LIFELONG LEARNING, ICT, AND ELDERLY PEOPLE
A STUDY OF TWO COUNTRIES

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To "the other Danai", my grandmother.

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong learning is a concept extensively discussed in Europe since 1996, when the European Commission announced the European Year of Lifelong Learning.   In addition, ICT has demonstrated significant development during the last decade, and it has become a highly effective tool in the service of information science and learning.   Public libraries have been, traditionally, essential learning and information providers in their local communities. Nowadays, they are called to redefine and adjust their policies and services, in order to successfully meet the challenges of the Information Age, contributing to the establishment and maintenance of a culture of lifelong learning for all the European citizens.

Elderly people are a social group balancing in the borderline between active participation in the new developed society and social exclusion.   In order to keep in pace with the constant progress of the new century, they need to adapt in the social and cultural changes.   Thus lifelong learning is a notion appealing significantly to their needs, for it is a main factor for the creation of an inclusive society.   Continuous updating of their skills is the key for people, in order to achieve their full potential and secure future prosperity and happiness.

Depending on evidence collected from individuals, this study portrays the attitude of elderly people towards lifelong learning and ICT in the UK and in Greece.   It describes the motives of elderly learners, together with the means by which they learn.   Moreover it refers to the role of the public libraries in supporting the lifelong learning of elderly users, and delivering the benefits of new technologies. It concludes by suggesting ways to libraries, in order to assist elderly people more effectively in adapting to an ever-changing information world.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.0 Background

The study presented in this report is the outcome of a research based on a dissertation topic proposed by Richard Proctor, under the sponsorship of Sheffield Libraries. On the ground of previous research, this proposal states that elderly people are more frequent users of public libraries than other user groups (Hendry, 2000), and it would be appropriate to consider what might public libraries do to improve their take up both of new ICT[1] and lifelong learning opportunities.

During the last decade, the role of public libraries in lifelong learning, and their reaction to the current challenges of ICT, have been discussed by many researchers. However it does not seem that much emphasis has been given to the needs of elderly people, that is to say people aged 60 and above. This study thoroughly examines the attitude of elderly library users towards lifelong learning and ICT, in both the United Kingdom, hereafter the UK, and Greece. It attempts to identify their learning needs, and suggests how public libraries could adapt their services in order to respond to the new demands.

1.1 Aims of the research

The initial step in every project is to state the subject (Busha & Harter, 1980). This is highly important because it secures that the research will progress following a specific path that will lead in the answering of the research question. The aims of the research are the ones to define the objectives and they will ensure appropriate methodological options.

The aim of this dissertation is to:

- Investigate how do the public libraries in the UK support lifelong learning for elderly people, by means of ICT, and how they could respond more effectively to their needs,
- Examine the condition in Greek libraries,
- Suggest how Greek libraries could benefit from the UK experience.

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[1] Information and Communication Technology

1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of the research are to:

- Investigate to what extent people aged 60 and above in the UK use public libraries, and particularly ICT, for lifelong learning purposes,
- Examine how far elderly people in Greece use public libraries for lifelong learning purposes,
- Identify the kind and amount of services provided by the UK and Greek public libraries that support lifelong learning of elderly people, with emphasis on the ICT infrastructure,
- Analyse and compare the findings, showing what Greece has to learn from the UK, and
- Suggest ways for improvement in both cases.

1.3 Research context

The significance of investigating the particular subject is highlighted by the attention paid to further education and lifelong learning nowadays.   Lifelong learning is an issue greatly under discussion during the last six years, and considerable effort is being made in all the 15 EU[2] Member States for the promotion of the idea.   1996, The European Year of Lifelong learning[3], was a turning point (OJEC, 1995).   Moreover, the National Action Plans for employment have set guidelines requiring Member States and the social partners to develop possibilities for lifelong learning.   As part of the programme of events to coincide with the UK Presidency of the EU there was a major conference and exhibition on lifelong learning on 18-19 May 1998, held in Manchester.   The aim was to influence the development of lifelong learning in Europe in the context of economic and social life, particularly in promoting employability, and two of the main subjects were the use of ICT and the broadcast media social inclusion and citizenship (Conference and Eurofest, 1998).

Lifelong learning and lifelong education is not exclusively a European idea.   Galbraith (1995) suggests they have become popular slogans within the lexicon of American language and international organisations such as UNESCO[4] and OECD[5] have been involved in attempts towards the implementation of the idea.

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[2] European Union
[3] EYLLL
[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
[5] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

A factor that has been discussed in length in the framework of various lifelong learning initiatives is public libraries.   They are considered effective tools for the implementation of the idea.   IFLA[6], in the 65th IFLA Council and General Conference, makes recommendations on the potential role of the public library in supporting lifelong learning.   Moreover, it attempts to promote and encourage information and computer literacy among public library users (Glashoff, 1999).

In the UK, lifelong learning is high on the agenda of government, employers, employees, students, and institutions (Brophy, 1998).   In the Government's Green Paper on lifelong learning, *The Learning Age,* there are dynamic proposals for encouraging learning because it is seen as the arena where the nation could successfully face the social and economic challenges of the new century.   David Blunkett, Secretary of the State for Education and Employment that launched the Green Paper mentioned above, stated:

> "Learning improves the quality of our lives. Learning promotes social justice,
> and enhances both our earning power and the competitiveness of the economy. It
> is the key to the United Kingdom's future prosperity"
>
> (Learning comes of age, 2001).

In addition, Kennedy Report maintained this attitude, suggesting; "the needs of the country would best be served by widening participation in education, with further education at the heart of that strategy" (Brophy, 2000:19).

It is, therefore, visible that much emphasis has been placed on the promotion of lifelong learning in the UK during the last 6 years.   Besides, Fryer (1997) in his study *Learning for the twenty-first century* highlights the importance of lifelong learning, and states that the country "needs to develop a new learning culture, a culture for lifelong learning for all" (Fryer, 1997:3).   He also suggests that libraries could contribute drastically to the establishment and maintenance of such a culture.   According to the Audit Commission (1997:4), the UK public libraries are "one of the most popular local government services", visited heavily and playing a noteworthy role in meeting recreation and culture, learning, social welfare, and economic development needs.   Furthermore, in a world where ICT has become a factor of vital importance, public libraries face the challenge of taking advantage of new technologies, in order to enhance their services.   Independent studies, an area where

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[6] International Federation of Library Association and institutions

libraries have traditionally provided with facilities, could be improved by means of ICT (Audit Commission, 1997).

The role of public libraries in learning is an issue that has provoked a lot of discussion and stimulated a substantial amount of research action. According to Godfrey (1999:5), studies such as the *Sheffield Strike Research* by Proctor and Sobczyk in 1996 and the *Social Audit of Public Libraries* by Linley and Usherwood in 1998 "have touched upon the value placed on the public library as learning provider". Godfrey (1999) in her study titled *An investigation into the use of public libraries for learning* discusses the contribution of public libraries to lifelong learners, based on the learning experiences of library user's.

Although there are lots of studies on the ways in which people learn in libraries, and the matter of ICT contribution to learning has been considered in great extent, not much attention has been paid on elderly people. Non-academic lifelong learning of the elderly people is an area where public libraries are called to play a notable role. In the UK, public libraries offer a variety of services, but it would be appropriate to investigate how effectively they perform in supporting the lifelong learning, and exploiting the opportunities of new ICT.

Greek public libraries are a social area where not much progress has been made. Whether they offer lifelong learning aid to elderly people is a factor that has not been particularly investigated. Moreover, it seems that not many opportunities for further education of elderly people exist. The Open University, which was established in 1992 and its headquarters are in Patras, offers priority to people aged 23 to 45 (Kokosalakis, 2000; Pafilis, 1999). In what concerns this issue, Greece has "neither introduced a comprehensive approach to promote lifelong learning nor set national targets in this regard" (European Commission, 2000). In addition, ICT is a field largely abandoned, with most of the libraries lacking not only PC[7] for public use, but also automated library management systems.

The role of libraries in supporting lifelong learning of elderly people, promoting also the use of ICT, is therefore a rich and rather unexplored ground for investigation. The present study tries to enlighten and compare the current situation in both the public libraries of the UK and Greece, in order to suggest methods of further development, and to show what Greece could learn from the UK on the field discussed. There were numerous issues to be taken into account and a lot of limitations to be overcome. However, this study aims to present and maybe to provide some answers on the issues raised on the field, encouraged by

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[7] Personal Computer

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the truthful statement that: "Yes, we are naïve if we think that we can "know it all". But even a small amount of understanding can make a difference" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:56).

Chapter 2 - Methodology

2.0   Introduction

Strauss & Corbin (1998:3) define methodology as "a way of thinking about and studying social reality".   Hart's (1998:28) more specific description refers to "a system of methods and rules to facilitate the collection and analysis of data".   Regardless of the definition they use, most of the theorists writing about research methodology agree on the point that the choice of appropriate methodology is a fundamental step in the research process.   For methodology provides guidelines about how the topic will be approached, the data will be collected, the findings will be analysed, and the theory will be formed.

2.1   Research question

The development of a reasonable and well-supported theory requires the statement of a specific problem (Busha & Harter, 1980).   In a qualitative research this statement takes the form of a research question, meaning "the specific query to be addressed by this research that sets the parameters of the project and suggests the methods to be used for data gathering analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:35).

The accurate definition of the research question is an issue of great importance.   For not only this question determines the issue under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), but also assists the researcher in deciding and forming the research methods by means of which the study will be conducted (Pierce, 1995 in Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The research question underpinning the present study was:

How could public libraries support elderly users in taking up both lifelong learning and ICT opportunities?

This initial question was rather broad and general, but it dictated the nature of the study and stretched out the areas of investigation, namely; elderly people – libraries – ICT – learning. During the research process more specific relationships between the factors of the study were discovered, and it became clear that the aim of the research should be to explore and present whether and how elderly people learn in public libraries.   However, the structure of the research question did not alter significantly, for the study is exploratory and there are not

specific findings required.   Therefore the final version of the research question is structured as follows:

How do elderly people exploit the opportunities of lifelong learning and new ICT by using public libraries?

2.2   Research approach

The research approach of this dissertation is the *inductive* one; that is to say specific cases have been examined with the aim of drawing a theoretical conclusion.   This usually results in generalizations for a whole class being made on the ground of evidence obtained from limited particulars (Busha & Harter, 1980:10).   The researcher allows the theory to emerge from the collected data, which are systematically analysed throughout the research process.   This analytical method is what Strauss & Corbin (1998:12) label *grounded theory*, and consider it "likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action".   It has proved to be particular useful in answering the research question stated above.   For the question itself does not propose a theory; it rather expresses the researchers' curiosity about the issue, and the potential theory that could emerge from it.

Furthermore, the research approach used was the *qualitative* one.   This means that, although some of the data may be quantified, conclusions are not mainly drawn by means of statistical or other quantifying processing of the data, and the bulk of the analysis is interpretative.   Relationships and notions are detected in raw data and organised into an explanatory theoretical conclusion (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).   The reason for this approach is, again, the research question nature. Because, people's points of view, identification of needs, evaluation of existing services, and, in general, thoughts and opinions are required for answering the raised question.   This type of data is mainly qualitative, which led to a qualitative approach of investigation.   However, quantitative data was used at the same time to strengthen the validity of the findings.   They did not affect the qualitative nature of this particular investigation, for they were extracted from a former lifelong learning survey[8].

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[8] See paragraph 2.4.5

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2.3 Research method

Bearing in mind that data would be collected from the two countries under discussion and they would be analysed comparatively, the *comparative case study* research design (Eckstein, 1975; George, 1979, in Yin, 1994), or what Yin prefers to call *"multi-case study"* (1994:14,45), was the one used. "The overall purpose of a case study is to obtain comprehensive information about the research object" (Busha & Harter, 1980:151), and this definition coincides with the intention of the proposed work. As Busha & Harter (1980:152) accurately suggest, "case studies allow close examinations of unique problems of individual groups or situations – something that many other methodologies do not readily permit". Detailed examination and analysis of a research problem have the advantage of leading to findings that can be applied directly to the object of inquiry. Taking into consideration this fact, case study was the method judged more effective for the purpose of this study. In such a decision contributed Yin's (1994:13) assertion that a case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context", which is exactly what the researcher aimed to do.

2.4 Methods of investigation

The methods of investigation were designed with the purpose of better serving the objectives of the research. According to Mellon (1990:49) the two main questions to be addressed were: "who might have the information you need and who is accessible"? As Patton (1990:45) puts forward, "where the focus is on individuals, an inductive approach begins with the individual experiences of those individuals". This research aimed at identifying the beliefs and needs of a certain target group of library users, and suggesting ways of dealing with these needs. Therefore, sample of library users and library staff, in Sheffield and Thessalonica provided the main bulk of data. Secondary data were collected from local authorities, former research, and the available literature on the field, with the purpose of facilitating the research process and supporting the conclusions more effectively.

2.4.1 Sample

In Patton's opinion (1990:184) "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry". Kane (1985:95) rationally states, "sample size is determined mainly by the type of sample, degree of precision required, and degree of variability of the population". Moreover, Busha and Harter (1980:59) describe a good sample as "large enough to allow generalisations, within measurable limits of accuracy, to the subject group from which it was selected". They

agree that the grade of homogeneity of population defines the size of the sample, to be precise; the more alike the population the smaller the sample is (Busha & Harter, 1980; Kane, 1985).

