

Welfare state and ageing in Telematic Society

Artemio Baigorri and Mar Chaves

baigorri@unex.es

mchaves@unex.es

(Grupo de Investigación en Estudios Sociales y Territoriales. GIESyT)

University of Extremadura, Spain

giesyt@unex.es

ABSTRACT

The Welfare State is based on universalization of access to certain goods and economic, cultural and personal services (education, sanity, housing, etc). However, a growing number of societal activities and public services are carried out in a telematic way, as much in the teaching as in the Sanitary, among others. We can observe the repercussions of the technological advances related to Telematic Society in different fields, for example, the own technological advances applied to medicine are changing the senior citizens concept, since it improves and it enlarges the own aging process in our advanced societies.

The New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT) development and their potential, have been the base for many researches and political social, in which, the digital literacy in diverse economic and political sectors just as in civil society is beared in mind by governments, and at the same time, the NICT begin to be considered as elements of social exclusion or integration inside the Telematic Society.

This paper is focussed on the analysis, on the one hand, of the public and private initiatives, carried out in Extremadura (Spain) that pretend to social integration of the senior citizens in Telematic Society by means of the use or applicability of New Information and Communication Technologies -like Digital Literacy Project on New Knowledge Center (Nuevos Centros de Conocimiento) promoted by Extremadura Government-, and the other hand, this paper pretend to describe and analyze those new technologies developments that influence, in more measure, in their quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

Along the last third of the XX century, the relation between certain technological developments (fundamentally related with the optics, the computer science and

telecommunications), with certain social and economic changes, as well as the own impact that the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT) have had in the society, they have come configuring what we denominate, colloquially, as Information Society, which is characterized by, in historical exclusivity, "its capacity of overcoming barriers space/times, thanks to the new technologies of processing, transmission and diffusion of the information" (Baigorri, 2001). We prefer that denomination, more appropriate to this kind of society, which is also defined as Global, due to be cause and effect, in the same time, of the trans-nationalization processes (globalization) what so much is impacting in the last years.

These deep changes are developing, although at planetary level, especially in the rich and occidental democratic societies, whose socio-political systems are based in a social pact: Welfare State, and specifically, about universalization on access to certain goods and services, so much economic, cultural and personal, basically education, sanity and housing.

The access to Welfare State advantages, and therefore, the access to full citizenship, has rested in Occident, along the past century, in a full element: the literacy. Who don't know to read and to write, was condemned, in the modern societies, to social exclusion, because the literacy is considered an indispensable minimum. Without it, the survival is only possible through assisted way (from family, State or private charity).

Actually we are present, however, a qualitative and quantitative jump about training necessities for the citizenship refers. We are hardly beginning to peek it, but it becomes already evident for several observers that a growing number of social activities and public services are being carried out in a telematic way, as in the education environment (e-learning, virtual courses, etc) as Sanity (it is not necessary we refer here to the potentialities of certain technologies, as the domiciliary tele-assistance. In deed, a growing number of administrative acts, in very diverse environments (so much municipal as state), can also be carried out in a telematic way.

But this goods and services advantages are not available for the whole society, and this is due to many people have not access to these technologies. An access lack to NICT, what we have denominated as digital divide, which comes being object of attention by public policies from last decade. The digital divide refers to the existent differences between countries, and inside the same countries, between regions or collective social, on base to access possibilities and penetration of New Information and Communication Technologies inside society, and therefore, this concept refers to the differences in access, as direct as indirect, to advantages related to use of NICT.

This is an important aspect to keep in mind when we study the old people and their relation with the new technologies, due to this population's sector has been considered,

historically and according to diverse theories, like not integrated. However, we can say the digital divide refers, not only not access to the technology - this is, the non disposition or not use -, but also an inefficient use (Baigorri 2001). So, the digital divide can be a new exclusion mechanism in the emergent society. If a citizen cannot access to telematic advantages related to new Welfare State due to lack of capacity, he will be, in Telematic Society, in the same exclusion situation that the illiterate in Industrial Society.

