



European SeniorWatch Observatory and Inventory -
*A market study about the specific IST needs of older and disabled people
to guide industry, RTD and policy*

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The E-Te@ Room

A Irish internet café for seniors.

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Short Title

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Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	The E-Te@ Room. An Irish internet café for seniors.	6
2.1	Description	6
2.2	Analysis	8
2.3	Acknowledgements and links	9

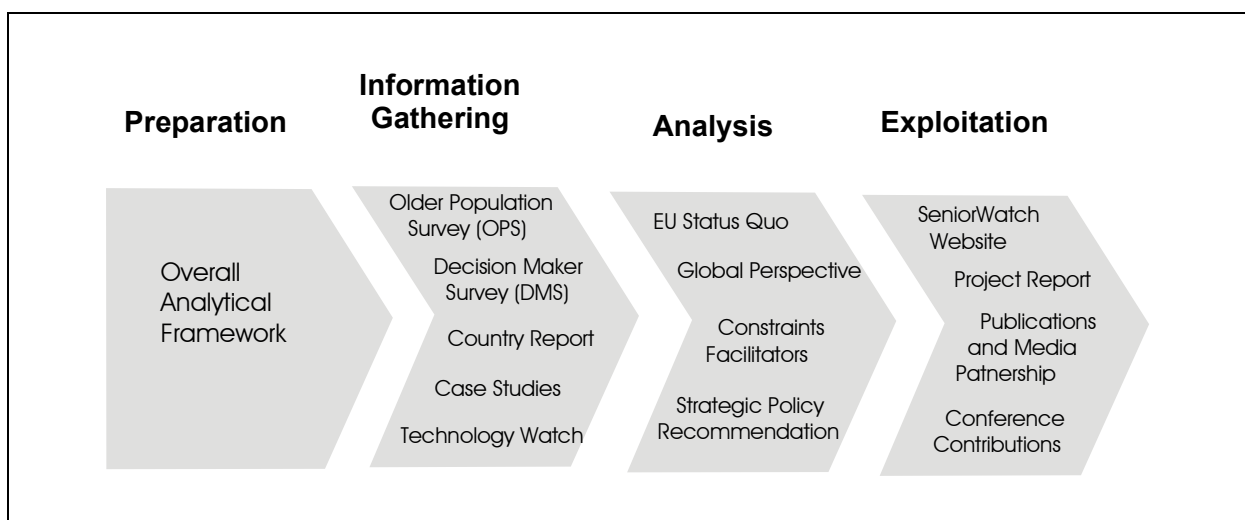
1 Introduction

The SeniorWatch project addresses the need to understand better and to monitor the market dynamics of Information Society Technologies (IST) applications and services targeted at older (and older disabled) citizens. Currently, there is insufficient empirical data about the needs of older citizens which could be met by IST-based applications and services, and a lack of awareness on the part of industry, users and politicians that hampers the rapid exploitation of new market opportunities arising from IST developments. In order to redress this state of affairs SeniorWatch will provide a European single source of empirical information on the market potential of IST-based products and services targeted at older people. The main objectives can be summarised as follows:

- to help and encourage European industry to address the market opportunities, and particularly challenge current competitive advantages of the US industries,
- to enable policy to really influence the current situation and to benchmark achievements between different European regions and countries and to make comparisons with competing world economies (Japan, US) most relevant to the field,
- to inform citizens about what is now possible with the support of IST and, thus, encourage them to demand IST products and services which meet their requirements.

As illustrated by Figure 1-1, these objectives require a comprehensive methodological approach to be applied. On the basis of an overall analytical framework, it integrates a set of complementary research methods such as European-wide surveys of older people and of decision makers in care services, best practice case studies, technology watch work shops and country reports. Synthesising the various types of empirical information gathered with help of these methods will finally enable the project to arrive at an holistic overview, to establish a technology and market observatory, and to derive policy recommendations to accelerate market development. Research results will be exploited by means of different measures.

