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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN FINNISH HOUSEHOLDS

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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN FINNISH HOUSEHOLDS

Objectives of the project

1. A number of statements and position plans have been made by the public sector guidelines in order to develop the Finnish Information Society. Statistics Finland launched a project to measure ICT effects to everyday life. The basic aim was to examine the extent to which the Finns possess the skills required for participation in the information society by examining *their use of information technology at work, at school, and in the home* and the degree to which their capabilities correspond to the utilisation requirements. The second aim was to document the *Finns' experiences of the use of modern information technology*.

Sampling and estimation of the survey

2. The main material for this survey was gathered in November 1996 by a sample of 1,432 households with 3,782 members. Personal interviews were aimed at 3,488 persons aged 10-74 years. The interviews were based on an extensive sample covering the entire country and the results were adjusted to apply to all inhabitants by using non-response and correction coefficients. The costs were covered by Statistics Finland, a number of ministries and teleoperators. The non-response rate was 24.5% i.e. there were a total of 1,080 interviews for information on at least the technical devices in households and 2,362 personal interviews. About 1,600 of them gave a permission to give another personal interview later in 1999 or 2000.

3. Using modern information and communications technology requires that people should have an *access point*, i.e. the actual equipment and the necessary networks, the *skill* to use these and a sufficient degree of *motivation*.

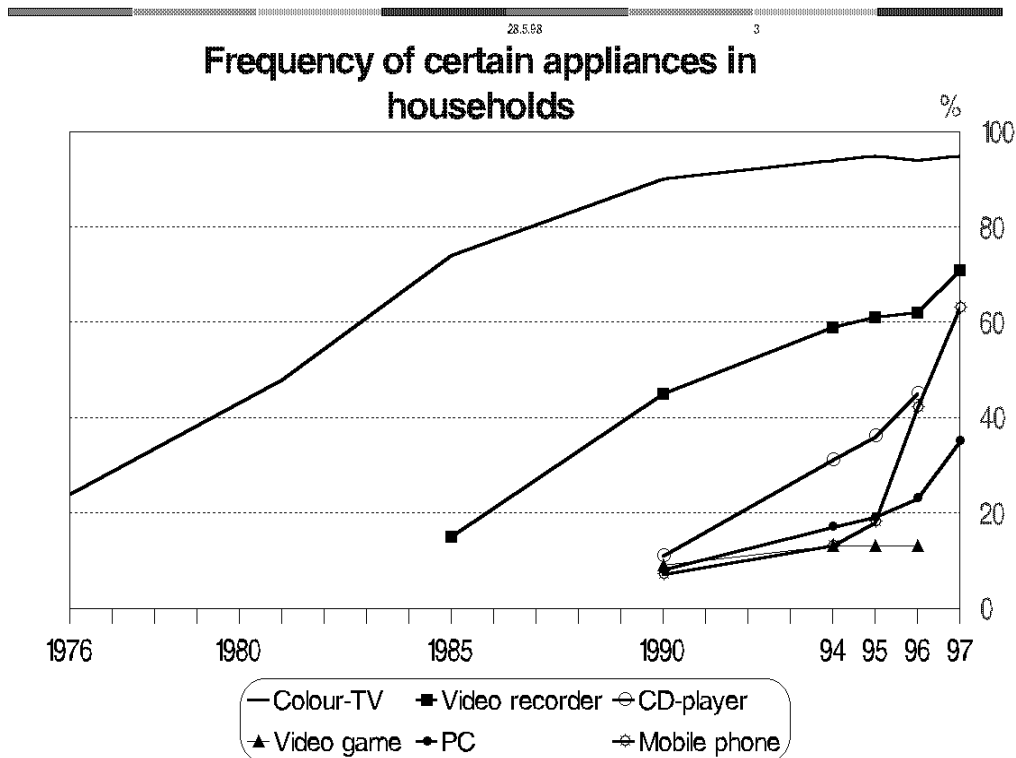
4. The questions covered the audiovisual equipment and ICT resources possessed by households, the use made of these and the respondents' experiences and attitudes regarding the information society. The questionnaire contained some 200 items on types of equipment and technology and the same number again on the use made of them and opinions regarding them. The number of questions put to a respondent depended on the types of equipment to which he or she had access at home, work or school.