The digital literacy level, and therefore, the integration grade inside this Telematic Society, as economy ambit as civil one, will come marked and influenced by the insertion process as for the use and applicability of the New Technologies, and how this literacy process has been carried out. And this question is more important, logically, if we refers to the adults, and particularly, to those population cohorts who are old people before, even, the revolution Internet took place.

ADVANCED, BUT AGED SOCIETIES

To speak about the progressive aging on occidental societies doesn't constitute a newness. The researches about this matter emitted as from academic ambits as public organizations, are already too numerous: As the number as the proportion of old people have grown along last century, and this growth will continue during the next decades.

According to the document "*Ageing in Spain*", presented by the IMSERSO in the II World Assembly on Ageing, the population denominated old men - third and fourth age -, conform in Spain the 16,8%, (6,9 millions of people). The octogenarians people, this is the called fourth age, exceed the million and a half of people, and the future predict a bigger growth even in next thirty years. In fact, the most recent predictions of National Institute of Statistic (INE) indicate that the population with 65 and more years will exceed the 8,6 millions for year 2020, and around 2,8 millions for year 2050; of course INE predictions are excessively lineal and rarely they are completed, but they show a historical tendency.

Without existing an agreement between demographers about if the ageing is due to socio-cultural factors (Rosa Gómez, 1990) or another, the specialist sociologists on demography show some essential and inter-related factors which have influenced -and they will influence- in the old population's growth:

A) Life Expectance Increase.

In the beginning of last century, the life expectance was valued in 40 years old. In 1997, this life expectance was located in almost 75 years for the men and almost 82 for the woman at national level, which means another aspect to consider: the *old age's feminity*.

B) Natality Descent along last three decades.

The natality rate in Spain is located below the 1,3, so for rate inferior at 2, we can consider a lack troops to replace the existent population.

C) A more and more low nuptiality rate.

Although this question seems a merely cultural aspect, is certainly a fact that less and less people decides to live in couple and form families. This also means a high percentages of old people who will live alone, or in situation of residential isolation in the future.

An important aspect related to differences between gender, is that the number of old women is very superior than men. This difference is more evident if we attend to higher age sections, the octogenarian population: two of each three old people with more than 80 year-old are women in Spain. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that, in the last decades, the life expectance between men and women begins to approach due to women incorporation to habits of life traditionally excluded, like the tobacco, the consumption of alcohol, the sports of risk, etc..

In same direction, Extremadura follows the same tonic, but moderate way although. But, in spite of this, Extremadura is one of the regions of Spain with the most aged population respect to the national population. In this way, its obvious the aging of the society, in Spain and Extremadura, and the future predictions show a progressive increase of the same ones. We are in front of many people whose will characterize to our society, they will be a part quantitatively important on telematic society in the present century.

TOWARD THE DEPENDENT SOCIETY

We are present at increment in the number lived additional years since the 65 years, till the end of the vital cycle. Additional years that will go in increase thanks to the technological advances applied to medicine, and thanks to the increase of the quality of life, among other factors.

However, diverse studies are showing two derived direct consequences of that new mark, at least. On one hand, we are already attending an explosion of the percentages of old people who lives alone, or residential isolation situation. According to 2001 Population Census, more than 25% of those older than 90 years, about 60.000, they live alone. Of 85 to 89 years old, that figure rises at 140.000, and of 80 to 84 years it reaches the 250.000. On the whole, 1,4 million of people with more than 65 years old live alone in Spain. And the second direct consequence of the life expectance increase is the balance of probabilities of appearance of illnesses

Naturally, the effects on socioeconomic structure will be very deep: appearing new professions, being increased the necessity of services assistance public, etc. But we want to show the important increment of dependent people number who will need, specifically, the use of services what, in Telematic Society, will be telematics in more measure. For example, the development of the nanotechnologies, what some authors consider like part of the NICT, will facilitate the relation between the old men with his doctor in his own house.

Why is this so important? Because the studies of public health, show the existence of kind of universal pattern, according to which, the population groups with less educational resources present the worst indicators of health at the same time (Blaxter, 1989). In Spain, Dolores Puga and Antonio Abellán has studied the National Survey of Health of 1997 and they have checked how, for example, the dependence rates between illiterates duplicate the levels of those who know read and write, and they conclude that "some resources cultural minima not only become for the adults a valuable instrument to be able to 'to be managed' in a complex society, but in indispensable to be able to find the strategies and the necessary resources to save the own difficulties or to face them" (Puga, Abellán, 2002).