In the present study the size of the sample was difficult to be pronounced. Factors such as time and geography were considered possible to impose limitations. The only decision made referred to the number of libraries under investigation, namely; the main public library and two branches in both the cities mentioned above.

2.4.2 Data collection - Interviews

Another important issue under consideration on this stage of the research was; how am I going to collect the evidence? Yin (1994:84) suggests interview as "one of the most important sources of case study information". He makes reference to the *open-ended* interview as being the most commonly used in case study. He uses the term to define an interview where "you can ask key respondents for the facts of the matter as well as for the respondents' opinions about events". Yin also discusses the *focused* interview type (Merton et al., 1990, in Yin, 1994). During this the researcher could adopt a conversational manner similar to the open-ended interview, but allow a short period of time and follow a certain set of pre-defined questions. Kane's concept of *standardised interview, no schedule* (1985:63), presents a type of interview "based on the assumption that it may take different kinds of questions, perhaps put in different order, to get the same information from different people".

The method used for gathering data in Sheffield throughout this research was a blend of these interview types. The *semi-structured* format, consisting of open and closed questions, and the pre-defined duration, enabled the researcher to avoid problems of timing, reducing the length of the interviews, and to overcome language difficulties risen from the fact that English is not her mother tongue. However, questioning was adapted according to the interviewee reactions, and more time was allowed where necessary. The piloting of the initial interview construction during the first day of the interrogation showed to the researcher the weaknesses of her method. These were spotted on the structure of some questions and the overall way of interviewing. Different people appeared to need different structure of questioning in order to speak for the same issues. Therefore, the interviewer altered the method of interrogation, and focused on what information was needed rather than on what question should be made. People were encouraged to talk about their experiences, while the conversation was driven to the topics the researcher thought necessary to discuss. This lead to richer data since people freely expressed their opinions without struggling to answer very specific and narrow

questions.   In addition, flash cards were introduced to facilitate the interview.   There were useful because they encouraged people to give information that sometimes are reluctant to discuss, such as their age[9].   They also helped the researcher to keep notes of the interview in a brief and significantly quicker way, encoding some more specific answers.

Another factor to be taken into account during the development of the methodology was where and when the interviews would take place.   Locations for investigation were carefully selected to ensure a reasonable response rate.   Contacts with librarians in both cities were initially established, with the aim of seeking useful advice about the best possible libraries to be investigated.   In this way, libraries that serve elderly users were warranted to be chosen, and this certified there would be a sufficient number of respondents.   Within the libraries used, it was also important to make sure that the respondents would feel comfortable, and to eliminate possible distraction.   A priori arrangements with the local library staff resulted in the preparation of a special place in each library, where the researcher could conduct the interviews without interruptions, and causing the minimum possible discomfort for the other library users.   Since it is suggested that constant rapport is essential (Mellon, 1990), there were at least five-minute intervals between interviews.   The interviews were recorded to ensure that useful data would not be overseen, and respondents were assured anonymity.   The content of the interviews was not transcribed due to lack of time.   The researcher kept extended notes of the relevant information during the interviewing process and reheard the tapes, in order to extract more accurate and rich data.

2.4.3 Data collection - Questionnaires

A questionnaire was the means used to collect evidence from the Greek libraries. Although questionnaires are not as effective a method as interview in gathering qualitative data, restrictions of time and geography suggested that this would be the best practice.   This decision was made after attempts to interview elderly people in Greek libraries failed, because of restrictions on time and availability, which are explained in a later stage.   Busha and Harter (1980) claim that questionnaires allow for retrieval of a greater number of responses, and guarantee a wider rate of honest answers.   This method, therefore, saves time, which was a crucial factor during this project.   Disadvantages of questionnaires, such as the lack of personal contact that could produce more accurate response clarifying doubts and misunderstandings, could not be totally avoided.   However, they were reduced with the assistance of the library staff, which provided all the necessary help to the respondents.

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[9] Instead of being asked about their age they were shown a card with age groups and asked in which one they belong.

Busha and Harter (1980:71) state, "The preparation of questionnaires is often the most critical - yet the most under emphasized - part of research".   Bearing this truth in mind, a lot of effort was put on the design of the questions to be addressed.   The analysis of past questionnaires from a Library and Information Commission study carried out in the Department of Information Studies at Sheffield University assisted the preparation of the questionnaires, both the ones used as the initial spine for the interviews in UK and those that were distributed in Greece.   A number of open questions were encouraging the respondents to express themselves, with the purpose of gathering qualitative data.   Additionally, closed questions offering exhaustive and mutually exclusive response alternatives (Busha &Harter, 1980) were used to collect more practical data. Following Busha and Harter 's (1980) suggestions, slang, jargon and technical terms were avoided to ensure comprehensiveness. Moreover, definitions of terms were provided where necessary and similar-content questions were grouped together and presented from the most general to more specific in order to facilitate the answering.   The Greek questionnaires were particularly short and easy-to-fill, with a layout attempting to accommodate both readability and reasoning (Busha & Harter, 1980).

2.4.4 Data collection - Libraries

To define the profile of the libraries under discussion a set of evaluation questions were designed, based on literature findings and on past research questionnaires (Proctor & Bartle, 2001; Batt, 1998:151).   They were presented to the contact librarians in all the libraries studied, and they were followed by brief discussions.   Further information for the Greek public libraries under investigation was obtained from the web page of the Municipality of Thessalonica.

2.4.5 Data from former lifelong learning survey

A Library and Information Commission funded study, titled *Low achievers - lifelong learners,* which was carried out in the Department of Information Studies at Sheffield University, was an additional source of data.   It allowed the researcher to conduct quantitative analysis of the topic, by partly analysing 328 past questionnaires filled by library users aged 60 and above, retrieved during the LIC[10] funded study.   Using the method of triangulation, that is to say extracting data from different sources, the researcher exploits the

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[10] Library and Information Commission

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findings of previous research on the field, and ensures objectivity and accuracy of the theory developed from the data collected in the framework of the present research project.

2.4.6   Literature review

Apart from the primary qualitative data, which has been gathered throughout the research with the aim of answering the problem examined, and the quantitative data extracted from previous research, secondary data was used to theoretically support the research.   This kind of information was collected and processed in the literature review stage.

Hart, (1998) underlines the importance of the literature review preceding the research, stating that it is necessary for understanding the specific topic, the research already made on it, and the key issues involved.   More specifically, he defines literature review as:

> "The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed".
>
> (Hart, 1998:13)

In addition, Strauss and Corbin (1998) highlight the role of literature review as a valuable source of experience that leaves the researcher with: better understanding of the information needs on the field, aware of the gaps left by previous studies, and sensitive to the issues he/she might identify in the data.   Literature could be a secondary source of data, and help the researcher to formulate questions to be used in interviews and questionnaires, during the initial steps of the research.   It can also confirm findings, comparing the research results to past evidence.   Literature review is, therefore, a particularly weighty stage of the research process and sufficient time should be avoided to it.

2.5   Analysis

The process of analysing the data retrieved throughout the whole research project was not restricted only in the particular period of time when the report of the findings was being prepared.   It was rather a constant rethinking on the concepts and issues emerging during the collection of the data, a continuing critical evaluation of the elements that were coming to the surface while the research was going deeper in excavating the topic.   During the interviews, part of the data was subjected to an initial analysis in the researcher's mind, and this allowed for the adjustment of the interrogation in order to clarify the new issues.   The qualitative interpretation of the data took place with a view of meeting the aims and objectives of the study, whereas the parallel presentation of quantitative findings works as a supportive dynamic.

2.6   Limitations

To highlight the limits within which the theory was developed, and generalisations were made, it was necessary to define the scope of the research (Hart, 1998).   Because, apart from a number of limitations that were taken into account while designing this study, imponderable factors, which occurred mainly during the stage of data collection, had a negative effect to the research.

Time was a crucial issue.   Since this report forms a dissertation aiming at a Masters degree, the work had to be submitted by the 3rd of September; that allowed for a period of three months between the end of the academic year and the due date.   This interval was tight, given that collection and analysis of the data, and presentation of the outcomes are processes that require careful planning and considerable time.

Geography also imposed restrictions.   Two countries were to be investigated, which created complications, mainly in terms of data collection, and affected the methods of investigation.   Different interrogative tools had to be used, so as the researcher to be able to take advantage of the available time as much as possible.   Using questionnaires in Greece whereas conducting interviews in the UK was the selected solution.

Questionnaires were considered that might place the precision of the research at risk, because it could not be ensured that the respondents would fill the whole questionnaire, or fully express themselves without the personal contact and encouragement of the researcher. However, social and environmental limitations in Greece, in combination with the lack of

time made impossible the conduction of interviews in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, short-term discussions were carried out between the researcher and the respondents, while the later were filling the questionnaires.

The social structure in Greece often wants the elderly people to actively participate in the upbringing of their grandchildren, which leaves little space for personal activities. Moreover, the former generations were not encouraged to use the libraries as a place to learn, since there were not any school libraries. Therefore, there are a rather low number of elderly people using libraries in Greece, which posed a serious limitation on the research.

In addition, the environmental conditions in Greece do not assist any research during the summer. Due to the high temperature most people leave the cities for summer resorts. Elderly people who have not obligations in terms of work and family leave the city early in the summer and return in the autumn. This reduced significantly the available respondents. After spending a week in the library trying to identify elderly users and meeting with a situation where only one elderly person would come the whole day, and taking into account the reasons mentioned above, it was decided to use questionnaires instead of interviews.

Transport was the main factor that restricted the number of elderly people interviewed in UK. Since the Central Library used is in the city centre, is mostly used by people that have a reason, usually their job, for going down town. Elderly people, who in their majority leave in the suburban areas, find it rather far away and often expensive to visit the Central library. This caused long waiting times of the researcher for finding people available to speak with.

The issues mentioned above limited the number of cases examined. Only one main library and two or three branches were studied in each country, and the research focused on Sheffield (UK) and Thessalonica (Greece).

Language was another perplexity, since the data collected in Greece were in Greek, and translation was required. This fact also called for the development of two sets of questions, an English and a Greek one. The design of the Greek version was not so simple, because translation would not be sufficient. The questions should be adapted so as to reflect the style and reasoning behind, an effect that is being achieved in dissimilar ways in different languages.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the methodology used for the compilation and execution of this research project has been portrayed.   The research question, method and approach have been discussed, and the methodological options made have been explained and justified.   The tools and techniques used during the data collection process have been described together with the method of analysis, and the significance of the literature review has been highlighted. Finally, the bias the researcher had to confront while carrying out this project have been reported.   In this way an overall picture of the spine of the work done has been created, with the aim of ensuring a better understanding of the outcomes of the research.

Chapter 3 - Literature review

3.0 Introduction

The current chapter aims at providing an insight in the concepts of this study, through a retrospective analysis of the former literature in the field. With a view to present comprehensively the relationships and structure of the topic, and to set the scenery in which the research would be carried out, specific notions were consider better to be explained. Therefore, this chapter commences with an explanation of the notions of learning and lifelong-learning, highlighting the value of them, in order to gain a more robust understanding of the reasons why lifelong learning has received extended attention recently.

Subsequently, the role that libraries are called to play in lifelong learning is being discussed, with reference to the conditions in English and Greek libraries. ICT, as a tool for lifelong learning, and its usage in the UK and Greek libraries is brought about. The chapter concludes with an overview of elderly people's lifelong learning needs, and how they could benefit from the support libraries have the potential to offer. Speaking about these issues was judged essential for portraying the background of the research, and thus creating an enhanced understanding of the findings that would be reported afterwards.

3.1 Learning and Lifelong Learning

3.1.1 Definition

From the time when the notions learning and education were introduced in the human vocabulary, whenever people use the word learning formal continuing, or, adult leisure education comes to their mind (Longworth, 1999), together with the processes of information retrieval and vocational training aiming at the acquisition of various skills (Karakatsanis, 1997). However, as Allred (1998) truthfully suggests, learning is not just a practice of retrieving information and applying it in the form of skills and theoretical knowledge. It is rather a process of interpreting, conceptualising, encoding, decoding, and organising data retrieved from several learning resources, for various purposes. Moreover, learning is the outcome of this process. The term, therefore, could be used to describe a variety of experiences, which include both the conscious, or, unconscious retrieval of information and the transformation of it into explicit or tacit knowledge.

According to Gustavsson (1998:92), "the fact that human beings learn throughout life, from the cradle to the grave, is indisputable". People learn to walk and talk, to communicate

with other people and behave according commonly approved rules.   They learn to support themselves and solve problems, to create and destroy things, they formulate an overall view of the world and they way it functions, and adapt themselves in it.   Then, external, or, internal factors affect their environment and alternate their needs.   Therefore, they have to re-adapt, and get involved in new learning experiences in order to cope with change.

Change is part of people's life, and that justifies Gustavsson's (1998) claim that most of our learning takes place in our everyday life.   Taking for granted the simple truth that change is a constant parameter of life and learning is maybe the most effective medium for coping with change, one could speak about lifelong learning.   Galbraith (1995) agrees on the phrase lifelong learning suggesting alone a process that takes place throughout the life span. He defines lifelong learning as a process broader than lifelong education.   Lifelong learning is not a static notion, it reflects the adjustments in people's consciousness, which aid their understanding of, and adaptation to the various societal and personal changes they experience throughout their lives.

