New activating media in further education for older people in the civil society

Neue aktivierende Medien in der Weiterbildung älterer Menschen in der europäischen Zivilgesellschaft

Nouveaux médias dans l’apprentissage pour des hommes âgés dans la société civile

Information: www.web4seniors.eu

Sponsored by:

Microsoft

ZAWiW
ICT use standardisation at the UPUA as a tool to achieve the social integration and active participation of seniors.

1. The University of Alicante: Development of digital technologies and senior training programmes for social integration and personal development

The University of Alicante has gone through an ongoing technological evolution which has had a direct impact on the teaching/learning process, increasing accessibility to educational resources and contents, as well as communication with teachers and researchers, and encouraging lifelong learning. It is in the latter area that access to ICTs has proved critical both in the self-learning process and in the development of over-50s’ personal autonomy.

The incorporation of state-of-the-art Digital Technologies, along with the social changes operated in the educational process, has led to conceptual and methodological shifts based mainly on a more active group-based, collaborative, tutored, self-learning work on the part of students, which has been supported on a continued monitoring of the process and an ongoing assessment by part of the teaching staff.

During the last few years, these changes —which are customary for young university students who enrol in the UA with a professionalising specialisation or lifelong training goal— have been affecting the 50+ students who started their university training at our university in 1999, within the ‘Permanent University’ (UPUA) programme, which is not a professionalising one, strictly speaking, since it is addressed to a segment of people between 50 and 92 years of age, the largest subsegment of which corresponds to the 60-75 age-group, i.e. the retired, non-active population. However, the UA regards personal development and active citizenship as being sufficiently important to justify the promotion of this programme.

The UPUA programme is integrated into the framework of specific university education for older adults and responds to such demands as the need for a deeper democratisation of knowledge, a reduction of social inequalities, a greater social involvement of seniors in society, and the enhancement of intra- and intergenerational relationships, all of which will help to maintain their quality of life and will additionally enlarge the range of options available for them to continue active life outside their normal working environment.

The main objectives of this programme are:

· To help older adults in their process of continuous adaptation to our fast-changing society.

· To provide older adults who could not receive it in the past with a chance of having access to higher education.

1 Headmistress, UPUA.Alicante University.
2 Programmes Coordinator, UPUA.Alicante University.
3 Research Technician, Upua International Programmes Researcher.Alicante University.
4 ITC Project Technician and Quality and Evaluation Plan Upua.Alicante University.
5 E-LiLL Project Technician and Quality and Evaluation Plan Upua.Alicante University.
· To offer educational alternatives to professionals who wish to widen their knowledge or get into other fields of knowledge.

· To recognise, enrich and enhance the experience acquired by older adults during their professional life.

· To encourage older adults who have accumulated working experience to reflect on their skills within a theoretico-practical framework, so that they can assume a more active and efficient role in the development of the society they live in.

· To help older adults to reorient their life with the aim of becoming more useful for their family, their social community and their country.

· To attract non-active people professionally, so that they can help to increase collective participation and social solidarity, thus creating a new framework for intergenerational relationships.

· To provide opportunities to share knowledge and experiences through the interaction of different working groups, to incorporate new life experiences that can reinforce each participant’s ability to be useful to society, and finally to guarantee the feedback of the educational system through already educated individuals with expertise in their respective fields.

· To take advantage of the continuous education programmes offered by the University of Alicante, especially those offering courses on Spanish language, culture and history for foreign residents living in our province.

In addition to a wide formative offer, distributed between the knowledge areas of Legal and Social Sciences, Humanities, Health and Social Action, Experimental Sciences and New Technologies, Image and Sound, a huge effort has been made to promote a training scheme based on the development of educational programmes through the use of the Internet, virtual tools and platforms, and other advanced multimedia materials. For this purpose, a set of accessible, open means and systems have been developed that will allow students to access the information more easily. Central to this strategy has been the importance assigned to the disciplines and courses which focus specifically on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which have combined all the above with the aim of facilitating intellectual activity and access to science, technique and culture, thereby favouring social integration through the development of mechanisms and initiatives that encourage self-learning and the implementation of autonomous projects by students.