So that imperious necessity that the old population will have, in next years, of being alphabetized digitally. Not only because it is demonstrated that the access to New Technologies, and particularly to Internet, improves the quality of the old men's relational life, opening them new activities, but also, and especially, because the access to certain advantages and benefits of support of quality will be conditioned by the capacity to relate with New information and Communication Technologies.

DIGITAL DIVIDE IN OLDER PEOPLE.

Digital divide is defined as the inequality social expression on access to New Information and Communication Technologies, and it can understand from very different perspectives: inequality between countries, regions, or social groups; or inequality on access to the contents, or in the own capacity of emission of contents, etc. From the public Internet appearance, by the middle of last decade, the analyses on the matter have multiplied. In relation to access, we can observe a certain reduction of digital divide as the technology price is reduced. And so, related to older people- collective heat-resistant to technologies, and economically weaker-, it is observed in important countries, like United States of America, a growing access. In fact, the connected percentage grows quickly in this population of more than 65 years old (Fox, 2001:4), and probability, this percentage will grow in the future.

According to the data published by Eurostat, for the group of Europe, the

percentage of connected homes to Internet has been increased in four points in the year 2002 respect 2001. The connection rate is, at European level, of 40,4%, being Spain located 11 points below the European stocking, and being the Nordic countries, together with United Kingdom and Holland, the most advanced; in the following chart we can appreciate the digital divide between the Mediterranean countries and North Europe Countries.

However, in Spain, and respect to 2001, of 23,4% of homes with access to Internet, we have passed to 29,5%. Spain occupied the number 14 in the world ranking of Users of Internet in December of 2002, and according to the General Study of Means (EGM), between October of 2001 and May of 2002, the percentage of people internet users, of more than 55 years, has passed of 1% in 1996, to 6,2%.

% Home with access to Internet 2002		
Countries	2001	2002
Germany	37,9	43,7
Austria	46,2	49,1
Belgium	34,7	40,9
Denmark	58,9	64,5
Spain	23,4	29,5
Finland	48,1	53,7
France	26,2	35,5
Greece	11,7	9,2
Holland	58,5	65,5
Ireland	46,2	47,9
Italy	32,9	35,4
Luxemburg	43,6	55,0
Portugal	23,4	30,8
Sweden	64,3	64,2
United Kingdom	54,5	45,0
Total U.E.	36,1	40,4

The Regional Government of Extremadura bet for the New Information and Communication Technologies, explains that, inspite of situating on low levels of relative rent of the region, and its low positions many indicators of wealth, however the adults in the region are not more out of NIyCT. On the contrary, according to the regional

survey carried out to families by the **GIESyT**, 6,7% of people more than 55 years old are declared active users of Internet. Although, the survey also emphasize differences between gender: while in men, the rate of "connected" is of 12,3%, for the women is an insignificant 2,2%. Naturally, like one can observe in the following chart, to more age smaller connection rate.

Population Internet Users in Extremadura (GIESyT survey)				
Genre/Age	55 to 59	60 to64	65 y more	55 and more
Men	21,2%	25,7%	4%	12,3%
Women	6,7%	0	0,7%	2,2%
Total	13,5%	10,3%	2,2%	6,7%

Nevertheless, according to the monthly study of Center of Economic Prediction (CEPREDE) of the Autonomous University of Madrid, Extremadura, although has grown in the last years, presents, together with Castilla-La Mancha, the smallest percentages of homes with Internet in December of 2002, with 8%, and the smallest rate in penetration of the Internet Users of Spain with 10,8%.

Beyond the differences, is evident the existence of big differences between penetration grade some regions with others. This digital divide emphasize the inequality on access to new goods and services created by the Telematic Society, inside the Spanish society.

