



Educational Senior Network

Best Practices and Educational Innovation for Seniors

Author/s	Incubator of values Permanent University of the University of Alicante
Title	EuCoNet Club
Key words	ICTs, peer learning, accessibility
Context – location and impact	<p>The University of Alicante –through the Permanent University Programme– joined European NICT learning projects for seniors in 2005.</p> <p>Before the challenge of providing Internet access to most Europeans stood a reality where a considerable number of European senior citizens risked being left out of this technological development. Age was an evident exclusion factor at the end of the past century.</p> <p>EuCoNet (European Computer Network) was born in 2005 with this specific objective. It was a project sponsored by the European Community within the framework of the Socrates-Grundtvig Programme and created to facilitate access to the Internet, especially for older adults.</p> <p>This project involved older adult students coming from the universities of Ulm (Germany), Brno and Prague (Czech Republic), Glasgow (Scotland/UK), Vicenza (Italy), Bratislava (Slovakia) and Alicante (Spain), and had as its goal to help solve this problem.</p> <p>The aforesaid EuCoNet project served to undertake numerous research studies, as well as to develop methodological analyses along with didactic experiments for the purpose of designing not only materials, tools, learning systems and best practices but also courses specifically designed for senior citizens interested in learning to use the new technologies. This has allowed seniors to exchange their basic knowledge regardless of time- and space-related circumstances, and within the framework of NICTs. Multimedia systems, blended learning, virtual classrooms and authorised learning projects have been key aspects of EuCoNet.</p> <p>A direct outcome of this project was the innovative initiative — the EuCoNet Club— set in motion during the 2003-04 academic year thanks to the efforts of a group of voluntary students of the Permanent University of the University of Alicante who belonged to the EuCoNet international work and research group, the objective of which was to help UPUA students to become familiar with computer use. The practical results of the project were highly valued by the European Union as a best practice example in a report released in 2007.</p> <p>The main objective consisted in providing assistance to other students interested in approaching New Technologies and, above all, the project was oriented to all students who wished to start working with</p>

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	computers as well as to those who wanted to solve specific problems, and more importantly, to overcome their fear of computers.
Start date	2003
Institution	Permanent University of the University of Alicante
Addressees?	Students enrolled in the Senior Diploma of the Permanent University of the University of Alicante
Thematic area	New technologies
Justification	<p>The activities resulting from the Euconet Project have largely increased in terms of frequency as well as intensity during the last few years. In this way, the initiative has managed to reduce the fears and reservations which used to prevent the European senior population from taking advantage of the multiple applications offered by computers. Likewise, an effort was carried out to make people with limited mobility aware of the great possibilities to overcome their difficulties to move around and, therefore, to remain up to date in terms of training, education, and communication, and also to avoid the growing isolation suffered by aged and disabled people in modern society.</p>
Objectives	<p>The EuCoNet Club primarily sought to support students interested in learning to use New Technologies. Its efforts also focused on the familiarisation of older adult students with computers and on providing solutions to specific problems, as well as on overcoming the fear of computers.</p> <p>The efforts thus revolved around meeting the specific objectives made explicit in the document that proposed the creation of this Club, which in turn arose from the research group's reflections within the framework of the EuCoNet Project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and normalising the <i>Campus Virtual</i> [Virtual Campus] platform both as a means of contact with UA and as a working environment for students. This is why emphasis has been placed on training courses and also on the continuous tutoring of the training received. • Promoting contacts amongst UPUA students interested in the use of NICTs. • Developing a 'voluntary service' culture through the creation of a small group of cyber-volunteers who collaborate with the Club. • Establishing a training exchange and collaboration forum in contexts where NTs are used. • Consolidating a Learning and Guided Self-Learning Project with materials, tools and support groups, oriented to all those students who wish to take their first steps in the field of new technologies and, above all, to leave behind their fear of computers and/or of the university.