After taking part in a programme academically coordinated from the UA, the UPUA students will be able to continue their intellectual development and socio-cultural involvement in initiatives and projects focused on various knowledge areas (Literature, Sociological Research, Art, Environment) in which they are particularly interested, for which the ICTs in general and the virtual platforms in particular have come to be considered decisive, essential elements.

As for the actions and resources developed by the UA, they have made it possible to implement online training tools such as “Campus Virtual”, as well as a number of portals and services that have been grouped together under the name of “www.ua.es 2.0”, including: Portal Audiovisual; RUA – UA Institutional Repository; OCW-UA – UA Open Course Ware; BlogsUA; Urgent Notification Service via SMS through ‘Campus Virtual’; the free-access wireless network all over the University Campus and, finally, the campaigns to facilitate the purchase of laptop computers by students.
Thanks to all of the above, most UPUA students have now joined the ICT World, and senior students’ autonomous initiatives have been set in motion, among which stand out Club EuCoNet; Blog Palabras (words); and Portal of the AAUP (Association of UPUA Students and Alumni), all of which are currently working at full swing. Other initiatives find themselves on a development stage, e.g. Conversations at the UPUA; the ‘Senior Citizens and Communication’ Observatory; and the Portal of Experience (an Intergenerational Observatory). Information about them all can be obtained at www.proyectosupua.es

In order to make known the different actions and initiatives which are currently being carried out at the UA within the ‘New Technologies’ framework, a brief profile is now going to be offered of those which we regard as being most relevant to older adult students.

2. Resources, tools and technological support at the UA

2.1 Campus Virtual

Campus Virtual (CV) is an Internet-based service which complements teaching and academic, as well as administrative management, and is addressed to the whole University community (teaching and research staff, students, and administration and service staff). It has been entirely developed with UA resources and staff and the whole university community participates in it to a greater or lesser extent.

For the teaching staff, it is a first-class technological resource, because it makes easier teaching management, research, student management, online connection with the resources required for teaching and their evaluation through the exchange of assessment practices and tests. Therefore, not only does it offer the possibility to obtain the personal card of each student and the class list, the appointments, the attention hours, the diary, and other purely administrative issues, but also makes it possible to manage the bibliography recommended for each subject, to receive and answer students’ questions, to propose and chair debates, and to supply online materials and resources to students (with unlimited access), once these resources form part of the discipline imparted or the programme in which students have enrolled.

Likewise, students have the reciprocal advantages of training, practice and research, a series of options through which the management of their studies is made easier, as they can register, check their academic record, meet their classmates and contact them (either using the e-mail addresses or in the debates, tutored sessions or working groups set up by the teacher).

This tool equally acts as a complement to class teaching, though this will always depend on how teachers use it and the extent to which they do so. In this way, a student will be able to: take part if the teacher opens it; to download materials as long as the teacher has put them at the students’ disposal, to visualise the recommended bibliography, and so on.

Apart from the teaching management options for both teachers and students, CV is a powerful management tool thanks to which teachers can manage their curricula, see their payslips, make appointments for medical check-ups and monitor their research
projects, among other things. The Administration and Service Staff can also see their work records and time control sheets.

The Permanent University has been developing formative actions specific to the Campus Virtual tool for years now. Such actions are programmed using a didactic methodology that is in keeping with the requirements and needs of senior students. Thus, at the beginning of each academic year (between September and November), we offer students the Conectate (Get connected!) courses, the objectives of which are: 1. To provide an overview about the possibilities of the Information Society, of the resources available to the UA, and of free software. 2. To get to know and handle the technological resources that the University of Alicante places at its students’ disposal. 3. To introduce students to the ‘teletraining’ methodology. 4. To offer a tour of the institutional website. 5. To empower students to access CV and make them aware of the possibilities provided by this tool and the personalised tutorial sessions created for the student. 6. To make students familiar with the virtual services delivered by the UA Library. 7. Blogs UA.

This free, voluntary training procedure has been used by 450 students every year, since work on the areas of training and ICT-access started at the UPUA. This has meant a great step forward in terms of online usage of this tool, an increased access of older adult students to teaching resources, and a greater involvement in the learning process.

2.2 “www.UA.es 2.0”

A number of new projects and portals are grouped together under this name, which has been chosen for two reasons.

Firstly, because these projects are characterised by being inspired in the philosophy and principles of the web 2.0, i.e. based on users’ communities; social networks; interactivity, participation and collaboration; multimedia content; and simple, user-friendly edition tools.

