

Digital Society for seniors in Sweden

THE SITUATION IN 2019

The number of Swedes connected to internet has increased in 2019 and consequently, the number of people left in digital exclusion is decreasing. In 2014 about one million Swedes out of a population of 10 million were not connected.

Still half a million do not use internet at all - but another half a million use internet more seldom than once a day.

Few elderly people have Facebook and 1,5 million people do not have a Bank ID*. These are a few examples taken from a recent report from a survey made by *The Internet Foundation in Sweden*.

Age is the dominating factor to explain that part of the Swedish population does not connect daily (75 % are 65+ of age). But there are also other factors behind:

- Gender – a majority are women
- Income – a majority have low income
- Living site – a majority live in rural areas
- Education – a majority have lower education

Other factors observed are: being single, unemployed or on sick leave.

On the other hand, those who start to use internet do not stop doing so and those who start to use specific services (mobile Bank ID etc) do continue. Those born in the 1940's feel as involved in the digital society as those born in the 1960s did two years ago. The 1940 generation is increasingly connected in different ways. Those in the oldest group account for the largest increase.

One of the largest senior organization in Sweden (the SPF) has calculated the costs for having access to internet for a period of one year. The cost is over 700 euro per year and person, which is quite a heavy burden for most retired people. One major part of this cost is the investment of buying a computer/ smartphone and the rest is the cost for subscription of access to internet and sometime costs for repairing of the hardware. Of course, it is a question of priorities, but a majority of seniors cannot even think of buying a smartphone or a computer because of too low a pension. Statistically females earn about 25 % less than men and consequently they get lower pension. Single households are more frequent in Sweden than in other European countries. Living single means that you cannot share costs for internet connection.

For people living in rural areas there is also an initial cost of about 2000 euro to be linked up by fibre. In many places the traditional telephone net is already taken away and fibre

installation is often delayed by years (according to my own and others recent experiences from rural parts of Sweden)

The case of Uppsala Senioruniversitet (USU)

In 2016 - 2018 an Erasmus+ project (EduSenNet) was carried out at USU (through EFOS). A survey was carried out and a random sample of 10% of the USU members were selected to answer a questionnaire. The experience from this exercise is as follows:

Only 9 % of the sample did not have an e-mail address. The questionnaires were sent by e-mail from the USU office. The people of the sample were asked to complete the questionnaire and send it back by e-mail. Detailed instructions on how to do that were given. If they still were not able to return the questionnaire by mail, they were asked to send an e-mail or call the USU office to get the questionnaire by regular mail with a stamped return envelope. The 36 persons which did not have an e-mail address and another 20 persons who could not read the attachment got the questionnaire by e-mail.

“We had to realize that we had misjudged the computer skills of our members.” Even some of those who had an e-mail address could not handle attachments. A new questionnaire was sent by regular mail to the persons that had not answered the e-mail. (After this action almost 80 % did answer)

From the results of the questionnaire we got the following information about USU members:

- 93% had a computer
- 44% had an Ipad
- 68% had a smartphone
- 30% had a simple mobile telephone

At the same time we were informed that 18% of our members needed help to use their computers. (There were less persons who needed help with their Ipad's or smartphones.)

PROBLEMS

Implementation of digitalization

The fact that thousands of seniors do not have full access - for different reasons - to the Society and its different institutions is a kind of discrimination. Most people still can pay their bills with a simple invoice on paper, but it is becoming more and more costly and complicated year by year.

When old people need some sort of assistance, it is almost impossible to get in touch with someone to assist by a simple telephone call. You will be met by a mechanical voice telling that *”You are number 87 on a waiting list”*, or *”You should press 1 for xx and 2 for yy and 3 for zz”*. You will have to go to the home page of that institution/company, use chat or create a personal account/a profile or log in with a Bank Id. (Not only old people find this a difficult procedure.)

Members of the Society, who have been paying taxes during their whole life do not easily get in contact with Welfare Institutions - Welfare companies also lose customers.

The fast introduction of new technology has very much to do with the the interest of companies, who want to earn more money on selling new technology, hardware as well as software. Each individual has to ask her/himself questions about their own need for "this or that". Seniors have other needs than young persons. Each individual has to take into consideration how "climatesmart a smartphone is". How often do I need to buy the latest model? Is it possible to repair the old one? Do I really need what the new model will provide extra?"

To keep a smartphone and repair it for one more year will be equal to save hundreds of litres of petrol. A smart use of smartphone also has to be climatesmart!

Sociopsychological effects of digitalization

For many old persons there are now less and less opportunities in their daily activities to meet and talk with other people eg. at banks, when buying tickets, when shopping. People risk becoming more lonely when getting older, which is not good for your health. This is clearly underlined by the Canadian social psychologist Susan Pinker (*"The Village Effect"*). Living together in a "village"/human society means a longer and more healthy life. It is necessary to build an infrastructure within the society which makes it easy to develop social contacts

The more we have of digital technology, the more we get of a fragmented society. By the way we act in social media "*we establish our own rooms*" in the society, where others are not coming inside. This phenomena is studied by prof. Elin Wihlborg (Linköping University), who underlines that democracy means a bottom up process, where people have to listen to each other and solve problems together. A democratic dilemma will be the result if we are not aware of and find ways to solve this problem.

Life Long Learning and the internet

The SPF underlines the fact that as long as you are employed you get continued updating via your job or colleagues, but as a retired person it is up to each individual to get updated. The municipalities do not take any responsibility for the updating of retired people! The national policy is at the same time stressing the importance of Life Long Learning. There are national plans for some 100 "Service centers" in Sweden but even if this will be realised there will be too few and at too far a distance for many retired persons. There must at least be one digital help center in each municipality - easy to get access to.

The Internet Foundation started a pilot project in the town of Motala (Sweden) in 2017 and more than 15 municipalities are in the pipeline to start Digital Help centers for a two year period with funding from the Government. So far, the Motala project has been a success. "The *digital shame* among many older persons has been cured".

Many seniors feel ashamed that they do not know how to use and handle internet and thus feel excluded by the society if they do not get help, when needed. Digital shame can also lead to further isolation of seniors and be a hinder for inclusion in the society.

Think before implementation!

Ask the right questions at every step in the implementation process of digitalization. How to assure that half a million of the Swedish people can continue to live a safe and comfortable life in Sweden is an overall and national question..The planners for tomorrow´s society need not only to take into account whether a particular target group uses the internet or not, but also why, how and how often they do it and how experienced they are.

Questions like those are on a local level very relevant when Uppsala University of the Third Age is developing a program to offer digital support to its members through the SeLiD – project.

- **BankID**

Most public institutions in Sweden use the national identifier for individuals. It is the Swedish Tax Agency that manages civil registration of private individuals. Also Banks, Health Care, etc, use the very same identifier. The use of the identifier is so frequent that almost all Swedes remember her/his identifier.

There are few countries in the world that have such a wide spread use of national identifier. This has led to the success of the BankID. Almost all organisations, public as well as private, where a secure authentication is needed, today use the BankID.