learners' Week. These activities are done on a voluntary basis mostly by amateurs within a week, where every night is covered by a course or lecture. The duration of courses is approximately 2-4 hours. Themes of courses range from baking bread and building stone walls to IT and communications. Sometimes common themes – such as intergenerational ties – are assigned to TÕN of a particular year.

STUDY BUS, STUDY TRAM, STUDY SHIP

Over different years Adult Learners' Week has been advertised in various ways. Along the roads and waterways of Estonia a study bus, study tram and a study ship have traveled. The goal is to provide people with information on learning opportunities. Study bus has chosen to stop mostly in small towns or villages, to provide information on lifelong learning also to people who live away from the larger settlements, and who are therefore less informed about other study possibilities. Internet using possibilities are also not as self-evident in villages as in larger towns or cities.



What forms of voluntary work has been more popular in Estonia?

- Let's Do It – keeping Estonia clean! (garbage cleaning from parks, streets, forests, etc..)

- Improving welfare of animal shelters and animals
- Charity fund-raising concerts
 - Donations to children with special needs
- Promoting Healthy Lifestyle by walking

VOLUNTEERING IN LIBRARIES

Volunteering can also be linked to libraries. A relatively large number of people gets information and also ICT-related help from librarians, who direct people in need of help according to their own skills and capabilities.

Librarians have started encouraging older generation to use computer more actively and encouraged them to read different articles from internet.

Sometimes librarians also create various activities – meetings, trainings and short learning courses voluntarily.

PROJECT: BE INVOLVED!

Vaata Maaailma SA in co-operation with Eesti Telekom, EMT, Elion, Microsoft Estonia and Smart Work Society has been leading a project „Be Involved!“, where computer- and internet-training will be offered to 10 000 beginners and advanced users all over Estonia in 2011. Trainings are for free for the participants.

A major goal of the project is to create new computer and Internet users, so that more people could be part of the possibilities offered by information society. Trainings are offered as classes both for absolute beginners as well as for advanced students who have previously used computers for a while. Beginner courses offer understanding of the possibilities of a computer and internet. Advanced training offers people a possibility to understand how to use e-services securely, find information effectively and how to use ICT for communication.

In addition to above “Smart Work” trainings have happened, where knowledge on how to use different computer programs, office appliances and how to effectively organize one’s work is given.

A study was made before the start of the project, which outlined a profile of a non-user of internet. An average non-user of internet is following:

- Age: 50+ (81%), followed by age group 35-49 (17%)
- Nationality: Estonian (60%), non-Estonian (40%)
- An average non-user is from Tallinn (25%), Virumaa (23%) or Harju-, Rapla, Järvamaa (16%). *This distribution follows the logic of population distribution in Estonia.*
- Living in countryside villages (36%), in capital (25%) or other town (23%).
- Vocational education (33%), basic education (31%) or secondary education (30%).
- Not working (including retired people)(74%), or worker (simple laborer) (85%)
- Income: 280 € - 400 € / month (46%) or below.

Project target group:

- People above 50 years, but also 36-50.
- Beginner ICT users (who have never used a computer) should participate on beginner and then advanced training.
- Computer users who can only do one thing (e.g. surf the internet) – they should participate in advanced training.
- Experienced users, who would like to use computer for distance work should participate in a special course for distance work.
- Retired person, unemployed, worker or specialist.
- Both Estonian and Russian-speaking person.

One of the reasons why volunteering is not popular in Estonia is that the Estonian state also

provides rather good support for various projects financially through a variety of learning opportunities and a lot of training, which is offered to students free of charge (an example is also Be Involved!, which was just introduced).

Functioning state-commissioned education is available from all schools that have been issued a license by the Ministry of Education and Science. Funding of training courses for working adults is organized by state, and lecturers are paid through the project. Courses are free for participants.

Unemployed people can also learn various courses for free (including IT) and their training is paid from EU-funds via the program “Increasing the supply of qualified labor, 2007-2013”

People who are willing to learn are used to get trainings for free, which means that educators are also wondering, how the situation will change in 2013 when project funding to provide free trainings will finish.

Voluntary work in the field of IT-teaching is not popular in Estonia, as learners are sufficiently trained and lecturers compensated via various projects.