NEW INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND DIGITAL LITERACY IN EXTREMADURA

The insertion process on Information Global Society for older people in Extremadura comes carrying out by means of specific programs of digital literacy related to the occupation of their leisure time and through direct use of Internet in specific places, the Old Men Homes. In this sense, from 1997 and through an agreement between the Extremadura Government and The Caixa Foundation, decided development of projects related to the new technologies and the older people, as well as the disposition of technological infrastructure in 15 Older People Homes.

Inside the main objectives, we can emphasize those related to facilitate access and first contact with the New Technologies, by means of computer terminals like the Blue Point, the Computer Classrooms, Mediatecas, the development of the participation and

the communication social through technical volunteers, and the web Club Estrella.

These programs are based on three basic axes. On one hand, the Computer Classrooms, where they combine the introduction courses to the computer (use of CD-ROM, word processor, domestic accounting, spreadsheets, design of bulletins, announcements, posters, etc) with free access to Internet. As differential characteristic to other programs, the classrooms are located in the own Older People Homes context, certainly in four: Badajoz, Cáceres, Trujillo and Merida.

The second basic axis is conformed by the creation of Mediatecas, physical spaces what redefine the library concept adapted to New Technologies. Here, the old people can find books, newspapers and magazine, videos, and materials in new computer supports, together with computers multimedia that facilitate the consultation. These Mediatecas is located in Almendralejo and Navalmoral de la Mata.

The third fundamental pillar is conformed by web page Club Estrella, in which, the old men can meet and communicate with other people, exchange experiences and knowledge with other users, so participate in debates and surveys, buy and sell, and exchange products, be informed about news and know the formation possibilities to those that can have access.

For other part, the Extremadura regional government, and inside its Digital Literacy Plan with older people collective, have created and developed the “Nuevos Centros de Conocimientos” (NCC). This Centres are conceived as public spaces in the net, located in cultural and social centres of the region, with computer equipment and specialized worker to facilitate the access from the adults to the New Technologies. In their electronic address, www.nccextremadura.org, we can find the area The pic@ta, directed specifically to older people collective. At the moment, thirty four NCC have been distributed in regional geography, ten of them, called integra-Red, are referred to specific districts inside the cities of Badajoz, Cáceres and Mérida. We want to emphasize that the NCC absence in small towns is supplanted by the displacement of Itinerant NCC.

Diffusion Activities: The main objective is Digital Literacy Plan diffusion inside older people collective and the development a space of encounter social-virtual between the adults, with the purpose of exchanging experiences, the creation of a net of collaboration between the different Older People Homes in Extremadura and the introduction to knowledge of the reality of the region extremeña by means of the new technologies. Another primordial objective is the development of inter-generational relationships by means of combined activities with Public Schools, as well as to the diffusion of the potentialities of the technologies applied to the health, and specifically, the domiciliary tele-assistance. These activities have been carried out by Leisure Time

Studios, video-conferences among Older People Homes, events, and specific Older People Days.

Formation Activities: These activities is related to the adults formation on New Information and Communication Technologies use. These formation modules are appropriated to older people necessities and the older peoples,s preferences.

Therefore, the digital literacy in older people in Extremadura is related to occupation of leisure time, in their specific spaces (Older People Homes) or created for the population's digital literacy in general (NCC), and based exclusively on use of certain technological elements (mail, word processors, Internet, etc) for the occupation of leisure time, but we still have to know the use for other ends related to social and economic aspects, as well as this information consequences in their daily lives.

In broad outline, we have shown that goods and services accessible through NTIyC are wide in relation to simple occupation of leisure time, still when the technological products applied to leisure and consumption have become a potent economic niche. We should keep in mind that other uses can increase the life quality -for example, applied technologies to the health, banking transactions, bureaucratic procedures with saving of time and displacement, access to information determined in essential aspects or demanded by older people, ...- and this goods and services are not accessibles from habitual housing due to the inexistence of computers or net connection to Internet.

We are in present the first steps of obtaining older people digitally alphabetized thanks to initiatives like in Extremadura, but far (relatively, if we keep in mind the speed to which the changes take place in telematic society) of a digital literacy related to economic aspects which answer to the market necessities and demands for that this collective sector is profitable economically. The following step must be establish the access to NTIyC from housings, aspect which will have to be, and foregoney, in charge of the State.

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