



e Learning

Project co-financed by the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture - "eLearning Programme"

e-LARA, e-LEARNING, ALPHABETIZATION OF RURAL AREAS

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2007

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR RURAL AREAS

1. RURAL AREA NETWORKS

One of the main problem regarding ICT access in rural areas is the lack of cheap high bandwidth Internet access when ADSL is not available. Alternative solutions exist but they are expensive and reserved for professional uses (eg. satellite access). On the other hand, Internet applications are more and more complex and require always more network speed to be useful in normal conditions.

Facing this problem, most of people are waiting for national operators to bring them the ADSL, village after village. The strategies among the different EU countries are different, some countries are widely covered or plane to do it, while others will never bring ADSL everywhere depending on geographical conditions.

Some communities could not wait for national strategies and began to solve the problem locally. It is the case for example with the RAN Group in France. RAN is the acronym of "Rural Area Network" (in comparison to LAN or WAN, local/wide area network). It is an informal community of people interested in wireless network connections (Wifi) and related topics. Their battle horse is to invite rural areas' inhabitants to set up themselves their network access, becoming their own Internet access provider. To achieve the task, the RAN Group members help other members to set up Wifi transmitters in different places (mainly in the country side), so that the network can grows from one point to another point. So they can share a single ADSL covered connection between several members living in the "shadow areas". They claim that this solution can provide a good Internet connection for a low cost, at the condition that people maintain the antennas and avoid some heavy practices like peer-to-peer applications.

Beyond the technical aspects, this solution brings some interesting side effects. The RAN Group members note that members become more implied in the social life of their area. The network requires regular meetings between members, and regular maintenance operations need to be planed. They are not just paying for a service, they decide and build it themselves. For that they have to contact municipalities, negotiate with local farmers to plant antennas in fields, calculate costs with potential new members, etc. The need to share technical information among the different RAN members of several regions, etc. The network generate social links instead of isolating people, like it generally does when each one pays for its personal Internet connection...

To know more about Rural Area Networks: <http://ran.pomeys.org>

2. A WEB SITE COLLECTIVELY MANAGED BY ISOLATED PERSONS LIVING IN RURAL AREAS: WHAT SERVICES FOR WHAT USES?

Famidac is a voluntary non-profit association of people who welcome at their home mental illness people or elderly people, when these people cannot stay at their home. The function is called in French "*accueillant familia*". It is a paid job, legally managed by the Departmental Council.

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Famidac gather 500 "accueillants familiaux" located in France, mainly in rural areas. The common point is that each of them have to stay home all day in order to help the people they welcome at home. To maintain a contact among Famidac members, the association built a web site in 1998.

At the beginning it was only some static pages spreading general information about the association. Now it is a real service managed voluntarily by 5 people. The association spread all the legal information about the profession, publish for free offers and demands of placement, maintain a public mailing list and a huge forum thanks to a pool of advisory members as moderators, share legal advises and information between members, etc.

The tools used are quite simple : free software (SPIIP CMS, Phorum forum manager, a *wiki* tool for internal association works) and a common web hosting. Now most of the activity of the association rely on the internet web site and telephone contacts, even if each year the association invites members to joint and meet for the annual meeting.

Half of the members are themselves elderly and confess to have problems with Internet. But this activity trend to involve younger workers (as there are employment problems with young peoples), who are more in care with Internet and on line services. Theses new members should find in these internet services good opportunities to maintain and empower their activities in rural areas.

To visit Famidac: <http://www.famidac.net/>

3. NEWS FROM EUROPE

- **The first e-Lara European conference** "e-learning and rural areas" took place in march 1st, 2007 in le Puy-en-Velay. The full report is available online at <http://lesrecontres.velay.greta.fr>. Audio files from speakers are available.

- In France, the *Villes Internet* group has decided, in collaboration with the national association of rural mayors. to create a new category for its ninth awarding edition (March 20th to May 15th). It aims at valorising the **rural areas** initiatives of Internet uses with for and by the citizens (rural meaning municipalities with less than 3000 inhabitants and rural groups of municipalities). The municipalities have to apply for this award filling an online questionnaire. Specific questions have been set up for the rural areas. In 2006, 29 communities with less than 3000 inhabitants had been awarded, one with the maximum of 5@. To know more about it: <http://www.villes-internet.net>

- **A blog about rural uses of internet** has been launched by the FING (The Next Generation Internet Foundation), the GRETA du Velay, CREATIF network and the DIACT (former DATAR, interministerial delegation for the development of territories competitiveness): <http://rural.fing.org/>





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- Tourism and technologies in Lozère

In rural areas, tourism is a driving factor for the use of internet, whether it is for local promoters of tourism activities who want to advertise on the internet or for tourists who need to access networks for services like e-mail, banking management, or short-term booking. Tourist want to access IT in dedicated centres but preferably in the place where they stay. Wireless solutions can be developed to provide free unlimited access. In the French department of Lozère the Lozère wireless plan has started. Tourism professionals and public access points can participate to this network by installing a hot-spot on their high speed connection. The web site www.lozere-wireless.com provides information to potential users and and to the tourism actors, it shows the locations offering wireless services. If the tourists are targeted by this initiative, it should also benefits to the inhabitants of these rural aras.

- In France, the circular of August 2nd, 2006 invites the prefects of departments to certify "**Public Services Relays**" structures that provide services to citizens, essentially situated in rural areas. The services concern mainly the fields of the social-security benefits and the help for employment. The Relay accompanies, if needed, the users of Internet or visio communication. These places can be managed by local authorities, by non profit groups or by mixed consortia. To know more about it: <http://www.vie-publique.fr/actualite/alaune/relais-services-publics-labellisation-lancee.html>

- Internet points in the Piedmont Region

Thanks to the infrastructuring process lead by the Piedmont Region with the programme Wi-Pie, the memorandum of understanding with Telecom Italia and the contribution of Csi-Piemonte, there are five mountain communities that can offer now a public service to navigate in internet with Adsl (Internet Point): Langa Astigiana and Val Bormida, Roccaverano (At), Valli Chisone and Germanasca, Perosa Argentina (To), Valle Vigezzo, Santa Maria Maggiore (Vb), Valle Maira, San Damiano Macra (Cn), Valli Monregalesi, Vicoforte Mondovì (Cn). The project objective is to offer a free access both to the e-government services available inside the Piedmontese Public Administration, and to the internet network. The access service is trough dedicated points situated in public places or trough wireless dispositives belonging to the citizens themselves (laptops, PDA, etc.)

- Course for open source solutions developers

The Equal partnership COMUNET has organised, among its project activities, the course for "Open source solutions developers for the Third sector". The COMUNET project intends to intervene on the problematics related to professionals qualifications and skills gaining for the Third sector operators, adequating their profiles and capacities for an active participation to the job market and increased competitiveness, favouring occupation and workers qualification in disadvantaged conditions concerning knowledge and use of ICT, projecting and experimenting innovative training paths for the no profit. The Course for "Open source solutions developers for the Third sector" aims at professional training of Third sector operators in order to permit their professional growth, enabling them to individuate the open source use in the Third sector and promoting open source among the no profit organisations. The course is free of charge. It foresees 100 hours of activity, of those 24 with a teacher (divided into 3 meetings: starting, intermediate and final meeting) and 76 on line. The course will start in April 2007 and will end September 2007.

For further information: www.equal-comunet.it

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