3.1.2   Recent Attitudes Towards Lifelong Learning

«Lifelong learning is suddenly big news» (Longworth, 1999:3).   This phrase that the author himself judges as inaccurate, has been generated by the factual realisation that lifelong learning is receiving increasing attention since 1996, when the European Union announced the European Year for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 1995).   National Governments publish Green and White Papers on the topic, initiatives are implemented, international organizations such as OECD and UNESCO are promoting lifelong learning by means of publications and international conferences.

However, as Longworth (1999) rightly mentions, the Greek ancient philosopher Plato in 2000 BC used the phrase "dia viou pedia" which is one of the terms used in Greece nowadays to express the notion of lifelong learning.   Moreover, the Chinese philosopher Kuan Tzu in the 3rd century BC said; "when planning for a year sow corn, when planning for a decade plant trees, when planning for a lifetime train and educate men", and Comenius, in the 16th century, declared that learning is the most basic human instinct (Longworth, 1999). Hence, it becomes clear that attention was drawn to lifelong learning throughout the whole humankind's history.   Sometimes more profoundly, and other times in discrete, lifelong learning has always paced by the man.

In the Campaign for Learning (1998) launched by the UK government, learning is manifested as being the cornerstone for humanity's smooth adaptation to the newborn Knowledge Age, which succeeded the Information Age. The capacity of people to learn and conform to the forthcoming changes is considered now the key skill for people's evaluation, and the passport to the full exploitation of the human potential. "Human beings are uniquely adapted to learn" (Campaign for Learning, 1998) throughout their lives, and learning can improve their social and personal life significantly in a variety of ways, ensure the survival and prosperity of the nations, and bring fulfillment and happiness.

Fryer (1997:29), in the frequently discussed report *Lifelong learning for the 21st century,* highlights the importance of lifelong learning as being a factor which appeals to "all aspects of life and meets a variety of needs and objectives", so as to "foster personal and collective development, stimulate achievement, encourage creativity, provide and enhance skills, contribute to the enlargement of knowledge itself, enhance cultural and leisure pursuits and underpin citizenship and independent living".

3.1.2.1 Lifelong Learning in the UK

Kogan (2000) and many other thinkers in the field of lifelong learning agree that the Labour Government of May 1997 has shown significant motivation to work dynamically on the Educational matters of the country. Task groups, like the National Advisory Group on Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, were activated and responsibility were given to them, with the aim to investigate the conditions in the UK educational system, and propose ways for combating illiteracy, unemployment, and social exclusion. In June 1999, David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education & Employment, declared: "We must place the learner at the heart of the new system" (LIC, 2000).

This statement is indicative of the positive attitude that the UK government has adopted towards learning. Brophy (2000:20) comments favourably the governmental education policy, suggesting that pursuits the foundation of a 21st century society "where all citizens can develop their full potential, and which has the skills and knowledge to thrive in the increasingly competitive world economy". The role of lifelong learning in "maintaining the country's competitiveness" and "in the development of new skills, dignity, confidence and opportunities for all its people" is also stressed in Fryer's report *Learning for the 21st century* (1997:4).

In the framework of this policy, lifelong learning for all is encouraged (Brophy, 2000:20). The European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 was the starting point of an effort to encourage engagement in formal, or, informal, academic, or, independent learning. Tuckett (1997, in Brophy, 2000) mentions a study carried out in England and Wales in 1996, which revealed that only one out of three adults had participated in any form of learning during the previous three years. Brophy (2000:20) suggests that; "in a fast changing world where skills learned only months ago can be outdated, this was not a reassuring picture". This is a fact, but the UK government has taken action since then, in shape of the *Learning Age* Green Paper, and a number of initiatives aiming at delivering the objectives of lifelong learning, such as the National Grid for Learning and the University for Industry (FEFC, 1999).

3.1.2.2 Lifelong Learning in Greece

In Greece the concept of lifelong learning is met in the ancient years. According to Kokosalakis (2000:33) «it can be traced back to Solon and to classical Greek philosophy», only to be discussed extensively again in the framework of the European Year of Lifelong Learning. Trantallidi (1999a) do not quite agree with this position. She suggests the combination of the terms continuing and adult education as a synonym to lifelong learning, noting that refers to adults' personal development and "active participation in social, economic and cultural development" (1999a:32). On this ground she claims that adult education is first introduced in Greece in 1929 when the government of Venizelos made special efforts to fight adult illiteracy, establishing evening schools. In 1943, an Adult Education Service was founded at the Ministry of National Education, followed by the Directorate of Adult Education in 1970s. It was transformed into the General Secretariat for Adult Education in 1983, with the aim of combating illiteracy, unemployment, and social exclusion, by offering basic literacy and vocational skills training, and socio-cultural education (Trantallidi, 1999).

Although this information is accurate, it describes policies developed in favour of a narrowly defined lifelong learning notion. Reference is made to a rather formal type of education and training, rather than demonstrating the concept of informal, self-oriented learning, which is being promoted recently, and puts primarily on target the personal development and fulfillment of people. The lifelong learning notion includes both formal and informal learning, as well as incidental learning. Lifelong learning is a wide concept open to various interpretations (PECD, 1996 in Kokosalakis, 2000) and in this form is a "very

recent phenomenon in Greece" (Kokosalakis, 2000:330), where the issue has been mentioned sporadically during the 1990s, and even less action has been taken.

Until recently, there were not visible significant, coordinated efforts from the Greek government towards the promotion of the idea, with the possible exception of the Open University, which was established in Patras and its function was defined by law[11] in 1997 (Pafilis, 1999). This is an initiative strictly orientated to a formal type of adult education and therefore does not respond to a "lifelong learning for all" culture. Nevertheless, it represents a positive change in the former attitude. In addition, on the ground of the common effort made by the Member States of the European Union to develop a European lifelong learning culture, the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs[12] have published on their web page a document titled *Lifelong Learning*[13].

In this document is stated that "Lifelong learning is not only an aspect of education and training but also the principle, which controls and directs all actions of the entire education spectrum" (GSAE, 2001). This is a hopeful realization, which may lead in governmental activity towards the development and implementation of a lifelong learning policy, which will result in positive changes in the learning culture of the country. Furthermore, in reaction to the *Memorandum on Life Long Learning of the European Commission* (GSAE, 2001), the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs emphasises on the necessity of implementing the vision of a lifelong learning culture during the next decade, with the aim of ensuring an equal opportunities future for all the European citizens.

3.2 *Public Libraries and Lifelong Learning*

Lifelong learning nowadays asks for a new relationship between the learner and the learning provider, with the purpose of identifying what are the weighty things to learn, and which are the most effective ways to achieve this, what are the best resources to be used, and how new technologies could assist learning (McNair, 2000). As stated in the Learning Age (DfEE, 1998:53) "The public library service holds an enormous range of educational material and has the potential to deliver information and learning to people of all ages and backgrounds, right across the country. The Learning Age will be supported by the development of new information and communication technology within libraries".

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[11] Law 2552/97 published in Government Gazette no 266/24/12/97 (Source: Kokosalakis, 2000:333)
[12] Ypourgio Ethnikis Pedias ke Thriskevmaton (YEPTH)
[13] Dia viou mathisi is the Greek title

Allred (1998) also declares the capability of libraries in supporting learning, calling them "learning centres".

Nordbok (2001), in a statement on the European Commission's memo on lifelong learning, underlines the complex role libraries are called to play in lifelong learning. Libraries are no longer just the physical location of learning centres, neither they rest in their traditional role of book depositories (EBLIDA, 2000). Public libraries around the Europe provide, nowadays, a whole range of services, including digital information, high quality learning material, professional guidance, access to global resources, and study support (EBLIDA, 2000). They contribute in the development of new learning policies, stimulating and measuring learning needs within their sphere of influence.

According to EBLIDA (2000), which depends on data from the Library Economics in Europe Millennium Study[14], 224000 library service points exist in Europe with about 139 million registered users. The majority of these libraries are located in daily visited areas, such as high streets and Community Centres, at the heart of local communities. This justifies the great demand placed on libraries, to exploit their fame, and act vividly for the development of a culture for "lifelong learning for all" (Fryer, 1997:3). In this way they will contribute to a society of energetic citizens, who are easily and efficiently adapted in the requirements of the new age.

Libraries are ideal for independent learning, because they function in a way that encourages individual browsing around different thematic areas. Allred (1998) refers to the freedom of learners to wander a bit around the topic, and adapt their initial goals to new emerging needs. In the same way library users can use several types of materials as learning resources. Paper documents and electronic information sources, multimedia and library staff, even workshops and seminars, can be used any time separately or in combination, in a way that the users consider more effective for gaining the learning experience and the outcome they wish.

3.2.1   Learning in the UK Libraries

In contrary to what many people believe, lifelong learning is not a recently introduced practice in the UK public libraries. Batt claims that public libraries were first established in response to the Victorian values of "self-help and improvement", and they were places that people unable to access educational institutions used to visit in order to gain assistance while

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[14] www.libecon2000.org

educating themselves (Batt 1998:27; Audit Commission, 1997).   Based on the past good practice, and bearing in mind that lifelong learning cannot stand without the support of relevant agencies, various agencies such as educational institutions and public libraries should collaborate to support and encourage lifelong learners (Allred, 1998), and host learning activities.

Allred (1998) claims that in the UK around 50% of public library authorities are in formal liaison with TECs and LECs, commercial open learning centers, and educational guidance networks.   He also indicates that over 60% of public library authorities host Training Access Points[15], or, similar local databases for learning opportunities.   Moreover, a third of public library authorities have staff trained in educational guidance.

The UK government has launched various initiatives to promote lifelong learning, and within this framework it has invest in ICT training for librarians (FEFC, 1999).   It also aims at delivering informal learning opportunities to the heart of local communities, by means of access provided to a library network.   In Sheffield, public libraries do not even have a common web page yet, but this is something that will probably happen if they wish to keep in pace with the development of a lifelong learning society in the UK.

Hendry (2000:444) is optimistic, and asserts that since 1997, public libraries in the UK have experienced significant development.   However, he stresses the importance of libraries understanding the opportunities that lifelong learning offers, and the weight of their own role. He suggests they should appreciate "the wider context and agendas of the Labour Government…best summarized in three statements by the Prime Minister Tony Blair:

1.   «Our three most important policies are Education, Education, Education
2.   Education is the best economic policy we have,
3.   Government has put education, learning and the knowledge-driven economy at the heart of its ambition".

3.2.2   Learning in Greek Libraries

In Greece a lot of attention has been drawn to the significance of the role that libraries could play in a new information society.   In Thessalonica, a meeting under the title *Public libraries in the information society* took place in the Historical Centre of Thessalonica on 29 and 30 March 2001 (Eleftherotypia, 2001), and the new fields of action, where libraries are

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[15] TAP

called to successfully perform, were discussed.   Lifelong learning is also being promoted by cultural events. Such events as exhibitions of the artworks of the participants in the artistic workshops of the public libraries, book presentations, and lectures, are held in or organised by the public libraries.

3.3   ICT and Learning

Taking advantage of new technologies is essential for the development of "a culture for lifelong learning for all" (Fryer, 1997:86).   ICT is a technological area where radical development has taken place during the last decade.   The European Union has recognized the importance of ICT for the citizens of its Member States, and various initiatives such as E-learning have been encouraged.   Amongst other functions, Information and Communication Technology is an important tool for lifelong learning, given that ensures access to new, more expanded volumes of knowledge worldwide.   Moreover, it has escaped the boundaries of place and time, which are traditionally imposed on the learning process (McNair, 2000). Learning, therefore, can be assist by ICT, but first, an "inductive approach" (OECD-CERI, 2000:54) towards the use of the electronic equipment provided should be encouraged.   For ICT in learning does not only mean educational CD-ROMs and Journals in electronic format. It could expand access in information worldwide, and allow for local retrieval of information stored in extremely remote geographical areas.

The FEFC (1999) also underlines the effectiveness of ICT in providing access to information and supporting learning activities.   By means of ICT, distance and time are not a disadvantage in the learning process.   Access to the Internet, and use of interactive CD-ROMs and other electronic sources can significantly facilitate learning.   These advantages have been well understood by the British Government, which has taken significant action towards the "integration of new technology across all levels of education" (Santos et al., 2000:117).   Their efforts to encourage the use of ICT in all types of learning, including open and lifelong learning, is reflected to initiatives such as the National Grid of Learning which incorporated a web site offering indexed learning material of guaranteed quality, and the establishment of 700 ICT learning centres (Santos et al., 2000:118).

All these result in a disadvantage for the people that are not able, or confident enough to use the new technologies.   To ensure that social exclusion will be kept to a minimum on what concerns lifelong learning and ICT, an attempt should be made on behalf of libraries to co-operate with the open universities and colleges.   Additionally, the important role of ICT in delivering the potential of lifelong learning should be stressed.   In this way independent

studying, a facility that has been always provided by libraries (Audit Commission, 1997) can be significantly enhanced.

3.4   Public libraries and ICT

In the inspiring text *A basic vision of the public library in the information society,* Thorhauge (1997) underlines the important contribution of libraries in what concerns encouraging the citizens to engage themselves in learning, and thus to "take an active part in the constant process of maintaining the local cultural and social environment" (Thorhauge, 1997:9).   She suggests that this could be achieved, if libraries demonstrate the potential of new ICT, and take up the role of providing equal opportunities for access to information.   The increasing library use for learning suggests that, in a world where lifelong learning is a reality existing in tight bond with libraries, they could support their users significantly in achieving their personal goals, by introducing them in ICT, and providing updated electronic services.

