

## **AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH ELDERLY PEOPLE. NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN RURAL PLACES.**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION.**

Elderly Spanish people, especially in rural areas, do not use New Technologies, they do not even use the technologies they have in their houses very much. Many of them, when they are in front of a technological appliance, like a video, say: *“I do not know how to use it, but I do not worry because if I want to watch a film, my children will put it on”*. If they are speaking about an hi-fi system, they say: *“it has a lot of buttons. I prefer my little radio”*. Furthermore, some rural areas are being left by young people and the elderly ones are deserted there. Internet is the tool that can allow them to be involved in the present social world because the communication is possible. Often, they have been forgotten, but they have an important word in our society. Faced with this situation, we want to develop a project to take New Technologies and Internet to elderly people in rural Spanish areas.

### **2. SOME ELDERLY PEOPLE’S OPINIONS ABOUT INTERNET.**

When we wanted to work with elderly people and Internet, we wondered if they would be able to get into this world. Many people say: *“I do not like New Technologies. I think face to face communication is the most important. I also have my grandchildren’s example, I sadden to see they do not play like we used to before, they spend a long time in front of the computer, the TV. and the console. The dialogue and communication are getting lost with these inventions. Also the songs and the delusion, because now they have got everything. It is a shame!”*

We have to consider some ideas bearing in mind some answers about why elderly people do not get into Internet:

-Admitting to speak about this subject makes them nervous. *“Oh, don’t speak to me about these things. I do not understand them”*.

-They can be people who have never played with a computer. *“The computer games are not interesting for me. I am not patient to learn them, I prefer the crosswords or pastimes, but on a paper”*.

-They may think that they can touch the wrong key and lose the information or even erase the hard disk. *“I am very elderly to learn, and if I damage it?”*.

-Some of them are persons who do not believe in the method of trial and error as a way of learning. *“Sometimes I have tried to use the computer but it does not work, it was blocked”*.

-Their bad first experiences can get frustrating. *“Look boy, once I touched a computer and, suddenly, everything got black and it was a disaster.”*

-They can feel overwhelmed with the information when they have a doubt about the theme. *“I have never been interested in watching TV o New Tecnology, us too much to lear at my age”*

### **3. CHARACTERISTICS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE DEPENDING ON THEIR PLACE OF RESIDENCE.**

There are seven million pensioners in Spain; nearly four million live in towns and the rest live in rural or semirural areas. Do they have different ways of thinking about learning New Technologies?

25% of retired urban people begin a new and active style of live at their retirement. They have not had the former obligations and now they can enlarge their social life (volunteer, travels, social and political engagement...). They are determined to learn new knowledge about many topics.

Nearly 20% of them are working with their family and at home. They live apart from the society.

30% of them continue enjoying a good social life. They belong to middle class or skilled labourer.

About 15% live a resigned life. They belong to low class and have low culture. They think they can not fight against fate.

With reference to pensioners who live in rural or semirural areas, -our project is for them- we can say they are different from the pensioners in the city. They are usually used to working in their little land until they die.

There are many works about the difference between elderly people in the city and in the countryside. We have to think of some ideas to work with these people:

- Elderly people in the country remain less anonymous. They feel less loneliness because their knowledge and experiences are very useful.
- They have a very good memory.
- There are few places to meet, apart from the bar, pensioner house and the square. We have to go to these places to encourage them.
- They can be afraid of not being able to learn. They are afraid of being ridiculous.
- Women can now be seeing the opportunity of learning.
- They are interested in different subjects. Nature, environment, conservationism are the most interesting ones.
- We have to provoke the contact between elderly people and young ones.
- We have to work on the skills they have and not on what they lack.
- What the village really has is culture. We have to work on its stories, oral tradition, traditional crafts... in one word, the popular knowledge. His `culture on life´ level is high.

### **4. CIBERCAFE LIKE A NEW MEETING PLACE FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE. NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN PENSIONER HOUSE IN IZNÁJAR. (CÓRDOBA)**

INTRODUCTION.

Our project is about taking New Technologies and Internet into a rural Spanish centre and to do the same in similar centres of some countries of the European Union. Our idea is that the elderly people in the project can be in contact by the net system they are learning.

The life expectancy in Europe and in the rest of the world is increasing year after year. For this reason and for the low birth rate it is hoped that Spain, in 2050, will be the country in the world where there will be the highest number of elderly people. On the other hand, a lot of people are retired when they are 58; they along with the sixty five age group are full of life and they want to be involved in our society. They deserve it because most of them could not do it when they were young and they have been forgotten many times. As well, they are increasing and we can not allow them to depend on other people, they must live like autonomous persons.

## **5. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT.**

### **A) HELPING**

Iznájar's Town Hall corporation is with us, it has given its approval for the project, as well as the board of directors of the Pensioner House and an Association for Researching into Gerantogogy (AIG), an organization that works on elderly people well-being. A bank that is long-established in the place, Cajasur, will finance our project; it was not surprising because most of the pensioners in this centre have their savings in this bank. We have applied for another helping to another bank, Caixa, but they still have to confirm it.