Secondly, because these projects have been defined and designed after the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the UA institutional website, and therefore will start being implemented during the second decade of life of the website.

2.2.1 Portaol Audiovisual

Portal Audiovisual is a joint initiative of the Institutional Relations and the Technology and Educational Innovation Vice-rectorates born with the objective of managing, preserving and giving access to a collection of audiovisual resources available at the University of Alicante. Likewise, it seeks to make this University better known nationally and internationally and to encourage open knowledge. Its main functionalities consist in housing all the audiovisual production generated at the events which take place at the university premises, in spreading the results of major research and scientific gatherings, as well as providing access to the audiovisual collection of the UA.

For any other events of institutional, academic or cultural interest, the University of Alicante offers a real-time recording and/or broadcasting service through the Internet, using the streaming technology (which consists in transmitting video and audio through the Internet in real time). Thus, it will be possible to follow live from anywhere in the
world the events which are taking place in one of the UA sites equipped with this service. Examples of these events include strategic meetings, seminars, scientific meetings, conferences and academic activities which are relevant to the Permanent University and to senior students.

2.2.2 RUA institutional repository of the University of Alicante

RUA is the UA institutional deposit of the works in digital format resulting from the research and teaching carried out at this university.

RUA arises as a response to the increasingly widespread movement in favour of permitting the open access to the results of publicly-funded research. This open access to research makes its impact grow exponentially; in other words, the more access, the more visibility and impact for the work carried out. In order to ensure this increased impact, RUA has managed to place the documents deposited in the Repository at the highest positions in Google searches.

In turn, RUA responds to the need for storage, management and preservation of all the digital documents generated by UA members that can prove useful to the scientific and teaching community, thus avoiding their physical scattering and the loss of valuable works.

RUA is structured in three sections:

**RUA Docencia** (Teaching) is the UA institutional portal which provides access to the teaching materials and learning objects left there by the teachers and researchers belonging to this university community.

**RUA Investigación** (Research) is the UA institutional portal which gives access to the documents generated by teachers and researchers in their research tasks. This deposit has as its aim to store, manage and preserve these documents and seeks to increase the visibility of the work carried out by the university community.

**RUA Revistas** (Journals) is the UA portal meant to house the journals in digital format published by the different UA units (departments, schools, institutes, etc.) with the aims of guaranteeing the dissemination and preservation of the papers contained in these digital publications and avoiding their dispersion.

2.2.3. OCW-UA. University of Alicante opencourseware

It is a new space that tries to provide society with the contents of the programmes and knowledge that the University generates and imparts in its classrooms so that they can be shared with other ‘actors’, such as teachers, academics or students, among others. This is a web publication that grants access to the educational materials of university courses.

In order to consult these documents and, if necessary, modify them, free applications and/or those protected by open use licenses can be utilised, e.g. OPEN OFFICE or ADOBE READER.

2.2.4. Blogs UA
A blog is a periodically updated website which compiles chronologically texts or articles by one of several authors, with the most recent one appearing first. The author always has the freedom to leave published or remove what he considers appropriate. The term ‘blog’ comes from the words ‘web’ and ‘log’ (= ‘diary’). The University of Alicante makes available to its community (students, Administration and Service Staff, and Teaching and Research Staff) a completely free blog accommodation service, the only requirement to use it being to own a university e-mail account of the type @alu.ua.es or @ua.es.

Although the UPUA students develop common and specific projects such as the Blog Palabras (words), they can also share this section which is common to the whole university community, where UPUA students belong too.

2.2.5 Via Mobile Alert Service

Campus Virtual incorporates the possibility of sending SMS messages. It is a new communication channel set in motion to complement the already existing channels (electronic mail, tutorials, notices, etc.) with the intention of meeting the very urgent, immediate communication needs.

Its use must be limited to exceptional situations, i.e. when very urgent, immediate needs arise. The global cost of the service may be substantial, which is why it must be used responsibly. This cost will initially be assumed by the University.

2.2.6 The Wireless Network

The Wireless Network is an extension of the UA Local Area Network which permits the access to the Internet and other telematic services without needing to have a fixed network connection.