Batt (1998) also indicates the energetic role that public libraries have to take up in order to be a useful and competitive factor in the lifelong learning industry, together with the open universities and colleges, and stresses the important role of ICT in delivering the potential of lifelong learning.   Furthermore, he provides data showing that PCs are consider a basic resource in public libraries.

3.4.1   The UK Libraries and ICT

The UK Government is of the same opinion and its positive attitude towards ICT was expressed already in 1996, when both the Government and the Labour Party announced their intention to connect all public service buildings (Batt, 1997).   Moreover, in the framework of the National telematic policies in the UK, the Information Society Initiative of the Department of Trade and Industry was established in order "to promote the beneficial use and development of information and communication technologies – multimedia –in the UK".   It was created to fund the development of telematic systems and services (Batt, 1997:242).

Only one public library was associated with the initiative in 1996.   However, according to Batt (1997:242) "public libraries in the UK have been using and developing telematics–based systems for 25 years".   He claims that a survey investigating 167 library authorities show that public libraries in the UK have adopt a more positive attitude towards telematics, an assumption based on the fact that in 1993 the 82% of circulation was found to take place by means of sophisticated library automation systems and 50% of the libraries

investigated offered OPAC service.   In addition, according to Hendry (2000:445) "more than 1 billion pounds will be made available to support the delivery of the Governments targets for ICT in Education and Lifelong Learning by 2002".

In the publication *Due for Renewal*, Audit Commission suggests that ICT "presents a profound challenge for the public library service", for not only facilitates the administrative routines, but also improves the quality of services provided (Audit Commission, 1997:18). Automated circulation systems, OPACs and self-issue terminals, and automation of acquisition and cataloguing processes are the issues associated with the administrative functions support (Batt, 1997; Audit Commission, 1997).   Enhancing library services offered to public is associated to reference, learning, and research material provision.

OPACs were the only contact user had with ICT in libraries until around 1996 (Batt, 1997).   In the years 1994-1997, most of the telematics were used for administrative purposes, however most of the libraries in UK had introduced the CD-ROM as an effective and efficient medium for information provision.   More specifically, 77% of the libraries offered CD-ROMs in 1993 and, in 1995, 53% of library services had some kind of access to the Internet (Batt, 1997).

Batt (1997) indicates that public libraries have a long tradition of providing learning opportunities, and within this framework could not only provide ICT facilities, but also train the library users in using them effectively.   In 1992, the Open for Learning Project developed by the Department of Employment used public libraries as centres for IT-based basic skills training through open learning (Batt 1997).   By June 1995, 90% of library authorities had developed open learning centres using computer assisted learning, an action which is indicative of the fact that libraries are recognising the importance of developing open learning through IT (Batt, 1997:244).   Hendry, (2000:443) summarizing Bottomley's Reading the Future report (1997) refers to the necessity of libraries playing "an important part in the Governments IT for All strategy" and delivering "the benefits of IT to a wider population".

3.4.2   Greek Libraries and ICT

The rate of automation in Greece is low. It is restricted to academic and research libraries, and it usually relies in simple software.   In the Athens area, the National Library and some research libraries are linked to a documentation center, forming in this way some kind of intermediary network.   Public libraries are not connected by means of a network, and therefore there is no regular co-operation among them in form of union catalogues and

interlibrary loan services.   Since 1989 there has been a CD-Rom of Greek books, Bibliografia 2000, published by the private firm ELEA.   It is a modest attempt, helping, at least, libraries in solving some acquisition and information problems (Segbert 1997).

3.5   Elderly people, Public Libraries and Lifelong Learning

"The three largest client groups that public libraries have are: children, 17-24 years olds and the elderly. These are the very groups who have most need of education and information to shape their lives and to thrive in their later years" (Hendry, 2000:447).   Public libraries could therefore act as "gatekeepers to the ICT revolution, and as mentors and teachers", taking up both education and ICT as an opportunity "to thrive and to contribute to a more decent inclusive society" (Hendry, 2000:447).   More specifically, in what concerns elderly people, Jarvis (2001b) underlines their ability to continue to learn. Further more he suggests that this offers them a variety of opportunities to enhance their personalities and lives. Through learning they expand their boundaries taking up new activities, meeting people and making friends, telling stories and sharing experiences. Jarvis states that learning after the retirement creates a whole new life for the elderly, since new roles can be learnt and people can adapt in the changing society regardless their age.

Fryer (1997:62) refers to the proved by medical science benefits they could gain by continuing learning; "Continuing mental activity can offset the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease" and adds that "at a common sense level, energy practitioner knows the therapeutic benefit of local classes to isolated, lonely and under-confident older people".

However, elderly people are the learner's group that has profit less than any other from the policy changes introduced in UK educational system in 1992 (Frayer, 1997).   For not only local adult education programs have lost ground, reducing the participation rates of people aged 65 and above, who often do not "seek accreditation" (Frayer, 1997:62), but also, people over 50 lack in the right of gaining student loans, which is a factor that excludes them of engaging themselves in higher education courses.

This is a disappointing finding, considering that elderly people, may have financial, health, and mobility problems, and therefore they may need more effective and efficient support with their lifelong learning (Fryer, 1997).   Because, as Fryer (1997:63) thoughtfully highlights, "for them, continued or renewed opportunities for intellectual stimulation will make all the difference between a life retaining some prospect of dignity and independence. The bleak alternative is an existence, which appears to be doomed only to a patient wait for

the release of death, born along by varying combinations of benign condescension, dependence and neglect".

3.6 Summary

The chapter above presented previous writings and findings on the topics of lifelong learning and ICT. It defined the concept of lifelong learning and described its significance and the action taken on the issue in the UK and Greece. In addition, the role of libraries in aiding lifelong learning was presented, together with a description of the useful contribution of ICT in learning. The conditions in the UK and Greek libraries in terms of lifelong learning support and ICT provision were briefly discussed, and the chapter was completed with reference to the importance of elderly people's lifelong learning.

Chapter 4 - Locations of Study

4.0 Introduction

The present research project deals with a case study of two countries. It focuses on two representative cities; namely Sheffield (UK) and Thessalonica (Greece). These particular cities were selected because of the researcher's association to them; the first being the place she studies, and the second one her hometown.

The libraries under investigation were selected on the ground of more specific criteria. Special effort was made in order to locate libraries with similar characteristics in the two different countries, so as to allow for comparison. The central public library was selected in both cases, for being traditionally the one that offers the widest variety of services. For the selection of branches local librarians were consulted. John Murphy from the Sheffield Central Library and Rosemary Telfer of the mobile library service suggested branches that have a large percentage of elderly users and take some action on lifelong learning issues. For the selection of Greek branch libraries Thalia Xenaki, librarian, were consulted on the matter.

4.1 Public Libraries in the UK and Greece

4.1.1 United Kingdom

Public libraries in the UK are a 150 years tradition, established in 1850 under the Public Libraries Act, and they have always been popular with the public (Audit Commission, 1997). As Batt (1997:241) comments, they are "a statutory service required to be available to every citizen". However, the terms used in the various Parliament acts trying to define the amount and quality of services that should be required are rather general and insufficient. General terms such as "comprehensive and efficient" are, according to Batt (1997), the ones used to describe the ideal library services. Bearing in mind that there are over 4000 public libraries in the UK, this practice is highly unlikely that will finally produce a set of guidelines about what services a quality library should offer.

The library services are traditionally provided by local authorities, and they are funded 58% from local taxation and 48% by Government grant (Batt, 1997). This partial dependence on the Government has caused problems in the provision of quality services. Hendry (2000:442) reports that public libraries suffered extensively from what he calls

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"malign neglect" by the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s. Discussions with local librarians also revealed that these governments did not allow enough funding for the local authorities to spend on libraries, especially in areas were local authorities represented different political parties. Batt (1997:214) refers to an "interventionist approach" adopted by the Government, which is expressed by attempts to dictate the actions taken by local authorities and define the function of the services provided. However, in the Green Paper on lifelong learning, the UK Government expressed the intention to fund the provision of ICT in the libraries with £50 million from the Lottery (DfEE, 1998), an amount that is recently said to have reached the £100 million[16].

4.1.2 Greece

Greece is a country with an old and great library tradition (Segbert, 1997). Therefore, it is widely thought that Greek public libraries should be in a leading position. However, this is far from the truth, since public libraries in Greece have been abandoned for a long time. There are specific cases where the personal effort of individuals has made a difference, such as in the Public Library of Veria, which has been involved in the MOBILE project (Brophy et al., 1996). This, though, is not a fact for most of public libraries, where the automation rate is extremely low and the collections outdated. According to Katsirika (2001) Greek libraries lack in specialised staff. Souliotis (1998) shares the same view and attributes the problem to the non-existence of official posts for librarians, although a lot of graduate librarians are out of job.

Although staff limitations are a considerable problem in Greek libraries, there is not the most severe. The total lack in libraries, or their being in shape of a warehouse, in many places where the existence of a well organised library is essential such as in schools, is indicative of the decline of the library services in the country.

In Greece there is an institutional difference between public libraries (dimosies), and libraries that are under the local authorities and called "dimotikes"[17] (Souliotis, 1998). The total number of libraries in Greece appears to be around 650 (Segbert, 1997), and responsibility for them is spread to various local authorities and Ministries. Governments postpone any taking care of the subject that public libraries do not have a common policy, and depend on the institution responsible for them, which in many cases is completely irrelevant,

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[16] Information provided by J.Murphy during a meeting in the Central Library in Sheffield, 09.05.01
[17] For the needs of the present study local libraries are called "Public", because in fact they play the same role with the so-called libraries in UK.

as being the Naval Commerce Ministry for instance (Souliotis, 1998).   This creates similar problems to the ones UK public libraries have to face, in terms of funding.   Political disagreements and rallies affect the flow of the funding.   A widespread disbelief on the importance of the role of public libraries results in shortage of demands for better service provision.   Therefore, local authorities invest the funding on projects strongly demanded, because the execution of them will increase their popularity.

4.2   Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information

Sheffield belongs in the broader area of South Yorkshire, an area wealthy in public and academic libraries.   Since 1980s Sheffield City Libraries were involved in open learning initiatives, as results from Smith, Shuter and Allred (1987) writings.   Being a place where two Universities exist, namely; The University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield has focussed on facilitating finding information, studying, and lifelong learning of the citizens and students of the region (SINTO, 2000a).   The outcome of this attempt was an agreement for co-operation between the academic and public libraries in Sheffield, called *Access to Libraries for Learning (ALL)*.   Since ALL has entered into force, all people living, working, or studying in the Sheffield region have the right to use the academic and public libraries.   Academic libraries apply some restrictions to users not studying in the particular University they belong to, but joining the public library is easy, considering that there is no membership fee and most services are provided for free (SINTO, 2000b).

The libraries selected to be investigated in the framework of the present study were the Central public library, and two branches; Newfield Green Library and Woodhouse Library.   In the Central Library there are different collections in the form of sub-libraries and during this research the Reference collections, that is to say; Arts & Social Sciences and Business, Science & Technology, were investigated together with the Local Studies department.   This decision was made bearing in mind that the particular departments are visited for learning purposes, and have elderly users, especially the Local Studies.

4.2.1   Arts & Social Sciences reference library

Arts & Social Sciences provide reference and information services on "arts, humanities, social science, including education and careers, social issues, maps and travel, genealogy, film and television, charities, government publications, parliamentary information, census, statistics and periodicals" (SINTO, 2000b).   As results from the information retrieved during

the research[18] there are ICT facilities provided.   There is a Word Processor available for 2-hour book-able sessions, and two terminals for searching newspapers and journal indexes, National Geographic and other CD-ROMs.   There is also Internet access available in the form of 30 minutes sessions, and OPAC[19] terminals.   What is significant for the research is the existence of resources for lifelong learning, such as CD-ROMs, books, videos, audiotapes on basic skills, IT and business information, and the Citinet Learning Centre offering information on local courses.

4.2.2   Business, Science & Technology reference library

Business, Science & Technology offers a wide selection of reference material and other information on engineering, materials, health, natural history, pure and applied science, industry related matters.   Trade and technical journals, government reports, UK official statistics, market research sources, and consumer trading reports are also available (SINTO, 2000b).   As results from the questioning of the librarian responsible for the services, there are two PCs providing Internet access and allowing for the use of the CD-ROM collection, which provides material such as the UK, European and World Patents, British standards, ANTE abstracts in new technology, engineering, metals/materials, Marquesa trade names and trade marks registered in the UK, and company data.

4.2.3   Local Studies Service

Local Studies Service

"Collects and preserves printed material relating to Sheffield and the surrounding area including books and pamphlets, newspapers and indexed newspaper cuttings, photographs, maps, trade directories, videos, sound recordings and periodicals. Information and report on present day Sheffield including census and other local statistics and development plans"

(SINTO, 2000b).

According the librarian, the service expects ICT equipment for personalised use of Internet. There are two PCs running the Sheffield Pictures collection, assisted by part-time employees.   The collection includes microfilms and interactive CD-ROMs such as the Census 1881.

4.2.4   Newfield Green Library

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[18] Information extracted from the Library Information Questions distributed to the libraries visited.
[19] Online Public Access Catalogue

Newfield Green is a branch library that offers a collection of books, videos, talking books, cassettes, jigsaws, and other material.   But what is more significant for its selection as a location of study is the library's support of lifelong learning by "offering access to Community language resources in shape of books, videos, music, and CDs"(Appendix 1). The library staff[20] referred to the promotion of lifelong learning, mentioning that the library hosted six computer skills development sessions with laptops in the framework of the *Flying laptops* initiative.   They also accommodate a creative writing group for ten weeks, and host 4 Gleadless Valley Wildlife Group slides shows per year, which are attended by 30 people each time.   There are no ICT facilities in the library, apart from a terminal used for accessing the OPAC.   However, they expect that they will be able to provide Internet access next year.