Results of the survey

5. Two reports "The Finns and Modern Information Technology" and "Does Modern Information technology select its Users?" are now available giving the basic results of the survey. The next report, modelling of the spread of modern information technology into households, will be published at the end of 1998. The material has also been made accessible to a number of researchers outside Statistics Finland, from whom results can be expected in 1998 and 1999.

6. Households of different size and at different stages of their life span will differ in their decisions, purchases and actions regarding the adoption and use of ICT. The equipment resources are reported by single-person, two-person and at least three person households. Some major findings of the survey:

7. The percentage curves refer to households with at least one item of the given type.



 Statistics Finland

Source: Statistics Finland, Household Budget Surveys.

8. The mobile phone was relatively common in most types of household, particularly in young, small households. The popularity of mobile phones is also attributable to the large numbers of these used by people in their work, especially by men aged over 30 years.
9. The mobile phone has spread extremely rapidly and has reached a much wider range of 'social strata' than has the computer. In addition to its lower price, and the fact that its price has dropped substantially in recent years, it is easy to use by analogy with the conventional fixed phone. The spread of mobile phone has been accelerated by its use for work purposes. This may be attributable to changes in the nature of work, but also related to the fact that improved accessibility really improves working efficiency.
10. The home computer had gained a solid foothold among single men aged under 30 years, in two-person households of the same age and in families with children of school or student age.
11. Many home computers lacked a printer, the figure for computers with a printer being only 70%.
12. Boys aged 10-14 made up the only category in which a half of the respondents used a home computer daily, the figure being 2/5 among males aged 15-29 years. The use of a home computer for network connections was most common among young men aged 20-30 years.
13. Education in particular did not seem to contribute to the frequency of ICT devices at home. Income levels may play a role though young people and families with children possess these devices even their incomes were quite small. The equipment resources of single-parent families were quite good as compared with those of the other family types.

14. The use of a computer at work essentially reduces the inequality by sex and age. The results nevertheless give the impression that the computer skills and expertise gained at work are somewhat narrow and not very profound.

15. Sixteen per cent of Finns aged 10-74 have contacted information networks through library computers.

16. The ICT resources of households living in urban centres were better than those of households located in remote areas.

17. Attitudinal differences between the regions were high. Young people living in rural areas reported feelings of marginalisation from the information society more often than did those living in the other areas.

18. Half of the pupils at the primary level had access to a computer class, 89% of the secondary school pupils and 87% of the upper secondary school students. Only 43% reported that computers were available only in the computer classroom, which would seem to suggest that they have become a basic tool in a variety of classes. A total of 72% of the pupils and students had used a computer at school during the autumn term. The most widely reported task was word processing, the second most popular use were exercises of various kinds. Regarding the lessons during which the pupils had used a computer was named information technology, mathematics, physics, chemistry, Finnish and foreign languages, biology, geography, environmental studies, civics, history, art and music. It seems that the use of information technology has already established itself even as an integral part of foreign language studies.

19. Regarding the Finns' attitudes towards the information society almost 90% of them feel that the use of computers and network connections should be as easy as the selection of TV channels. Almost 66% felt that they would be satisfied with simple equipment without sophisticated features. The Finns do not feel that they have been overrun by information technology, 43% accepted the statement. Only 25% saw modern information technology as likely to increase the number of jobs available. The Finns seem to be quite unanimous about the potential for their interest in information technology to benefit their work, 87% agreed the statement. Most people, 88% were not bothered by the current flow of information.

Ongoing surveys

20. The numbers of mobile phones, home computers, modems, CD-ROM units and Internet connections are regularly surveyed starting from November 1997 based on questions added to the consumer barometer data collected in connection with the labour force survey. The number of home computers and mobile phones increased rapidly during the year in all household types. Over a half of all households had at least one mobile phone, nevertheless cars were still much more common, except in single-person households, which were more likely to have access to a mobile phone.

21. The rapid spread of home computers does not mean that households necessarily have access to multimedia or network connections: the situation was best in four-person households, over 40% of which had access to a CD-ROM unit and 25% to Internet connections. Approximately every third home computer had been connected to the Internet and some 60% of them had a CD-ROM unit.

More information

Nurmela, J. (1997). *The Finns and Modern Information Technology*, Statistics Finland, Reviews 1997/12, Helsinki 1997.

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