Figure 1-1: The Project Phases of SeniorWatch



Source: © SeniorWatch, 2001

As part of the project's overall methodological approach the SeniorWatch case studies aim at providing a useful source of information on how the IST-related needs of the target groups in question can adequately be served. They are also intended to help to understand - in a qualitative manner - more deeply specific aspects of the market situation related to IST

products and services relevant for older citizens. To allow a comparative analysis of real-life examples, a common approach for selecting and describing suitable cases was developed. The main selection criteria applied in this context include:

- suitability of the case to provide input to the overall understanding and analysis of the market for IST among older people;
- suitability of the case to serve as an example of a success story (or failure) that can guide and motivate others to take actions that will support the diffusion and take-up of IST by or for older people.

In the following the SeniorWatch case study no.9 is described.

2 The E-Te@ Room. An Irish internet café for seniors.

2.1 Description

E-Te@ Room: a cyber café model

One of the main issues facing older people is that of isolation, particularly when a reduction in ability or loss of independence results because of poor health. With the provision and use of new technology as a form of communication, the extent and impact of isolation can be reduced and social interaction, essential for good health, maintained.

The project was seen as potentially of specific interest to the health sector as it provides a useful additional environment to assist in keeping seniors active and in the promotion of quality of life for older people. The current and future problems of the ageing population in Europe will potentially create a burden on taxation in all member states. In a recent WHO report it was noted that the potential cost savings to the EU by keeping older people active for one additional year was in the region of 15 billion Euro.

Within the community involved in the E-Te@ Room activities at St. Ann's Church, several examples of improvements in quality of life and reduced isolation have already been identified. One older man who had received hearts surgery and lost confidence in himself and consequently contact with his peers. His motivation to rejoin his peers was encouraged initially through his use of communication by the Internet at home and then by active participation in the E-Te@ Room.

Older people are the fastest growing segment of the Irish population and have the potential to benefit enormously from the communication opportunities provided by IT. Sometimes, however, there are barriers preventing them from participating. These may include physical barriers such as not having the means to get access to computers, or mental barriers, such as apprehension or a feeling that new technology is not for them. The E-Te@ Room project aims to overcome these barriers by providing computers in a place where older people feel comfortable. The project is aimed at people over the age of 55 years to stimulate and encourage them to learn about information and communication technologies, in particular how to access material on the Internet.

The E-Te@ Room project had its origins as part of the EU funded Senior Online project. Irish partners included the European Institute of Women's Health (EIWH) and the communications company Connect-Ireland. Together they saw an opportunity as part of the Senior On-line project to create a 'cyber café model' that could be used in all senior communities. Consequently, EIWH and Connect-Ireland initiated the project locally by holding information days for seniors and involving them from the beginning in the design and the development of promotional information for the target group.

At the initial meeting, approximately 100 seniors attended an information session at St. Ann's Anglican Church in Dublin. Presentations were given to this initial group and feedback was sought. A series of follow up meetings were arranged and held with smaller groups and individual seniors.

The research process outlined above highlighted specific user needs from the senior focus groups. These included:

- Their need to access technology in a relaxed, unhurried environment.
- Their desire to be with their own peer group.
- Their need to ensure that access to technology would be managed and cost effective.

Short Title

Resulting from these meetings, the user group analysis and feedback from established focus groups, a series of training sessions were completed. During this process an identified core group of seniors who had shown aptitude for the use of communications technology were trained as trainers.

In conjunction with the above there was an undefined request for enhanced levels of social interaction and support from peers initially at a local level. The above needs were examined and discussed by the project partners, EIWH and Connect-Ireland, together with the user groups. As a result, the idea of seniors' social centre based around technology was considered.

In the beginning, discussions centred on how the user needs identified could be best met and implemented with limited resources. The technological partners, Connect-Ireland, developed a system based on a specially developed high-end server and a highly specified PC based on Linux that could be remotely administered by Connect-Ireland. The server, which was to be developed specifically for the users, had to provide a range of resources including a firewall, caching services, dial-up-on-demand, and connectivity though an ordinary modem. The server should also provide services to a number of workstations. The workstations themselves were recycled 486s and early Pentiums. To reduce maintenance and improve their operational stability, the hard disk drives were removed and the operating environment was provided through a kernel loaded onto a floppy disk. Floppy disks could be replaced quickly and easily by downloading copies from the central server.