4.2.5 Woodhouse Community Library

The Woodhouse Community Library demonstrates a quite vivid action in the framework of great effort made to support lifelong learning.   It cooperates and promotes the work of Woodhouse Community Education Centre and Community Adult Lifelong Learning, providing information to the library users.   The library also holds three keep-fit classes on Mondays where participate 30 people, and organises children activities on Thursdays 8-12. There are two PC classes running on Fridays with 20 participants[21].

4.3 Libraries' Directorate of Municipality of Thessalonica

The Libraries Directorate of Municipality of Thessalonica is responsible for a network of 16 Libraries and the Historical Centre of Thessalonica.   The development of this network commenced with the establishment of the first Public Library in Thessalonica in 1932.   Learning, entertainment and information are the main action fields of the libraries. The Public library network supports lifelong learning by organising artistic workshops, chess lessons, and holding exhibitions of artworks, photography and other types of collections, meetings with authors and book exhibitions, lectures, concerts.

4.3.1 Central Public Library

The Central Library was founded in 1956, in the YMCA building.   In 2000 the library moved in a new building built for this purpose.   The collection in 1997 counted 27438 books available for loan and 66433 books available only for reference.   A part of the

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[20] Source: Library Information Questions
[21] Source: Library Information Questions

collection catalogue is now available in electronic format, but there is no connection between the branches and the Central Library.   The instalment of terminals in all the branches, and online access to the OPAC through Internet are planned.

4.3   Branch Libraries

The selected branches for the purpose of the research purpose were the Public Library of Saranta Ekklisies, which was established in 1978, and the Ano Poli branch, founded in 1959.

Saranta Ekklisies is one of the older areas in the city, where quite a lot of elderly people live.   The population's financial and educational conditions are rather good, for the area is quite privileged in terms of proximity to the city centre and the Aristotle University of Thessalonica, which has resulted in many professors and professionals living there.   The library collection counts 6556 volumes (1997), and there is subscription to 14 periodicals. Painting workshops are organised every year, and the library hosts exhibitions and other cultural events.

Ano Poli branch has a collection of 10540 volumes (1997) and 6 journal titles. Pottery workshops are offered occasionally.   The area is less developed and wealthy, and peoples' educational level lower. These differences in the two areas are useful for acquiring a more spherical view of the conditions in Thessalonica's public libraries.

4.4 Conclusion

The description of the locations mentioned above was made with the aim of presenting the scenery where the study was carried out. Thus a better understanding of the conclusions drawn will be achieved.

Chapter 5 - The profile of elderly library users in the United Kingdom and Greece

5.0 Introduction

The present chapter aims at picturing the profile of the elderly users group, in the public libraries of Sheffield and Thessalonica.   Based on the interrogated sample and statistical data drawn from previous research, it tries to describe this cohort of users according their age, sex, and educational level.   The frequency they use the library, and the purpose of doing so is also discussed.   Although this study is primarily qualitative, it was decided that some quantitative data should be presented, because the parameters mentioned above were considered important.   They indirectly affect the conclusions of this study by creating a slightly different environment for investigation in the two countries.   Whether elderly people, in both the countries under studying, are involved in learning and use libraries and ICT for this purpose is something that depends on this attributes.   Therefore, they were measured and taken into account during the analysis of the research findings.

5.1 Age and Sex characteristics of the sample

Age and sex were two factors of certain significance for drawing conclusions about the profile of elderly people that use public libraries.   In the UK 14% more women than men were interviewed, whereas in Greece the 88% of the respondents were female.
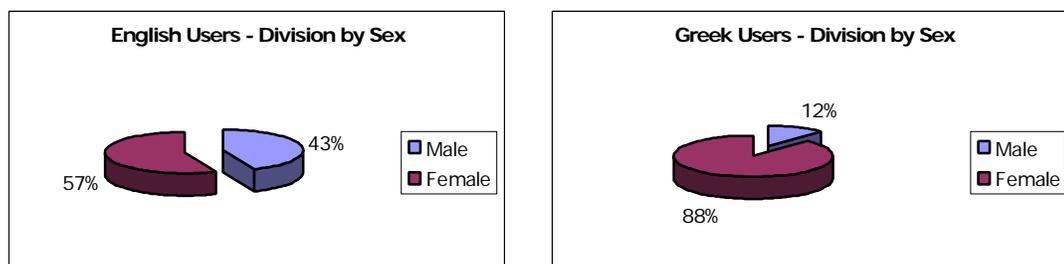

Figure 1. Comparison of English and Greek elderly users' distribution by sex percentage.

Bearing in mind that the researcher had no intention to select the respondents judging them by sex, the data show that women use libraries more than men in both countries.   The deviation emerging in the UK is quite reasonable, whereas in Greece it is particularly large.

Doubts could be expressed here, because a subconscious exclusion could sometimes take place, as a result of undiscerning prejudices, rooted in the mind of the interviewer.   However, in this particular case subconscious picking could not happen extensively, due to

limitations in terms of time. More clearly, in Thessalonica almost all the elderly users, who entered the library during the period of investigation, were given questionnaires to fill, because there were so few that selection was out of question. In Sheffield, the interviewer tried not to focus on a specific sex group, so as to have a more accurate view of the users characteristics. Therefore the fact that men appear to be under-represented, especially in Greece, consists the real share of library use by men and women.

One of the reasons, which are responsible for the phenomenon stated above, could be that women are more than men in population rate. According to the European Union statistics[22] published by Eurostat, in the year 2000 the ratio of women per 100 men was 124 English and 120 Greek women within the age group 65-79 years old, whereas the numbers for the age group 80+ were 222 English and 146 Greek (Eurostat, 2001).
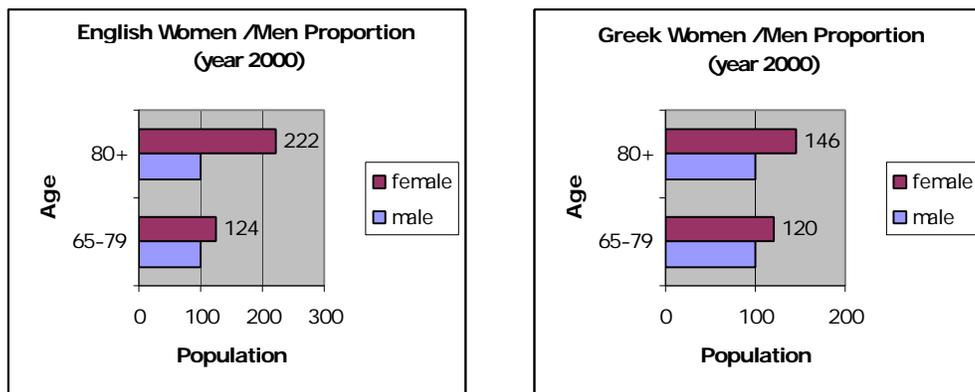

Figure 2. Analogy of men and women population, subdivided by age group.

This means that in total, English women aged from 65 to over 80 are 26% more than the men of the same age. The difference is even wider than the extra 14% of female library use, and could justify why more women were approached and interviewed in Sheffield. Greek statistics show that for the same age group previously mentioned there are 14% more women than men. This divergence is rather small to allow for the 76% difference between the numbers of male and female Greek elderly users, who participated in the study in the public libraries of Thessalonica.

There are various reasons that could be responsible for this later fact, attributed to the social structure in Greece, or to theories regarding the widespread rumour that women become more active by the years, whereas men settle down. In any case this is a field where

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[22] Please, see Appendix 2

more research could be made, and interesting findings might come to light. What attributes worth in the conclusion that women are heavier users of libraries is that libraries could take the fact into consideration while developing their policies. Especially in the case of Greece, where the numbers are extremely distant, women learning needs maybe should be paid more attention, with the purpose of creating learning opportunities that will meet their demands.

The proportion of the overall population of the UK and Greece that belongs in the age groups investigated in both countries; namely; 60 years old and above, is indicative of the trends in the use of libraries by the elderly. The 32,9% of the UK population in 1999 was found to be 50 and above years old, with the 15,9% being 65 and above (Eurostat, 2001)[23]. These numbers are similar to the ones in Greece, where a 34,5% out of the total population belongs to the age group 50 and above, and the 16,5% is over 65 years old. These percentages show that there is the same number of elderly people on average in both countries. Therefore, it worth examining why more people were located and questioned in Sheffield than in Greece, given that only one week was dedicated to conducting interviews Sheffield, in contrary to the six weeks spent for the same purpose in Greece.

It has been previously pointed out, that Greek atmospheric conditions are partly responsible for the fact. Summer months in Greece are particularly warm and people resort to the countryside when possible. Elderly people that have no particular commitments in terms of job and family responsibilities leave the cities in May and return no earlier than September. A woman's comment; *"I don't use the library so much in the summer, it is by chance that you bumped on me here…we were in our summer house but we came for medical examination, we will go back again"* is rather the rule than the exception. Moreover, even in cases that the elderly remain in the city, they avoid leaving home during the day and specifically between 11:00 and 17:00 because *"it is too hot"*.

The social structure of Greece requires in most cases the active participation of grandparents, and especially grandmother, to the upbringing of their grandchildren. Working mothers in Greece still prefer living children up to 3 years old under the attention of their grandmother, if there are no health problems involved. This reduces significantly the personal leisure time of elderly women. The phrase of a 70 years old woman claiming *"I use the library a lot, but now my daughter and grandchildren have come from Germany for holiday and I am very busy with the twins"* is indicative of this phenomenon.

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[23] Please, see Appendix 2.

Another factor that results in limited use of libraries by elderly people is that Greek people are not particularly encouraged to use them throughout their lives. School libraries are still a fairy tale in Greek reality. They are not in existence, apart from little occasional exceptions. Although the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs announced the foundation of 2.800 school libraries in late 1990s, there was no significant progress. On the contrary, discussion has started recently on the possibility of reducing the number to 1500, 1300 or 1000 libraries (Eleftherotypia, 2001a). If people are not introduced to the library from an early age so as to appreciate the services provided and realise the benefits they could gain, it is a bit unlikely they will develop a particular interest in a much later age. Most people in Greece discover the library in the University, when they associate it with a studying area.

In the UK things seem to better and people value the public library, which, according to the Audit Commission (1997), is one of the most popular public services, something that is definitely not the case in Greece.

Another dissimilarity between the two countries is that the elderly people demonstrating the most activity in using the library fall in different age groups in Sheffield and Thessalonica. Most of the elderly users in Sheffield are in between 70-74 years old, whereas in Thessalonica 60-64 is the group with the plurality of library users. This allows for a distance of a decade, which could be indicative of the people's activity levels in the two countries.
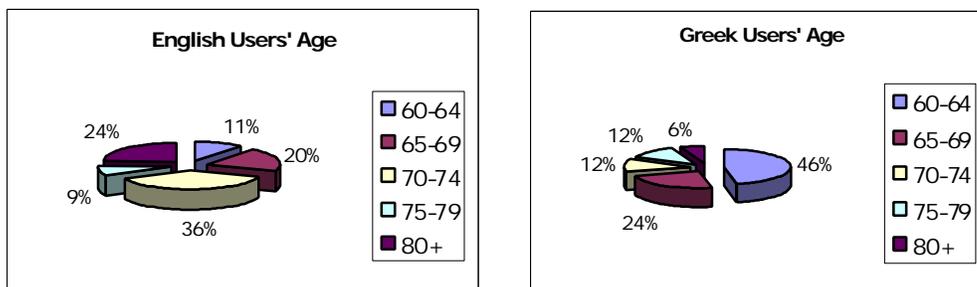

Figure 3. Comparison of English and Greek elderly library users, subdivided by age distribution.

5.2 *Qualifications of the sample*

People's educational level affects their lifelong learning, because their attitude towards learning remains often the same throughout life.   This raises an issue that people who are not well educated may be less interested in learning.   This seems to be true for Greece, but it is certainly not the case in the UK.

The tables below show the interviewees' answers in the question regarding which qualification they left school with.   By the word "school" the researcher was referring to all kinds and levels of compulsory and post-compulsory education up to the Upper Secondary, or, Lykeio for Greece.   The responses varied a lot, given that each country has different titles for the various levels of education, and the several levels of schooling had altered names throughout the years.   Hence, the data retrieved were difficult to organised.   With the aim of being more accurate, the comparability of qualifications in the two countries was checked (EYRYDICE, 1995)[24].   Therefore, the answers were unified under single labels for each educational level.   The lower-secondary education includes Greek Gymnasio, as well as English Grammar and Ordinary Schools.   O and A levels are incorporated under the upper-secondary education heading.

