

E-LiLL QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT / Finland

University of the Third Age of the University of Jyväskylä

Finland

The eLiLL questionnaire was sent by mail to all (9) Finnish Universities of the Third Age (UTA). The questionnaire was in English but the accompanying letter was translated into Finnish with translations of the headlines of the questionnaire. In the letter there was also a request to forward the questionnaire to other institutions or projects concentrating to senior education, in case there was some good examples in the area.

Getting in touch with the UTAs was easy, because the Finnish Universities of the Third Age have a constant cooperation through the National Board of the Universities of the Third Age in Finland. The UTAs have also a common website, <http://www.avoinyliopisto.fi/lkaantyvienYliopistotoiminta>

We got four answers from the UTAs, representing quite well all areas in Finland (UTA Helsinki, UTA Lapland, UTA Joensuu, UTA Jyväskylä). One is situated in a large city (Helsinki) and the others in a town with between 50 000-500 000 inhabitants. All except UTA Jyväskylä are arranged by the Open University of the University (Helsinki, Joensuu, Lapland). In Jyväskylä the Summer University of Jyväskylä is taking care of the UTA arrangements and financing, but in close cooperation with the City of Jyväskylä and the University of Jyväskylä.

In order to find more examples about activities, projects and associations concentrating on ICT learning of seniors we translated the eLiLL questionnaire into Finnish and sent it to four Finnish organizers of such activities. All filled the questionnaire even if there were some questions where it was not possible to answer. As feedback the contact persons said that the questionnaire was more appropriate for senior education given in the universities or Adult Education Centres.

The Finnish version of the questionnaire was also sent to some Open colleges and Adult Education Centres with projects in the area of ICT and Seniors. Seven answered.

Sweden

In Sweden the Universities of the Third Age, usually called Senioruniversitet (27) are normally implemented under the Adult Education Associations (Folkuniversitet) and -unlike Finland- only a few have a connection with the university. We found 26 email addresses and sent an email (in Swedish) with information about e-LiLL project and its targets and asked them to tell us, if they have

1) ICT courses in their UTA, 2) if they already use internet as tool of learning among seniors (distance studies) and 3) if they knew other institutions or associations trying to promote seniors' use of modern information technologies.

Target learner groups and participation data

In Finland there are no formal requirements for participating in the programs for seniors. There are no age limits or entry requirements as to educational level needed. Therefore participants vary from retired citizens to younger people often somehow with work or activities that relate to ageing. In the four UTAs that answered there are participants under 50 but also over 90 years. The biggest age group is 66-70 years old.

As regards to the number of students that participate actively in their educational activities, the number varies very much depending on the U3A. The number of students (of UTAs that answered) is between 500 to 4000 students. In 2006 there were 16 169 participants (net 7 879 persons) in whole Finland (9 UTAs together). In the UTAs reported there were 11 879 participants (net 5 311 persons).

As to the educational level of the participants in those four institutions we can consider that 20% of the students have primary education, 35 % have secondary education level and 30% have higher education level, 15 % other types or unknown education.

In Sweden age limitations are often mentioned in the regulations of the associations arranging third age university activities. The age required is generally 55+ or 58+.

Very good information about the Swedish UTAs can be found on the web page of UTA Uppsala, www.usu.se

Educational programmes: contents and forms

All UTAs offer programs / courses designed especially for older adults. In all cases UTA also designs and develops these courses. The main forms of activities are: lectures, seminars, research seminars for senior students and study tours. One of the UTAs arranges groups of creative work and ICT courses, too.

Lecture series, seminars and groups of creative work are mostly designed as a structured course of studies (half of a year or longer in duration). ICT courses have normally the length of 24-36 study hours.

With regard to the main focus of the subjects there is a great diverse offer with following subjects: history, literature, music, art and architecture, politics, psychology, pedagogy and sociology, health, gerontology, technical sciences, natural sciences and environmental questions.

In Finland and in Sweden there is a very limited offer of virtual learning for older adults. Only one UTA (Helsinki) has distance learning groups (with tape-recorded lectures, a tutor and study material). In 2007 UTA Jyväskylä (jointly with other organizers) started the so called emeritus lectures which can be followed also in the internet www.jyu.fi/emeritusluennot

From pedagogical principles frontal instruction, seminar form and learning in small groups are very important, learning through research, intergenerational learning and virtual learning less important or important. In one case learning in self-help groups assisted by senior tutors is mentioned, too.

The most important experiences for seniors according to the answers are: social contacts, improvement of skills or competences, bringing in own experiences or competences, possibility to participate in the choice of the learning subjects and also the learning style and to open new fields of activity. The communication on a European level is considered as a not so relevant experience (2).

About evaluation, the U3As mention mainly self-evaluation as a tool of evaluation.