The machines used, therefore, were not dependant on licensed software, and had no storage capacity or environments that were prone to virus attacks. The machines were all set to load the operating environment Netscape from the central server.

This solution provides an easily managed system with reduced maintenance and cost for the operators of the electronic te@ room. The use of an ordinary modem and telephone connection provided the operators with a known and understandable cost factor. This can be easily modified to operate with ISDN or Cable services.

Having met the potential technical needs of a senior activity centre, EIWH and Connect-Ireland met with Canon Adrian Empey of St. Ann's Church. The Church is based in a very central location - situated between the Lord Mayor of Dublin's House and the European Commission Offices. It is well placed to be accessible to most senior groups in Dublin. Discussions with Canon Empey realised the use of a small room off an existing tearoom based in the front foyer of the Church. The existing tearoom was redesigned and fitted out by the partners to become the E-Te@ Room.

In April 2000, the senior's cyber E-Te@ Room at St. Ann's Church, was officially launched by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mary Freehill. The launch of the senior cyber E-Te@ Room, the first of its kind in Ireland, generated extensive media coverage on radio, TV and in national newspapers and IT magazines. The Information Society Commission, a government agency, included the cyber E-Te@ Room in its TV series aimed at encouraging 'late adopters' to use technology.

Context

The initiative was supported by Connect-Ireland (technological partners), the European Institute of Women's Health, Dublin (for research and user needs analysis) and St. Ann's Anglican Church, Dawson Street, Dublin (location of the café).

The target group for the service is people aged over 55 years. It is a user-focused service for those wishing to familiarise themselves with and use email and the Internet. One-to-one tuition is available to users if required and a supervisor is always present. The E-Te@ Room is located in St. Ann's Anglican Church in Dublin city centre. The Church provides transport, supervision and help from people of the same age in the E-Te@ Room. Coffee and tea are

also available and the room is a place for people to meet and chat even if they don't want to use the computers.

The use of communication technologies amongst older people is encouraged in order to reduce social isolation. Therefore in 2000 a model is created for a senior cyber café that is transferable to all communities.

Ongoing activities are / were:

- Initially through meetings with older people, focus groups etc.
- High level of media interest.
- The project was highlighted at conferences.
- A recent video of the E-Te@ Room has been adapted into digital format as an additional promotion tool.
- A special booklet was developed to improve the training opportunities. The range of handbooks for the elderly are currently being made available in electronic format.
- In June 2000, the cyber E-te@ Room appointed its first full-time employee (a senior) to run the centre.
- The EIWH and Connect-Ireland hope to encourage the establishment of other senior cyber E-Te@ Room using the model developed by them.

Results

The cyber E-Te@ Room is run by seniors for seniors and attracts up to 50 users a day. The users are either seeking training or using the internet and email facilities. The E-Te@ Room has 5 PCs and can facilitate up to 15 people per day for one-to-one supervision, if required.

2.2 Analysis

Impact

The aim of the project has been reached. The number of users of the service is increasing and interest has not diminished. This is particularly in relation to the on-to-one training sessions, which are available for three hours a day and are, on average, fully booked.

Market perspectives: the E-Te@ Room is the first of its kind in Ireland but should not be considered as a commercial venture.

It was evident from the first meeting about the project that there was immense interest in the concept amongst the older people in this particular community. More than 100 people turned up for the first meeting to launch the concept.

It became evident from the initial meetings and the user focus groups that contrary to popular belief, older people know what they want from communication technologies, are quick learners and very adept users.

The considerable media interest in the project reflects the interest of the older population in general.

The use of an easily managed system with reduced maintenance and cost for the operators can influence the success. This also is true for the use of an ordinary modem and telephone connection provided the operators with a known and understandable cost factor. The

costfactor can be reduced by the use of recycled technology – the project used obsolete 486 PCs, which were donated free of charge to the project.

Lessons to learn

There will be no success without user involvement. However, a solid commercial base does not exist for this service, although the societal benefits outweigh any commercial interests.

The ‘model’ developed here is easily transferable and adaptable to all types of community settings.

2.3 Acknowledgements and links

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Literature

- European Institute of Women’s Health. User needs analysis report submitted as part of the Senior On-Line project. Unpublished report.