

# THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPUTER SKILLS FOR ADULTS 50+ IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

**Associate Professor Dobrinka Stoykova**

In the project DASUN in Sofia, Bulgaria took part the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies /SULSIT/, in partnership with the Association of University Libraries /AUL/. For all activities we became advice from Zentrum für Allgemeine Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung (ZAWiW) der Universität Ulm.

At the beginning we made a brainstorming and decided what to choose for the education of adults 50+ in our university. We made several assumptions about their needs and interests. That helped us to design a questionnaire. The sociological survey was conducted, based on 140 respondents. Included were adults from 50 till 90 years, with different professions and level of education.

We aimed to receive information about computer skills of the respondents and if they are interested to improve their knowledge in that field. Then we had to clarify the forms, themes, length of the education. Concerning the form biggest interest was shown to lectures, followed by practical education. Preferred were shorter forms. Most popular themes were: "healthy manner of life"; "ideas for leisure time" "information for treatment of illnesses" and "information about heritage?". This helped us in preparing and organizing the Academic Day.

Before starting we decided to prepare handouts with useful practical information to be of help for the education of adults 50+. For this purpose we asked some students to consult their relatives what specific topics are most useful for them. Then we made, together with the students handouts on 22 different themes, where we picked factual information, titles of books and web addresses for further search. We prepared also several presentations.

The Academic Day was held on 8<sup>th</sup> June, starting from 9.30 until 17.00 o'clock. In the morning we had two lectures. The first one was "The Thracians and their belief in the immortality" by Prof. Valeria Fol. The second lecture was "Third Age typical diseases. Prophylactic and therapy possibilities", hold by doctor Petrov. All participants received leaflets with web addresses on the above themes. After the lunch break we made several short presentations, disseminated leaflets with useful practical information and made practical exercises. For every participant was a computer and tutors from the team to help. The participants learned how to use the Skype, how to sent an e-mail, how to communicate per face book. Others were interested on how to find information in Internet.

The participants filled also a feed back form. As motivation for the presence on the Academy Day most of them indicated - "I want to learn something new". The majority of the respondents answered that they like all presentations /70, 7%/. They said also, that the first lecturer is interesting, wonderful and incredible. Others indicated that they

---

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of International Conference. Interaction theories, practice: key issues and solutions, Burgas, 2011

learned something new and interesting on the topic. The second lecturer is perceived as practical speaking specialist about the most common diseases for that age. The most valuable is that the lecturer provides easy to implement information.

All other presentations were highly appreciated. Special interest was shown at the practical exercises, when the participants made their own e-mails, addresses in face book and searched useful practical information in Internet. We hope that this will help for better communication between older people. We hope that they will be more confident in searching for the necessary information on the web. In this we see the benefits of adult learning 50+ in universities.

The biggest percentage positive answers we received for the organization. Most of the answers were –I like everything” or “I like it because the topics were interesting, professionally; presented with understandable language; there was a direct contact with the lecturers; the Academy Day was organized dynamically, I received useful information on an Academy Level.” There were no negative answers. Most importantly, 94% of the participants were willing to attend future academic days.

In conclusion, we understood that SULSIT, in partnership with AUL, disposes with enough technical equipment and premises for realization of Academy Days and other similar events. Both organizations can provide quality education how to use information technologies. In future the Academy Days can be realized as cyclic initiatives. The target groups can be defined more clearly according to their life position and interests. Another option is to create special virtual programs to improve the information knowledge of working people 50+. We can also arrange for adults 50 + a guided trip to new cultural and historical sightseeing's.