English interviewees appeared to be less qualified, given that the majority of them (50%) left school after completing the compulsory education.   The 58 % of Greek elderly users replied that completed the Upper Secondary education.   This could be attributed to the fact that most English respondents belong to the age group 70-74, meaning they were around 10 years old during the Second World War.   Given that schooling suffered during the world, together with many other aspects of the civilization, these people may had problems in continuing their education.   On the contrary, the age group of 60-64, which gave the most responses in Greece were possible born during the war, and by the time they were at school age things had significantly improved.
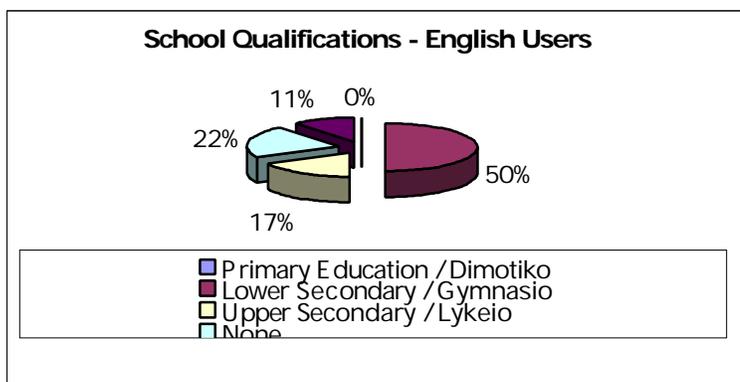
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[24] Please, see Appendix 2.

School Qualifications - English Users

11% 0%
22%
17% 50%

■ Primary Education /Dimotiko
■ Lower Secondary /Gymnasio
□ Upper Secondary /Lykeio
□ None

Figure 4. School qualifications of English library users up to upper-secondary
education.

School Qualifications - Greek Users

18% 6% 12%
6%
58%

■ Primary Education /Dimotiko
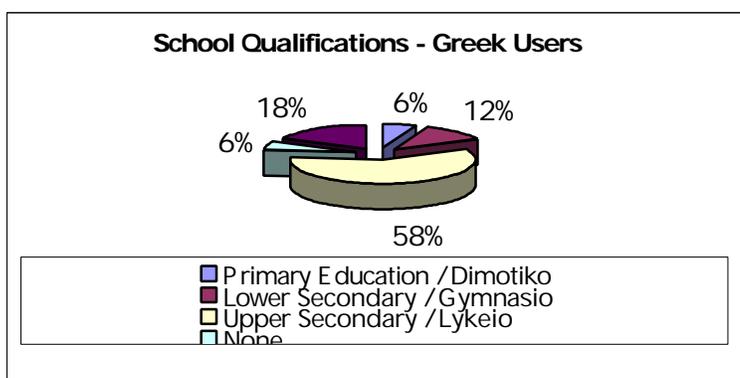■ Lower Secondary /Gymnasio
□ Upper Secondary /Lykeio
□ None

Figure 5. School qualifications of Greek library users up to upper-secondary
education.

The post-secondary educational level of the elderly respondents in both the countries is
more difficult to be measured, for the answers collected vary significantly.   The numbers
suggest, that in the UK 32 out of 46 (70%) elderly users said they were involved in post-
school formal education or informal courses, whereas in Greece 12 out of 17 (71%) gave the
same answer.   These proportions put the two countries in the same line.   However in the UK
only 3 people out of 46 (7%) said they had taken higher education courses, one of them had
reached up to a PhD, whereas the other two had attend Open University and Further
Education College.   Greek numbers regarding participation in higher education were better,
with 7 people out of 17 (41%) to own a University degree, and one of them having also a
PhD.   With reference to vocational training, Sheffield is far ahead with 13 people having
taken vocational training, either formal or in shape of apprenticeship.   Only 2 people from
Thessalonica appeared to have attended a formal vocational training course.
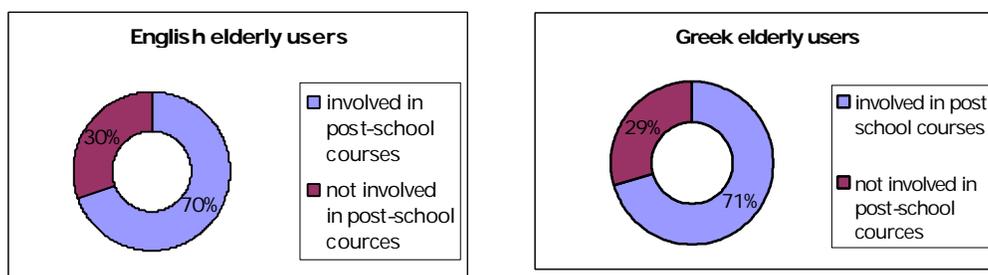
Figure 6. Comparison of percentage of English and Greek elderly people that were involved in post-school courses.

Regardless the type of elderly people's post-school education, the numbers above are encouraging, for they show an interest towards learning. However, these percentages represent post-secondary education that has definitely taken place before the retirement of these people. In what concerns lifelong learning 17 of the total 46 (37%) English interviewees said that had taken formal or informal training in the framework of artistic workshops, recreation courses, languages or computing and other learning subjects. There were 6 of them that had participated in more than one activity, whereas 2 of them had been involved in in-service training. On the other hand, only one Greek person said that participated in artistic workshop, all the others refused having been involved in any non-educational, organised, learning activity.

Although some of the lifelong learning courses where attended in earlier age than the 60 years old, most of the experiences described were quite recent, or, at least, within the age scope of the study. Greek people weren't involved in courses during and after their working life. English people appeared to become more active by the years, something that became also apparent during the comparison of the age groups that use more the library, which was presented previously.

5.3 How often do elderly people use the library?

Another factor where the two countries are different is the frequency of library use. Most of the English users visit the library weekly or 2-3 times per week. This justifies that Sheffield interviewees complained about the decrease in opening hours that has been observed in 1990s (Audit Commission, 1997). In Greece the majority of the users visit the library fortnightly. This fact makes sense; bearing in mind that the loan policy in the Public Libraries of Thessalonica suggests that the loan period is two weeks.
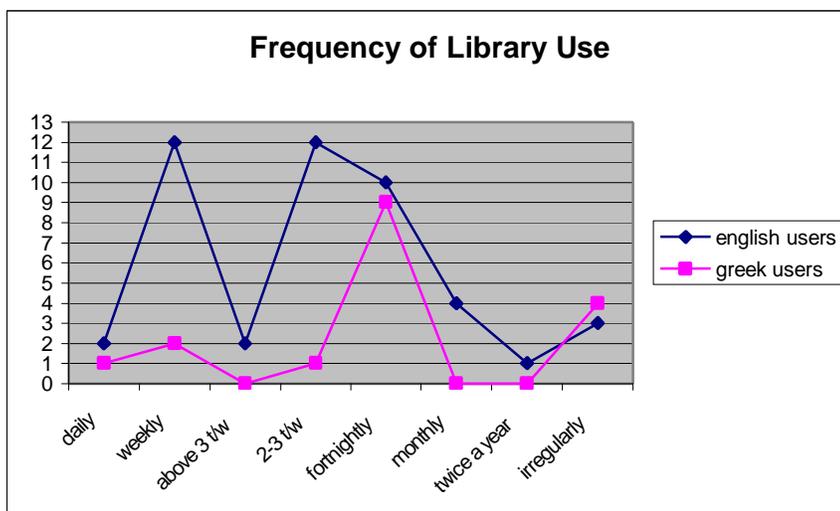
Figure 7. Comparative chart demonstrating the frequency of library use by the elderly.

5.4 Purpose of Library Use.

Whether elderly people use library for learning is a factor that will be particularly discussed in the following chapter.   Here other reasons why elderly people use the library will be examined.

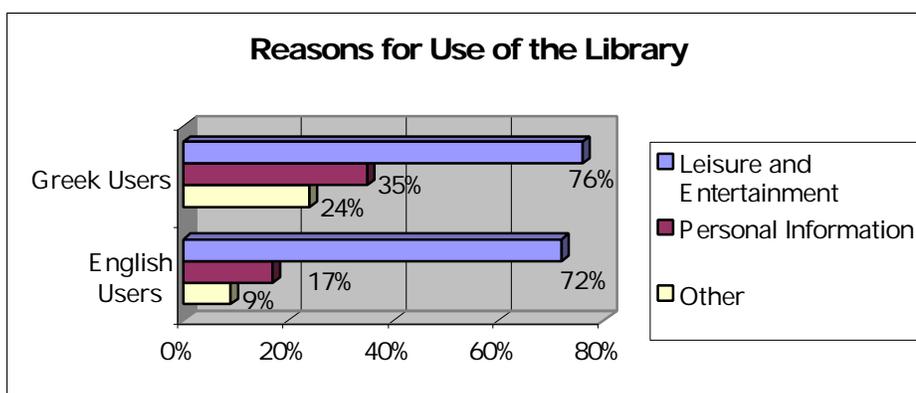Figure 8. Reasons why elderly people use the public library in the UK and Greece, apart from learning.

The chart above shows the percentage of interviewees that opt for leisure and entertainment, and/or personal information as some of the reasons why they visit the library. Many a user stated more than one purpose of doing so; therefore, the percentage comes out of the total number of elderly people requested.

Leisure and entertainment appeared to be the most popular answer. *"I just do it for pleasure"* and *"I am just quite happy to stay and read"* (Sheffield respondents) are some of the ways readers themselves put it. *"Personal relaxing, reading before bedtime"* and *"a good story"* are very common answers, together with narrations about how reading makes them forget daily problems and fill idle hours.

Personal information is a quite misleading term and the respondents tended to mistake it for personal interests. However, explanations were given where necessary, about the nature of the term, which refers to information about household matters, health, benefits, rights, and other, related subjects. It is a rather under-represented area in comparison to leisure and entertainment.

Other reasons for library use where particular issues that people stated as being the main thing that encourages them to visit the library. Loneliness is the only cause stated in Thessalonica, whereas in Sheffield some people said they visit library especially in order to find the answers of their crossword, or to research and develop their family tree. Apart from these three types of answer presented before, there were elderly people referring to learning as their motive in coming to the library. Whether elderly people in general use the public libraries for learning, and how they do so, is an issue that is being examined further on.

Chapter 6 –Elderly library users, lifelong learning, and ICT

6.0   Introduction

The primary question this study tries to answer is whether elderly people use libraries for learning.   As Fryer (1997:45) states, "the most important stakeholders and partners in lifelong learning are the learners themselves and crucially potential learners", and this reality suggest that the views of these people should be taken into account in the creation and implementation of lifelong learning policies in libraries.

Therefore, the present chapter consists an analysis of the data collected during the research carried out in the public libraries of Sheffield and Thessalonica.   It attempts to throw some light on the use of library by elderly people, based on the personal views and experiences of individuals, as they were recorded throughout the investigation.   Whether elderly people use library for lifelong learning, how they use it, and what is the extent of their familiarity with ICT are the issues that form the spine of the discussion that follows.

6.1   Do elderly people use libraries for learning?

From the total number of elderly people that represent the sample used in this study, 17 (37%) of the English library users and 7 (41%) of the Greek ones stated they use the library for learning.   Data extracted from the Library Users Questionnaires[25], which were collected during the National Survey *Low achievers-Lifelong learners* (Proctor & Bartle, [2001]), show that 72 elderly people out of a total 328 were using library for learning (22%).
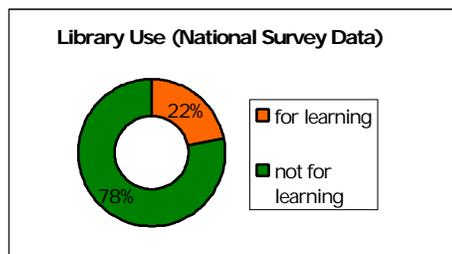

Figure 9. Percentage of library users aged 60 and above that use library for learning.

Although these ratios are not particularly high, they should be considered sufficient for they only represent a part of the actual elderly learners in the libraries investigated.   For, as

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[25] Please, see Appendix 1

Smith, Shuter and Allred (1987) put it precisely, many of the library users that learn in the libraries, may not label themselves as learners.

During the interviews, people were asked why they use the library and then they were encouraged to speak about their experiences in the place.   The outcome was that there are three main attitudes towards the use of library for lifelong learning.   Apart from the persons that were clearly and accurately answering they do or do not use the library for learning, there were people that they did use it for learning without having realised it.   This fact becomes directly apparent from their narrations about their experiences in the library.   Moreover, it has been previously also identified by Godfrey, which stated that "use of the public library for learning falls into two distinct categories of incidental learning and purposeful learning" (Godfrey, 1999:37).   Incidental learners do not necessarily recognise themselves as being so, and this results in lower percentages than the factual library learners.

These three types of library users, which are classified according to their attitude towards learning, are being discussed in length below.

6.1.1   Yes, and they know it!

During this study the definition the researcher had on mind about learning is something close to the ELLI definition as presented by Longworth (1999:2);

> "Lifelong learning is the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulate and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, skills, values, and understanding they will need throughout their lifetimes, and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments".

As it was stated before, from 46 library users interviewed in Sheffield only 17 directly replied that they use libraries for learning (37%), whereas in Thessalonica 7 people out of a total 17 interrogated gave the same answer (41%).   This fact is partly attributed to the lack of a unique definition about what exactly learning in library consists.   According to Godfrey (1999:37) "no structured and static definition of library learning can be reached since the subjects learned and the way they are studied is broad and diverse".   This is true, because each user understands the term in a different way, much affected by their personal experiences.   Consequently, these personal experiences were chased in order to acquire a better understanding about why elderly people learn, what makes them opt for the library as a

place for learning, and how do they use library to learn. However, before these questions are answered, an examination of the subconscious learning phenomenon should be carried out.

6.1.2 Yes, but they don't know it!

Do you use library for learning?