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Experience	<p>The Club is formed by: Academic Coordinators, Tutors-Students (F1), and Participants-Students.</p> <p>The collaboration of the Permanent University with the Senior Diploma lecturers and with the Computer and Space Management Services of the University of Alicante resulted in the availability of NT-equipped classrooms for this initiative, along with the implementation of a support and monitoring system for the EuCoNet Club, which focused on tasks of maintenance, content update and upgrading of the software and hardware required.</p> <p>At the beginning of each academic year and once the Senior Diploma students have enrolled in the Permanent University programme, those who show an interest in joining the Club are summoned to an informative meeting where registrations are made and the following aspects are established:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work schedule • The Club's timetables • The distribution of tutors and students into groups • The 'general' sessions in which specialists and academic coordinators will deal with specific issues and topics of common interest <p>Enrolment is free but, as a <i>conditio sine qua non</i>, students must have registered for the Permanent University programme in the current academic year, i.e. they must be enrolled in any of UPUA programme subjects and follow the general regulations concerning enrolment and functioning.</p>
Results	<p>Club EuCoNet has succeeded in connecting senior citizens both virtually and in real life, so that they can communicate with one another by themselves using new technologies. And in a broader sense, the project has served as a bridge between the different generations through the achievement of such goals.</p>
Future perspectives	<p>Other longer-term objectives include the development of research works, together with the organisation of encounters, debates, seminars and workshops and the establishment of contacts with other study and self-learning groups, as the EuCoNet Club has progressively strengthened its structure and attracted a significant number of members.</p>
Remarkable facts	<p>This best practice has been collected in a Facebook group called "Club EuCoNet" which seeks to give a boost to the use of new technologies amongst older adults.</p> <p>The great success achieved by this initiative made it necessary to increase the number of hours and classrooms dedicated to this best practice, as well as the number of tutors.</p> <p>A special emphasis is currently placed on the strong impact of current issues such as "the use of smartphones" or "social networks."</p> <p>Peer to peer training brings significant advantages, both for the addressees, who find themselves at a more agreeable environment,</p>



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	<p>and for those who altruistically impart training as volunteers and feel rewarded with the recognition that they are given. This represents a stimulus for both groups when it comes to the promotion of active ageing through training in ICTs.</p> <p>Trainers carry out an evaluation of the activities implemented each year and collect perceptions, needs and problems with the aim of devising proposal for improvements in the following academic years.</p>
Bibliographic references	<p>Since the EuCoNet Club started functioning, a number of workshops and seminars have been organised with the participation of teachers and, above all, students. Their results can be found below as EuCoNet Club materials at the service of other older adult students.</p> <p>http://www.universidadpermanente.com/iniciativas/en/content/materials</p> <p>http://www.universidadpermanente.com/iniciativas/en/content/links</p> <p>BRU RONDA, C et al (2007); <i>ICT use standardisation at the UPUA as an instrument favouring seniors' social integration and active participation. University of Alicante, Spain</i> "web4seniors". <i>European Conference - Learning in Later Life. Ulm University, Germany. October 2007. Proceedings of the European Conference - Learning in Later Life.</i> Edit Ulm University, pp. 103-109.</p> <p>RUIZ ARMERO, N; LOPEZ BLANES, A; BRU RONDA, C (2008); <i>Standardisierung der IKT-Verwendung an der UPUA als Mittel zur sozialen Integration und aktiven Beteiligung von Senioren. A bulletin of the European cooperation project. E-Learning in Later Life-Elil.2006-2008. Digitale Kompetenz für ältere Erwachsene.</i> Edit Zawiw. Universität Ulm, 2008. Pp. 46-50.</p> <p><i>Peer-to-peer training and active ageing: Becoming familiar with new technologies at the UPUA within a collaborative learning atmosphere.</i> José Luis Casal and Felipe Castejón, Alicante (Spain) Senior Students and Peers EFOS News No. 1 2016, pp. 19-22 http://www.efos-europa.eu/fileadmin/efos/downloads/efosnews20161en.pdf</p>
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