This service is available to every member of the university community at the San Vicente Campus and at the ‘Ciudad de Alicante’ University Venue and its purpose is to provide users with access to the UA computer resources, regardless of their location. From any location at the campus, users will be able to establish a ‘wireless’ connection to the UA Wireless Network and access its habitual resources, to visit the www.ua.es website and, through that portal, to explore a wide range of online resources.

2.2.7 The laptop offer

Along the same lines of technology-use development and promotion and for the purpose of making them more readily accessible to students, teaching and research staff and administration and service staff, the University of Alicante has reached agreements with various computer firms in order to facilitate the acquisition of laptop computers at a low cost or by means of financing systems.

It is essential to have a high accessibility level, and the UA has adopted a strategy which values the chances to establish a connection to the wireless network that is achieved from anywhere in the Campus. Being able to buy a laptop more easily in order to access these online resources provides a good opportunity. The strategy assigns the same importance to network connectivity as to hardware and software possession. With all these measures, the University of Alicante tries to offer a better, freer and faster access to ICTs by the university community.
3. The Development of the UPUA initiatives for the participation of seniors in digital technologies. Sociocultural integration and the exercise of active citizenship.

3.1 CLUB EUCONET

This initiative started working in the 2003/04 academic year. It was promoted by a group of voluntary UPUA students belonging to the EuCoNet international working and research group. Its main goal is to help other students interested in approaching and learning to use the New Technologies. It is basically oriented to all students who wish to take up computers, who want to solve specific questions, and also to overcome their fear of computers.

At present, CLUB EUCONET has more than 80 students who develop a six-hour-a-week ongoing activity between September and June. The classrooms and resources are provided by the UPUA, along with the academic advice, and the daily work is assumed by the 12 students/tutors. Thus, with a solid structure and a significant number of members, progress has been made with respect to the initial objectives.

A new stage has started in 2007, which includes the development of research works, as well as the organisation of forums, debates and contacts with other study and self-learning groups, and collaboration has been established with other ICT-oriented working and research groups belonging to other initiatives and areas. You can visit the following webpage: http://www.ua.es/en/upua/programasint/proyectoEuconet/euconet1.htm

3.2 Blog Palabras (words)

In 2006, a woman teacher who had long been imparting literature, literary criticism and writing subjects designed a voluntary Literature Permanent Seminar with the support of the UPUA. This seminar, along with the study, debate, research and creation tasks, helped to establish the need to create a portal or blog which could permit dynamic and accessible work as well as communication between users and students of this seminar.

A group of students who took part in this self-learning project have set in motion the ‘Blog Palabras’ (linked to this Permanent Literature Seminar) in 2007. See www.proyectosupua.es.

This initiative has made it possible to widen the training, research and communication possibilities and, above all, the creativity of the 40-odd students who took part in this Seminar during the 2006-07 academic year. It is expected to grow in years to come, thus favouring a larger communication flow.

3.3 Seniors and communication

An initiative in which UPUA students and alumni do research on “what image of seniors is projected in the different artistic manifestations and mass media: this image is analysed; it is compared to the participants’ own perception of reality and... action is taken accordingly”. Among the actions planned stand out the following: seniors in literature, in painting, in cinema, in the mass media, in advertising; seniors and laws; and seniors and the economy.

The overall objective of this initiative consists in improving the social consideration of senior citizens as well as their self-esteem.
A total of 12 students from the Senior Diploma have been involved this first year (2006-2007). Among the results obtained are the preparation of a manifesto, the publication of several articles in the (written and digital) press and the participation in a forum.

As for the 2007-08 academic year, there is a programme of seminars, debates and research groups that will similarly show their results in the blog linked to the web portal of this initiative.

3. 4 The portal of the AAUP (Association of UPUA Students and Alumni)

The Association of UPUA Students and Alumni was born with the desire to improve the relationships between these students through the organisation of formative, cultural or fun-oriented activities. Likewise, with its effort, collaboration and support, it largely contributes to the improvement of these university study programmes. The Association members seek to become part of the ‘university world’, thus favouring intergenerational links, to contact the other domestic or international Universities for Older Adults, and to join all seniors’ organisations.