"Not really...I use it for information to finish the crossword...for all subjects"

No, but…

"…When my husband first developed cancer I came and asked if they had anything they could give me on that conditions"
" To find out about the nature of the plants, information about diseases... my wife is a cook, I pick stuff for her and I learn as well"
"I was blackmailed into it [learn to cook and take out cooking books] from my mother. She was ill and I had to take care of her"
" Once I wanted to know about Irish potato famine"
"A man [in her creative writing group] used to come to the lib and write his stories"
<div align="right">*(English respondents)*</div>

"I use the library to get information about gardening"
"I use books for cooking"
"I use the library for scientific research"
"I take out fiction, biography and sometimes historical books"
<div align="right">*(Greek respondents)*</div>

In general, the only learning outcomes, which are being recognised, are those, which lead to formal qualifications (Godfrey, 1999:48). UNESCO Commission of Education for the 21st century, chaired by Jacques Delors comments: "Learning throughout life will be based upon the four pillars of learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be" (Fryer, 1997:26).

This statement attributes a multiple significance in lifelong learning, expanding it from the formal qualifications referring to vocational skills and higher education degrees, to a variety of pieces of knowledge that are being acquired and used in everyday life. Most people are learning all the time, but the majority of them are unaware of the fact. It is

significant the example of a Sheffield library user who said; *"I have been always used libraries for pleasure, not learning"* only to add later on; *"when you read you always learn something new"*. Or, people that do not use library for learning, only reference books to find answers for their crosswords, and the old man that claimed; *"this is really a hobby, so it isn't really for learning. It's really a hobby, I am interested in cinemas"* and he was doing research in Sheffield area and surroundings, because he was writing a book about the history of cinemas.

Education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop our talents to the full and to realise our creative potential, including responsibility for our lives and achievement of our personal aims. (Fryer, 1997:26). This does not require involvement in a formal educational process. As stems from the quotes above, many people ask for information, and acquire knowledge and skills in response to daily needs, personal interest, and desire to spend their spare time in a pleasant way.

In Greece using libraries seems to be a solution for elderly people, with a view of having some form of social activity. *"I take books to my summer house to read. I come to the library to cope with my loneliness. Mostly we come for having a chat with the librarian"* says a Thessalonica respondent, whereas another declares that he comes to the library in the evenings because in the mornings he goes to KAPI[26]. This shows that he, as well as many other elderly people, consider library a place where he could socialise a bit. Greek librarians in the branch libraries are aware of the fact, and try to have a quick chat with the people that walk in. Furthermore, in Sheffield, the staff in the branch libraries visited had adopted a friendly way of approaching, and chatting with, elderly people, which is something that encourages them, significantly, to actively use the library, and learn.

6.2 Why do elderly people learn?

Fryer suggests that "many people never get beyond the earnest, yet banal, view that education is generally a 'good thing' or the assertion that there is a simple and self-evident direct link between educational attainment and prosperity" (1997:2). This statement is quite true, given that, in general, most people are positive towards the idea of learning. However,

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[26] Public Centre for the Entertainment and Protection of Elderly People. There are several departments in different neighborhoods, where people can socialize, attend cultural events and participate in excursions and trips.

there are various reasons why people learn, and in the case of elderly people the main one seems to be their interest on specific subjects.   This is clear from responses such as: *"You know, I am an old lady and I 've lived a lot and there are so many things that interest me, I need to know, silly things, I need to know them…anything really…I had books out on computing…handicrafts…doll's dressing…"*, *"I am always ready to learn things if I am interested – you know"*, and *"It's just my own interest…"* (English respondents).   They usually are not interested in scientific knowledge, which they found it rather complicated; *"I am interested in general knowledge I suppose really, not of scientific nature… sort of history, geography…"* (English respondent), but they are happy to *"keep in pace"* with what is going around.   As a Greek respondent correctly puts it; learning *"keeps us awake"*.

Apart from their interest in specific subjects, sometimes they see it as a way to acquire new skills.   However, this is not much their response, because new skills are usually understood as working skills and most elderly people are retired.   This is clear from statements like *"not for learning new skills because I've got all the skills [from my work]. But on the other hand everyone is learning new skills as long as they are living"*.   Personal development is an answer not so much given for the reasons mentioned above; namely elderly people tent to think that knowledge and personal development is something acquired throughout the whole life, and not, specifically, by means of learning from the books.

Another reason they learn is to spend their leisure time.   In the UK, elderly people seem to be particular creative in what concerns their spare time activities, whereas in Greece they do not do so many things.   Both of them seem also to need the library and get involved in learning because *"It helps me cope with my loneliness"*(Greek respondent).   Accordingly, library is a place where they go for *"companionship, meet people"* (English respondent).

Contrary to what it could be expected, only one respondent from the UK replied that the reason she learns is she had no opportunity in the past, stating that *"we weren't taught history when I was in school"*, and making comments about the limited curriculum of the war time educational system of the UK.   In Greece, wartime education was limited as well and, even before, not quality schooling was provided, however there were no people expressing the view that library could help them to make amends for missing opportunities for education in the past.

6.3 Why do they use libraries for learning?

According to Hendry (2000:445) the Victorian phrase "Public libraries are the working man's university," reflects the library's role as an educational and informative tool for the public. This, together with the statement made by Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, in June 1999, that "Each library is a "streetcorner university", with a vital place at the heart of its local community" (LIC, 2000), creates a reason why people think of library as a place in which they could notably expand their knowledge.   In fact, people learn in various ways, that is to say; attending evening classes, or, through formal studying, using multimedia, or, within their daily routine at work, or, home (DfEE, 1998).   In view of this truth, it becomes evident that learners in the new knowledge age need not be tied to particular locations.

Hence, it is not unexpected that they feel library is a place when they can learn in a relaxing way, without the pressure they face while attending courses; *"…I do like historical books so I am learning as well. I am not learning as in studying, but I am gathering knowledge I like…"* (English respondent).   What they appreciate is learning in an unofficial way, when they want it and in the way they like it; *"…a library is as good a place as any, in library you can do it [learning] when you feel you want to. …If you are going for qualifications clearly you need to be enrolled with a college or University or something, but if you just sort of enjoy studying on a casual sort of basis I suppose the library is ideal"* (English respondent). In some cases they compare library to school, expressing a clear disapproval for the second; *"they don't teach you anything there"*.   However, Godfrey's view that "for some people the library could provide a replacement for formal education" (Godfrey, 1999:56) does not apply to the elderly users. They see the educational institutions and public libraries as two separate learning resources, that could be used alternatively or in co-ordination for achieving different goals, but they could not replace each other.

Both in Sheffield and in Thessalonica, people who use libraries for learning they regard them as a highly effective tool.   Apart from general statements like *"I think we always learn something when we open a book"* and *"you never really stop learning, there is always something new to learn everyday"* (English and Greek respondents), they refer to particular qualities that enhance learning in library.

Something that most users find encouraging is the way library caters for all needs. They think *"libraries are marvellous…they got everything for everybody, don't they?"* and that *"they cover all subjects"*(English respondents).   They also demonstrate that library *"is a*

wonderful source of information, indeed very helpful…really is everything here, isn't it, every subject…" and narrate learning experiences highlighting the ability of library to respond to people's various needs; *"I was interested in flower arranging one time and found here books – very helpful. … I was also interested in antiques and found book on that"*. The opinion that library is ideal for elderly learners emerged in various stages of the research and could be presented with a Sheffield user's respond *"I think libraries are important for people…I think possibly is better for old people…"*(English respondents).

The existence of a rich collection of learning material is a factor that most users appreciate. The variety and amount of information provided is an important parameter; *"I think it is [good] because it is so much material here, you know, you ve got everything you can't find anywhere"* (English respondent). Greek users often comment on the amount of books held in the main library, and English elderly people appear impressed by *"reference books, research, things like that…"* which they found a great and difficult to privately purchase source of information. They consider the available material a provision of great importance, even when they do not consider themselves as learners; *"they support them [learners] with reference books…there is such a lot of reference books that people can't afford to buy"*.

Cost of maintaining one owns library is a factor mentioned quite often, and suggests that financial difficulties encourage many a user to appeal to the library for learning. As the respondents themselves put it rightly *"you can't buy the books, you can't have home enough room for all the books. Here you find a lot in good condition"*. Many of them believe that the books provided is the way library helps them with their learning *"a great deal"*, because *"I cannot find the books anywhere else and I can't afford to buy them all, or they are out of print a lot of them anyway"* (English respondents).

Staff is another heartening factor for many elderly people, who state that; *" library offers almost everything but staff support is very necessary particular when you go to a library you are not familiar with"*. Greek respondents consider that *"staff is helpful and provides support"*, and Sheffield respondents comment about *"very few staff, but supports a lot…they are very good, I mean when I was working I used the Business & Sciences library by phone, so I phone and I will ask enquiries and they will answer the phone and ring back with the answer…and they used to copy everything at no cost"*. Elderly people are a group particularly sensitive towards social exclusion (Fryer, 1997). Continuing learning, and feeling that are assisted on their effort by the library staff, boost their confidence significantly,

and sustain their will and ability to actively participate in the social and cultural developments around them.

6.3.1 Further requirements

Although there is a general attitude in most of the elderly people to find library *"very helpful for learning"* and *"quite good as they are..."* there are many suggestions for improvement and some complaints. The opinion that library supports learning but *"not as well as educational institutions"* (English respondent) was expressed together with a feeling that while learning in library *"you are on your own"*.

Opening hours is a field of constant complaint in Sheffield, whereas in Greece people find them quite sufficient.   This difference in the state of mind in the two countries could be attributed to the alternate frequency of use, as it was demonstrated in the previous chapter. Since Sheffield users have the tendency to spend, in general, more time in the library, it is inevitable that they are not pleased with limited opening hours.

According to statistical data published in 1996, one third of libraries that used to be open for more than 45 hours a week in 1985/86 had fallen 6% below that level by 1995/96. In the same period there was a fall of around 40% in the number of libraries open for ten hours a week or fewer (LISU, 1996, in: Hendry, 2000:443; Audit Commission, 1997).   Sheffield respondents consider a *"main drawback the opening hours, library closes at lunch time"* and they think *"it would be better if they had more money...I would like the libraries to be open at better times"*.

Another request is more space provision.   Both Sheffield and Thessalonica respondents believe that "*...should be more seats," "there are hardly any places for people to use", "even in my years there wasn't enough spaces, and people like me who were retired were looking for entertainment and using the technical library to look things up"*.   In Thessalonica people appeared to be less annoyed of the space limitations than in Sheffield. This factor could be attributed to the Greek people's habit not to read, or, study in the library so much, but rather to visit it for taking books out, and learn by means of them.

The library environment is crucial for most of the users.   They all seem to consider a *"quiet, solitude, no interruptions"* environment, with *"quiet places you can go to study"* and *"concentrate solemnly on what you are doing"*, essential for learning. These are the reasons

why they opt for the library as a place for learning; they believe they can find these qualities there.

6.4   How do elderly people use library to learn?

From the responses of the interviewees, it becomes clear that elderly people in both Sheffield and Thessalonica do not usually turn to the library to support a formal course.   In some cases they realise that they learn incidentally, *"at least I found out about things"* and they often suggest that they learn out of personal interest, without necessarily being involved in courses.   It was impressive how many activities British elderly people were involved in. They are interested in various subjects, with most popular family and local history studies.

"I am a writer of history"

"I am doing some studying on family history"

"I was looking the history of Sheffield & family history researching the family tree, I am still on with it really"

 "It's information…I need information in respect on what I am writing about…I found a lot of information that I cannot find anywhere else…maps, history books…"

<div align="right">

(English respondents)

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There were interviewees narrating experiences when they used library to learn about specific subjects, such as astronomy, geography and travel, art, archeology.   People that state from the beginning that they use library for learning they often separate themselves from fiction books and leisure literature. *"I am not much interested in fiction, I want books on medicine, psychology, pedagogics, sometimes history…"* says a Greek respondent.   And several Sheffield respondents express their intention to study by means of the library books; *"I am getting books from the library to study, I go to the reference library to read the books there, to find out anything I need to know"*, or, even to support language, and other courses.

Data extracted from past Library Users Questionnaires of the National Survey mentioned previously, show that from the 41 elderly people that declared they use the library for learning and have taken courses after school, 15 (37%) comment that they visited the library to get help with their course.   Moreover, people interrogated in Sheffield and Thessalonica spoke about several circumstances when the library helped them with formal learning courses, *"just to back it up",* or, more systematically, while studying part time in the

Open University; *"I got my books from the library because I couldn't afford to buy them, so they helped me a lot…I couldn't do it without the library"*.

It was particularly interesting the difficulty that elderly people had in answering questions related to the way library assists learning. They seemed to regard library like a knowledge treasure, and they do not expect it to play an energetic role in promoting and encouraging learning. Statements such like *"the books are there…if you know what you want, what subject, then you can find what you want"* are indicative of this attitude.

The fact that people depend mainly on books for their learning is made clear, not only form the responses of the people approached in Sheffield and Thessalonica, but also from data provided by the Library User Questionnaires of the National Survey (Proctor & Bartle, [2001]). From the 72 elderly people that said they use library for learning, 56 mentioned *"borrowing non-fiction, factual books"* (Library User Questionnaire)[27] as a means of learning, with second most popular medium the novels, fiction, and story books. This measured preference to the printed material agrees with the Greek elderly users' statements that *"library helps people to learn by providing an updated collection of books"* and *"library should encourage people reading books"*.