The ICTs and especially the Internet in seniors education

Other important point to consider is the use of Internet in seniors' education in the different universities. From the Finnish UTAs two report that they have no experience in the use of Internet in seniors' education. The others have experience on courses on Internet use (1), Internet search as part of educational activity (1), Internet as platform of self-presentation (1) and online distant education on various subjects (1). All institutions think that there are a huge need for courses on Internet use for seniors before Internet can be used more in the education of older adults. In Sweden it seems to be more common to have Internet courses in the programs of UTA but no experience on distance learning for example. Many of the Swedish UTAs report however that the "mother" organization (folkuniversitetet, Volkhochschule, Adult Education Association) has distance courses so that also seniors could participate if they had the skills needed.

On the other hand, in Finland all the universities have very good facilities available for the educational development. The options are: a limited number of PCs for use in courses, possibility to use the PC pools of younger students enrolled in the institution, video projector, ISDN / ADSL, videoconferencing equipment, digital photo camera, digital video camera. About other facilities: in Jyväskylä the City of Jyväskylä has arranged the PCs and printers for the use of seniors in libraries, in some old age homes etc., where senior tutors of the UTA of Jyväskylä can teach ICT skills for their age mates.

Only one of the Finnish UTAs has seriously chosen ICT teaching as an important method to familiarize seniors with the Internet and other Information society skills. In this task the UTA of Jyväskylä has many courses with didactic approaches designed especially for seniors. In Jyväskylä also a model for peer teaching (senior tutors) has been developed. In the field of the ICT skills for seniors there are 3 private associations in Finland (Mukanetti, Savonetti, Enter) doing important work, which will be analyzed when suggesting the good practises. In Sweden there is a similar kind of association (SeniorNet) which will also be discussed in that connection.

According to the questionnaires returned it has shown that the most important educational activities in which the seniors used the new technologies are: creation of text, Internet search, e-mail, usage of some electronic services (eg. bank affairs) and also in evaluating the websites from the point of view of seniors.

Effectiveness / sustainability of educational activities in seniors education with the use of the ICTs

Except one, the Finnish UTAs report that they do not receive any support from the state in the use of ICTs in lifelong learning activities or information campaigns about the use of new technologies. Only one (UTA Jyväskylä) says to have benefits of national policies and information campaigns about the use of ICTs by older adults. However, the sustainability is in danger also in Jyväskylä because all the support comes as grants after applications made every year.

Except one, the institutions asked have answered also that they do not receive any support from local institutions. Only in Jyväskylä the city gives support to the UTA because (from the point of view of the City) the activities can be seen as an important form of preventive older people's care. City of Jyväskylä has also provided the equipment needed in ICT teaching in the library or in old age homes where the volunteer tutors of UTA Jyväskylä can teach ICT skills for other seniors.

The praxis of ICTs in the university programmes for older adults implies some disadvantages and advantages both for the institutions and for the senior students. The main remark is that seniors are not yet familiar with studying via internet and they also prefer face to face social contacts clearly over the benefits of being able to study flexible via Internet. They are looking for daily routines and reasons to leave their house weekly unlike younger students who appreciate the possibilities to study at odd hours when they have spare time. The U3A students seem to be very reluctant to Internet based studies.

About the main problems with using the ICTs in the programs has been mentioned first of all the inadequate technical infrastructure outside the institution and lack of technical support, the lack of financial support and learners' inner reluctance to technical issues. Also the language barriers and lack of interesting learning contents was mentioned in the answers.

As regard to the advantages and benefits following remarks were given: opening of new fields of activity, improved understanding of the way of life of younger generation and possibility for better intergenerational communication. Widening the knowledge of the students, social networks and also the improvement of the motivation towards ICT and language learning was also mentioned.

CONCLUSIONS

After having 27 answers (15 from Finland and 12 from Sweden) some conclusions can be made:

- The UTAs of Finland and Sweden don't use very much the ICT methodologies or Internet (virtual learning / on-line learning or blended learning) in the education of older adults and they do not participate in projects or cooperation activities in which these technologies are used or taught. However, all see the big future benefits in ICT-supported learning activities for older learners.
- In both countries there are very much activities targeting to train older adults to use new technology and helping them to participate in all spheres of life in modern society
- The peer teaching model (senior tutors) is successfully used e.g. by UTA Jyväskylä and by some seniors' Internet associations in Finland and in Sweden. The great benefits in this methodology are to be found in the system "seniors teach seniors": adaptation of contents, explanations and speed of teaching according to the needs and the characteristics of seniors.
- One of the barriers mentioned often in both countries is older learners' insufficient knowledge of foreign languages
- The lack of financial support from national institutions and the limited collaboration in the local field is an important barrier, too.

It is really an important task of e-LiLL, to collect all good practices in familiarizing seniors with new technologies and Internet and move away barriers in order to increase seniors' possibilities of learning the skills they need in Information society.