A visit to this portal gives information about the Association (subscription form, members, the Statutes, leisure and cultural activities —travel, auditions, theatre, etc.— as well as academic ones —seminars, conferences, debates, workshops, exhibitions, congresses, technical sessions, etc.—), publications such as the AAUP magazine, along with the numerous events in which the Association has intervened and a wide range of photographic reports of its activities, as well as some links that senior students could definitely find useful and interesting.

A close collaboration exists between this Association and the Permanent University for the purpose of dynamising and improving the education and socio-cultural integration projects which affect this group of senior university students.

3. 5. Initiatives and Projects for the 2007-08 academic year

During the coming 2007-08 academic year, the efforts made by the UPUA will focus on evaluating the strategies implemented so far with a view to improve and consolidate their functionalities and to introduce new communication platforms through the provision of the technological resources that the UA offers its users.

‘Conversations at the UPUA’ and ‘The Portal of Experience’ will be two of the projects starting this year. Both of them result from the initiative of UPUA students who, after several years enrolled in the Senior Programme, have decided to provide their expertise and knowledge to these social integration and cultural participation projects. They are inspired in the notions of solidarity and experience and knowledge transmission and exchange between different age groups and cultures and find a new reference framework in the ICTs.

3.5.1. Conversation at the UPUA

2006 was the starting point for this initiative, in which a group of volunteers who spoke several languages (Spanish, English, French, German) decided to have meetings with members of the university community in order not only to improve the use and knowledge of these languages but also to enhance the level of sociocultural integration of participants in this project, who came from different cultures and countries.

Thus, in addition to the structured subjects included in the UPUA programme which are imparted throughout the academic year, students have at their disposal this space to
practice, perfect and develop the language beyond grammatical mastery, for other participation and collaboration purposes.

The group has involved a significant number of students and collaborators and it has worked so well that they have developed an online communication platform which can permit open access and groupwork with other segments interested in the knowledge of the language and culture of different countries. There is also an intention to open this platform to a wider generational spectrum so that young people can be attracted too.

From the very beginning, this project has counted on the support of foreign residents living in our country who have helped to dynamise this group of work in various languages and cultures.

3.5.2. The portal of experience (an intergenerational observatory)

When the Permanent University started working in 1999, it was conceived from the perspective of promoting intergenerational collaboration among other things. Up to 70% of the students in this senior diploma are graduates and retirees, which means there is a large group of idle, qualified people who can offer expertise, advice and guidelines to young university students who have to face the search for paid work and a profession for the first time.

Additionally, there was an intention to incorporate seniors into university, to raise the awareness of the mutual interests shared by the different generations, thus bridging the generation gap and making possible an approach to common problems and parallel perspectives.

A group of students belonging to the AAUP set up the Experience Workshops in 2005. These early workshops dealt with a number of different thematic areas, e.g. employment, politics, sexuality, gender, and immigration. There are plans to continue implementing these experience and knowledge exchange workshops and to enrich them with the support of online services and resources. In this way, with various pilot groups focusing on specialisation areas, and always with the support of the volunteers and collaborators involved in the operation of this Portal, we want to use the ICTs to expand this initiative, so that it can reach a large group of users and therefore help to overcome the digital divide that often separates seniors from the rest of the society. Other objectives are to help the different generations to have a better knowledge of their respective specific contexts and to teach them how to support and help each other in the common interest of sociodemographic segments that are seemingly so far apart.

4. Conclusion

The accumulated experience has allowed us to check how important it is to develop didactic strategies which foster groupwork, collaboration and interaction (both teacher-student and student-student) in virtual teaching/learning contexts. The activities proposed within the different projects and initiatives have generated a high degree of motivation and involvement on the part of students during the years of existence of the Permanent University programme, and the wide range of institutional resources and support means provided by the UA have had significant spin-off benefits for students and, consequently, for the society in general and the older adult segment in particular. This fact is illustrated by the active participation in the forums and in other environments where the different individual and collective works and projects have been developed.
This is why, we will insist on creating and developing active learning environments within our future educational and planning policies, which means encouraging and implementing didactic strategies based on the constructivist theory, taking into account the training needs, the application contexts and the specific characteristics of senior students. Apart from virtual environments, emphasis will also be laid on the previous planning, not only of the materials which will enable the students to obtain the information, but also of the use of technological resources and a pedagogic design oriented to favour a certain type of learning and the previous training level that can enable them to access those resources in a non-traumatic way.