6.5   Elderly people that do not use library to learn

Apart from the people that stated they use library for learning, or the ones they claimed they do not but they proved to do so, there were elderly users that declared they definitely do not use library for learning. Bearing in mind that incidental learning escapes people's intentions and takes place in their minds in unsuspected ways, one should allow for the possibility that these people are involved in some subconscious learning. However, these library users deny having any learning experience at all, for various reasons, which are discussed below.

On common argument is that they do not need library for learning; *"no, not [learn something in the library] that I don't already know naturally… no, I don't come to lib for learning, what do you want to know at 82 that you don't already know? At 82 you should know all is required from you shouldn't you?"*. Sometimes are rather aggressive towards the idea *"…have never used library for learning…I don't need it…I am not interested" "more or less I ve never bothered with it…"* and other times they simply refer to different pathways for

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[27] Please, see Appendix 4

learning, the most common being; schooling, profession and, in general, life; *"it is the University of life, you are learning all the time, all the time you are working you are learning"* (English respondent).

There is a widespread feeling among the elderly people that are not in a learning age anymore. It is sometimes expressed with general statements such as *"well, I think I am a bit past learning now I think, I am 85 anyway..."* *"my learning days are over",* and *"I think I am a bit too old to start learning now"*. Other times they refer to more specific factors that discourage them to involve in learning, such as difficulty; *"always worked...getting old, I can't remember things"*, or, personal problems; *"I cannot be taught these days. I seem to have a lot of problems with my daughter and grandchildren and so I don't do much learning...I would really like to go back to creative writing..."*

There are people that visit the library for entertainment of course. They found reading a way to relax and spend their leisure time, but they are not interested in learning. As it has been mentioned above, there are also people seeing in reading a solution to their loneliness. Disabilities and illnesses are another factor that makes elderly people to turn to reading. A woman suffering from illness followed her doctor's advice and she has been using libraries for above 14 years because *"reading helps to forget"* the annoyance the illness causes. Another woman in Sheffield said that her blind mother was really happy with what they call talking books, and are books in tape. Several people spoke about bedtime and relaxation reading, but they also refused that they learn from this. *"I just do it for pleasure"* was a phrase commonly used, and suggests that often people associate learning with a great mental effort.

Chapter 7 – Elderly library users and ICT

7.0   Introduction

This chapter examines the degree of elderly people's introduction in new ICT, as part of lifelong learning, within the public libraries.   ICT has become an issue that draws a lot of attention recently.   In the framework of the IT for All initiative that was launched by the Department of Trade and Industry (1998), research was carried out in order to identify people's mind-set towards ICT.   It revealed that 35% of adults in the UK, with the majority of this percentage representing elderly women, feel uncomfortable about it (Hendry, 2000). Moreover, Hendry (2000) stresses the importance of elderly people being computer literate. With reference to the fact that life expectancy has considerably increased, he states that elderly people are gradually becoming less flexible in their social activities and daily routines. Hence, ICT could be an essential tool that would enable them to locate and access the information they need in terms of healthcare, welfare, benefits, and rights.

7.1   Do elderly people use ICT in the libraries?

As results from the analysis of the past questionnaires of the National Survey titled Low achievers – Lifelong learners (Proctor & Bartle, [2001]), there were hardly any people using ICT for learning purposes.   The data collected throughout the study carried out in Sheffield and Thessalonica did not create a more encouraging picture.   From the 46 interviewees in Sheffield only 3 said they were using PC in the library and the two of them were using only the OPAC.   In Thessalonica there were no use of ICT in the public libraries investigated.

7.2   Why elderly library users do not use ICT

The basic reason why English elderly people do not use ICT is that they are not familiar with it.   *"I know nothing about computers"* and *"I am totally computer illiterate"*, where phrases that many a user utilised to describe their relationship with this aspect of the new technology.   Furthermore, the second most frequent answer to the question about whether they use a PC in the library, or not, was that they do not need it; *"at my age I don't think there is any use…perhaps it would be a bit of strain for my mental powers"*(English and Greek respondents).

However, 13 out of 46 English respondents claimed they have a computer at home, and that is the reason why they do not use it in the library.   *"I've got one at home, a big one…I*

find it very handy for getting other information from BBC" is one of the English elderly people responses, which indicates that lack of confidence in using the equipment is not the only cause of the problem. There were 6 of the respondents saying they use Internet and 5 of them CD-ROMs, at home, whereas Word processing appeared to be something more familiar to them, given that 10 people said that they use it to write letters, articles, their books. In addition, 4 people referred to playing games as one of the reasons they use a PC.

Only 6 respondents said that are not interested at all in ICT, stating things such as; *"I am really, truthfully not interested" "I used it at work, all things I had at work I don't want"*. On the contrary, there were many people expressing interest about it, and desire to learn; *"I think I would do a course if I had the chance. I do keep looking around for one you know…I think there are one or two local colleges that do it…but like everything popular there is a lot of asking…»* or, *"no I don't know how to use it and it is a big regret, only I wish I did, because when you are interested in family history computers is a wonderful advantage"*. Desire is often mixed up with fear that it is something extremely complicated; *"I would like to take a course now, but probably it's too late. I am a bit scared…"* and; *"I've been no good at computers…I am not into computers…I would be scared I'll do something wrong"*, *"No, I can't use a computer. I don't think to start, I would like but I am not going to cause I wouldn't feel comfortable" "I've got to the age now when I don't think I could take it all in, I might have taken a course 20 years ago"* (English respondents).

In Greece, the main reason why all the users do not use a computer in library is that ICT is not provided by the service. Although only 9 of the 17 respondents stated this particular reason, computers in the public library in Greece exist only as part of the automation of the library administration services, and they are located in the Central Library. There are no OPACs available in the branch libraries, and users cannot have any real contact with electronic equipment. Apart from the lack of provided equipment, it is the reality that elderly people are not familiar with ICT. However, only 5 of them said that are not confident with it, whereas two of them claimed that they do not need it.

Chapter 8 - How could libraries support lifelong learning and encourage the use of ICT?

8.0   Introduction

The potential contribution of public libraries in the lifelong learning of elderly people and their taking up of the ICT opportunities is the subject examined in this chapter.   The views of the sample investigated are first presented.   In this way, what kind of support elderly people expect from the library is portrayed.   Furthermore, some recommendations are made about what action libraries could take aiming at the promotion of lifelong learning and ICT. The chapter closes with a brief summary of the issues on which Greece could benefit from the experience of the UK.

8.1   Elderly people's views of potential library contribution to their learning needs

English respondents came up with a strong believe to the ability of libraries to encourage learning without altering the services provided.   They did not make significant suggestions, apart from comments related to the designated silent studying areas that should be provided, and in some cases they spoke about the self-understanding value of library as a learning environment stating; *"I think most people already know that, if they are clever they realise they need it"*.   They made reference to books that they consider a bit outdated, and attributed the delay of their renewal to funds shortage.   Moreover, they expressed their belief that libraries should demonstrate more their ability to support learners, because so far *"libraries do not promote themselves, they should have open days, they could offer support by teaching computers"*.

Greek users uttered that library encourages learning by offering *"books on various subjects"* and insisted that library should provide a more *"updated collection of books",* and *"acquire new books frequently and organize classes and lectures"*.   There were more specific requests about artistic workshops, and seminars on various topics.   Additionally, as users put it themselves; *"cooking books would be very useful, they are not enough provided"* and *"it would be nice if there were books on sewing, embroidering, cooking and household in general"*.

8.2 Public library potential support for learners

During the 19th century, at a time where the majority of adults in the UK were lacking sufficient education, public libraries acted as providers of self-guided education (Kelly, 1970 in: Smith, Shuter & Allred, 1987).   Since then a lot of improvement has been demonstrated in the education matters, but as Smith et al. (1987:11) accurately suggest, "librarians recognize that a large number of ordinary library users are engaged in independent learning".

The realisation stated above creates a certain list of learner's needs that libraries should meet in order to sustain their position as learning supporters in the new learning age. Information about available courses, seminars, and workshops should be provided to the library users, together with learning material (Smith, Shuter, & Allred, 1987).   Books, journals, audiovisual material, electronic sources, are things that normally offered by the library services.   However, on what concerns purposeful individual learning the provision of the material only is not sufficient to meet the needs.

From the narrations of the elderly people interviewed it is visible that staff support is fundamental for the encouragement of taking up learning activities.   It ensures that people remain motivated, and they do not feel on their own.   Therefore, guidance is necessary, so as learners to select the material which suits best their needs, to plan their learning activities, and to measure their progress (Smith, Shuter, & Allred, 1987).

Special training on ICT matters is also something essential, and it could be take the form of workshops, or/and individual instruction (Thorhauge, 1997).   The introduction of ICT services in all the public libraries and branches is a vital step towards the visualization of the updated public library of the information society.

8.3 UK and Greece

In the UK 73% of the public libraries investigated during the National Survey *Low achievers – Lifelong learner's* (Proctor & Bartle, [2001]) stated that provide or plan to provide support for adult learners, and 75% of them declared they promote learning opportunities.   In what concerns ICT, computer training was the most common service provided to adult learners, whereas electronic information retrieval training was only a little bit lower than basic literacy in the rates.

Greece is far behind in what concerns support of lifelong learning in public libraries. Although most English elderly library users regard the library as a valuable and essential learning provider, Greek elderly people seem to consider the library a treasure of static knowledge, which has not enough ground for vividly encourage and host learning initiatives. Therefore, the focus should be placed on the development of a culture of libraries for learning in Greece. Before any special effort for developing specific lifelong learning policies and implementing associated initiatives, a library promotion campaign should be made. Greek people should be primarily encouraged to review the role of the public libraries, as being local gateways to the new, information society. Moreover, they should gain faith to libraries, as having the potential to meet their individual learning, entertainment and recreation needs. With this purpose in mind, libraries should start offering a variety of quality services, in terms of updated collections, ICT equipment, learning support and guidance. Demonstrating what they could provide is the only way to attract people's attention and increase the number of their users.

Libraries should find their place they worth in the heart of the Greek society, so as to be able to develop and offer their full potential. In the UK libraries are the most popular public service (Audit Commission, 1997), in Greece is the one where less attention is paid. The state of mind towards libraries is what Greece should primarily learn from UK. Catering for the needs of the potential users and offering updated services is something that libraries will succeed in, as soon as their value is attributed back to them.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

9.0 Introduction

This dissertation discussed the experiences of elderly library users on lifelong learning and ICT.   With a view of understanding this user group's needs, so as to help libraries to develop appropriate policies for the promotion of these two issues, the present study examined the way elderly people use the public libraries in the UK and in Greece. It drew the conclusion that most English elderly people value significantly the library, and consider it a fundamental learning provider in the local community.   It also clarified the attitude of Greek elderly people on the same matter, showing that they show library playing the more passive role of a knowledge depository rather than an active promoter of learning opportunities.

9.1 Main conclusions

Although the percentage of elderly people in the total population of the country is the same for the UK and Greece, more elderly people were met in Sheffield Public Libraries. This fact demonstrates less elderly library users in Greece.   In addition, more women than men were visiting the public libraries in both countries at the time of the research.

The Greek elderly people who were interrogated appeared more academically qualified then the English ones.   However, English people demonstrated more energetic participation in purposeful lifelong learning.

English elderly people were more active library users, visiting library much more often that the Greek representatives.   Therefore, reduced opening hours it was a complaint expressed by English users.

Many English elderly users were visiting the library for studying, whereas Greek users refer mainly to the circulation service.   However, Greek people recognize themselves more easily as incidental learners.   In general, most of elderly peoples learning is individual, informal, and very often, incidental.

Elderly people in both countries learn mainly because of personal interest in the subject. They appeared to value learning even when they do not label themselves as learners, and to be enthusiastic about many topics and activities.   A main reason for their using the library is to fill their leisure time and cope with loneliness.   Family history, history, gardening, and

cooking are the four more popular learning subjects amongst the people interviewed, therefore libraries could offer learning opportunities on these areas of interest.

Elderly people use mainly printed documents, such as books and newspapers, and sometimes microfilms and CD-ROMs for information retrieval. They use library for learning because it provides a lot of material, staff support and it is a place where they can socialise while learning.

English elderly people are more familiar with ICT than Greek ones. They use ICT mainly for information retrieval and word processing. Elderly people often feel scared about technology, but also, willing to try provided that someone instructs them.

Elderly people are sensitive on what concerns staff support. They appreciate guidance and ask for studying areas, and library conditions that would encourage learning, such as silence.

Elderly people have a lot of spare time and they could use library heavily if they were offered learning opportunities.

9.2 Issues for further research

Due to limitations in terms of time and availability, this study has raised some questions that remained unanswered and they could stimulate further research.

What created a strong impression is the fact that although Sheffield has a multi-race population, there were hardly any people representing other races in the libraries investigated at the time of the research. The same conditions apply for immigrant people in Greece. In addition, disabled people were also absent. Why groups of people that could be at risk of social exclusion are under-represented in libraries is something that would be interesting to investigate, taking into account that libraries should be places that will ensure equal opportunities in information and learning, and promote social inclusion.

Another issue that could be explored is why Greek women where particularly over-represented in this study, in comparison to Greek men. What makes them use the libraries more than men it would be a matter for discussion. In addition, it worth examining whether and how peoples former qualifications, or the lack of them, motivates them to engage

themselves in further education.   In this framework the role of library should be deeper explored, and conclusions could be drawn about whether people are encouraged to use the library for learning when they have been assisted by it during their schooling years.

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