### **B) LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS.**

Although the first part of the project has to be with skilled persons, working with elderly people requires volunteers who stay with each person during the course because they need to maintain all their attention. To be centre-stage in the first weeks is necessary so that elderly people may feel sure and they can work better. The work can be difficult because they are very special pupils and it is necessary for our volunteers to receive some pedagogic advises about treating with them. They are responsible to guess what elderly people want and hope of the New Technologies.

### **C) ADDRESSEES OF THE PROJECT.**

The starting point will be a group of retired people from an Andalucía's rural community, Iznájar (Córdoba), just as other rural retired people who are membership of other European countries and want to join us.

Our culture has always been thinking of young people and living quickly, but now we notice that the number of elderly people are increasing and they want to have some help that they deserve and we must give it to them because they have to manage with independence in this changing society.. Their life and social experience don't have to change with the years. We refuse the access to this new way of life to them because it seems little profitable, but they wish to go into it and to benefit from it..

The first participants will be chosen in the next guidelines:

- 1- They can be retired people or not, with good education and with social influences in their communities. They have to be able to be teachers in future projects, activities organizers or instructors: doctors, teachers, social workers...

- 2- We want to work with New Technologies, so we need skilled and dynamic persons who can teach new participants when our work finishes. We liked Roger Cloet (2000) advice that said it is possible to use the elderly people's knowledge for teaching future students, because we think it will be very difficult to achieve more help in the future if this task is not profitable.
- 3- Persons who are encouraged with our course from the first moment.
- 4- All of them can be interested in the first applications: email, videoconference...

#### D) AIMS AND ACTIVITIES.

When we teach children, we work with a practical aim; when we work with elderly people this aim does not exist.

The first classes are due to create a pleasant environment between elderly people and volunteers. We are interested in the subjects elderly people wish. It is not a passive learning; they will choose the subjects they want to work on. The experiences abroad has made us realize that one of the most interesting activities for elderly people is the **e-mail**, because they can be in contact with their families and friends who are faraway. It is also very easy to work with it.

The problem with chats is that they are very quick, for that reason **forums** could be more interesting for them.

Working with them, we also plan to look for some specific information in Internet. We will encourage them to do a researching work about their topics of interests and, afterwards, we could share the results. We have been able to see how interesting of is research for elderly German people, in Ulm University, because they had to work on their own and later they could share the results.

We may also use other tools of Internet like news groups, net meeting and videoconference, if the development of the project is successful and we have possibilities.

We want and hope to encourage this growing social group to go into this new world that New Technologies provide.

These are our first aims to get in a short time:

1. Formative activities. We can promote some ideas:
  - Improving their education because some elderly people could not study when they were young, It is very urgent to create an Elderly People Distant University for people living far away.
  - 'What I do not understand at the present world'. A seminary, forum, chat, researching about the difference and difficulties between elderly people and present world.
  - 'Is history as we know it?' We can see each person has his own history. We can use AV medias, forums between rural and urban people, Spanish and foreigners, persons with different religions or ideologies.
  - European matters. Discussions about agricultural finance. The Euro. The immigration.
  - Cultural, artistic and ethnological heritage study of Iznájar and other places in contact. To go into local web.
  - Valuation of the reports in Internet, local and national newspapers. Participation in chats and forums about actual news.

- Educational New Technologies. Learning how to use them in the security, medicine and for the communication with the family and friends. Using AV medias.
2. Appreciating traditional rural way of life.
    - Ecologic agriculture.
    - Traditional arts and crafts.
    - Recovering elderly jobs.
    - Rural ethnology: oral literature, ways of communication, parties, foods, folklore... We can record rural activities and send them by Internet.
  3. Creativity:
    - Painting and plastic workshops.
    - Theatre about problems and psycho-drama.
    - Chores and groups of street minstrels. The contact between generations is very important..
    - Writing courses. Recovering elderly writings. Promotion of autobiographies and memories. Evaluation, prizes and publication of the writings. Knowledge of Internet magazines.

We need teachers and volunteers for these activities. It is better if we can take the results out: expositions, webs, exchanges...
  4. Research working webs about themselves and their village:
    - Emigrants history. Their reality as it is remembered.
    - Perhaps, some educated persons want to study about their village's heritage: they could document art works, help local archives, recollect oral history...
    - To write distinguished local people's biography.
    - Perhaps it is a good moment to do a village's photographic file. They should be in contact with other village's elderly people and specialists from the University.
  5. To promote tasks and responsibilities in the group in order to strengthen its self-esteem and its autonomy. It would be very good if they could finance and do it by themselves.
    - Some elderly people could be teachers, instructors, artists...
    - Other people can stage exhibitions, make guides...
    - Some skilled people can work with computers and AV medias.
    - We will promote associations and voluntary works for civic engagements and for helping other people.

Afterwards we will do an evaluation about these aims and possible improvements.

## 6. CONCLUSION.

New Technologies has never had such an important role in the society. They are changing our way of working, encouraging, being in contact with other people and learning. This new century propose new challenges to everybody. Elderly people are involved in these challenges and we have to help them to achieve a better standard

of living with New Technologies because educationalists say that man can be educated in the course of his life.

Elderly people in rural places can not be out of this emotional experience, so they also have to learn with the New Technologies .

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