

# Impact assessment of the global ALADIN network

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## Abstract

ALADIN, the Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network, is coordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg. It was founded in 1997 to support the cooperation of libraries and documentation centres in the field of adult learning and literacy worldwide (UNESCO b). Thirteen years after its foundation, the first impact assessment of ALADIN was conducted through a survey questionnaire of all ALADIN members. The results of this impact assessment provide important background to inform future discussions on ALADIN developments.

**Descriptors:** ALADIN, Impact Assessment, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, UIL

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## 1 Background information

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg coordinates ALADIN, the Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network. The global ALADIN network was founded in 1997 to “support networking and capacity-building between documentation centres and libraries in the area of adult learning and literacy” (UNESCO b). It currently consists of 95 members from 47 countries (*ibid.*).

From March to August 2010 the first-ever impact assessment for the global ALADIN network was conducted within the framework of a research project at UIL. It took place at a crucial time for ALADIN as decisions were needed on how much human and financial resources should be invested in ALADIN in the future. Before presenting the ALADIN network and the impact assessment and its results and analysis, a brief overview on networking is given to highlight the advantages and challenges of a global network.

## 2 Global networking

The term “network” was used for the first time in the context of transport and traffic associated with rail, electricity and telephone. Later it became an important term in the field of information technology (Bienzle/Jütte 2008, p.7; Jurkeit 2004, p.37). In the context of this project it describes an international group of members cooperating on a voluntary basis to exchange information and work on common objectives, while remaining independent and autonomous (Starkey 1997, pp.14, 21). Networks can be divided into different types according to member composition, geographical coverage, structure or objectives (*ibid.*, p.15 ff.).

### 2.1 Important aspects of well-functioning networks

The starting point for a network is usually a specific problem or project in which several persons or institutions have common objectives (Chikurov 2000, p.3 f.; Jurkeit 2004, p.37). Those objectives need to be determined at the beginning of networking but may be revised and updated from time to time (Starkey 1997, p.31). However, it is also important to integrate members’ particular interests so that every member is satisfied with the work within the network (Bienzle/Jütte 2008, pp.8, 11; Starkey 1997, p.37). Another important aspect is that “networks need a committed core of active members who will take initiatives and be responsible for coordination, management and logistics” (Starkey 1997, p.33). To avoid over-concentration of power, the responsibilities within the network should always be spread between several members of the network (*ibid.*, p.36). Other important requirements for a network are a well-functioning communication among members, usually electronically, and regular meetings and other activities to get to know each other (Bienzle/Jütte 2008, p.11; Chikurov 2000, p.4 f.).

The following sections describe several advantages and disadvantages or risks of networks.

### 2.2 Advantages

One big advantage is that all members of a network have the possibility to exchange information and experience. As a result they can help one another and thereby increase their competences. Another advantage is that different groups of people or institutions dealing with the same subject can be brought together in one network. Finally, working together in a network can also reduce duplication of work by individual members (Bienzle/Jütte 2008, p.8 f.; Chikurov 2000, p.4; Jurkeit 2004, p.37; Starkey 1997, pp.15, 20).

### **2.3 Disadvantages and risks**

Despite the advantages there are also some disadvantages and risks concerning networks. For example, sometimes it can take quite a while before an agreement or solution can be found within a network. Evaluating networking can also sometimes be quite difficult (Chikurov 2000, p.4; Starkey 1997, p.29 f.). Other risks include, for example, that there are no clear objectives defined within the network or that the network members are too diverse in their capabilities and qualifications which could lead to difficulties in cooperating and finding common solutions. Another point that could cause trouble is if some network members assume too much control in the network (Starkey 1997, pp.21-24).

## **3 UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)**

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, formerly known as the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), was founded in Hamburg in 1951. UIL "is a non-profit international research, training, information, documentation and publishing centre" (UNESCO a) working on the topics of non-formal education, literacy and adult education and lifelong learning. Its documentation centre and library offers an international collection of more than 63,000 media units, mainly in English, followed by German, French, Spanish and other languages. A major project of the UIL Documentation Centre and Library is the coordination of the ALADIN network (UNESCO a; UNESCO c; UNESCO d).

### **3.1 ALADIN network**

The ALADIN network was brought into being in 1997 as a direct result of a workshop at the Fifth World Conference on Adult Education, CONFINTEA V, in Hamburg. The vision of ALADIN is that it "works for a global learning society, where information and knowledge on adult learning is created, well documented and made accessible to all". "The mission of ALADIN is networking and capacity-building of adult-learning documentation and information services for a global network of networks". Therefore "ALADIN works towards serving as an information broker between researchers/practitioners and policy makers". This is realized by "sharing relevant information on adult learning; correcting the uneven distribution of adult learning documentation and information resources; and providing training in adult learning knowledge management" (UNESCO b).

The ALADIN network is coordinated by the Head of the Documentation Centre and Library of UIL, in cooperation with the global ALADIN Task Force. This Task Force is composed of not more than ten active members from different parts of the world who meet up regularly at different places (*ibid.*).

## **4 Project realization**

Thirteen years after the establishment of the network, the first-ever impact assessment was conducted. The objectives were to find out how useful the ALADIN network is in general and how useful the individual projects and tools are in particular for the network members and which benefits arise from their membership. Another important objective of this study was to find out members' points of view on which topics ALADIN should concentrate in the future.

As a first step, the current situation and problems within the ALADIN network were analysed during several conversations with the ALADIN Coordinator at UIL to create a concrete basis for the impact assessment. Several aspects and issues were identified for consideration during the study.

To realize concretely the impact assessment, several empirical social research methods were considered. A survey by questionnaire was considered to be the best way as the 95 members of the network are spread all over the world. It was considered the most convenient and manageable way of reaching all members and to capture their opinions.

On the basis of the analysis of the current situation and future development of the network, several questions were compiled. This first step was implemented by developing a mind map. After this a draft version of the questionnaire was presented. This version was tested and corrected several times by UIL staff. In addition, it was also sent to the ALADIN Task Force for comments and suggestions for improvement.

After several corrections the final version of the questionnaire was ready to be sent out. It consisted of 22 questions, closed as well as open questions, was seven pages long and consisted of the following nine thematic blocks:

- General questions regarding the usefulness of the ALADIN network
- ALADIN Email Listserv
- ALADIN Website
- ALADIN Directory of Members
- ALADIN meetings and networking
- Capacity-building and training

- Languages within the network
- Future developments
- General information about respondents



## ALADIN Questionnaire

1. As a member of the ALADIN network, which of the following ALADIN instruments are useful for your work?

- 1 => very useful  
 2 => quite useful  
 3 => of some use  
 4 => not very useful  
 5 => not at all useful

	1	2	3	4	5	do not know
ALADIN Email Listserv	<input type="checkbox"/>					
ALADIN Website	<input type="checkbox"/>					
ALADIN Directory of Members	<input type="checkbox"/>					
ALADIN Workshops/meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>					
ALADIN Toolkit	<input type="checkbox"/>					
PALDIN	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Figure 1: Extract from the questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent out by mail in the last week of April 2010, together with an ALADIN brochure in English, French or Spanish and the current membership entry of the respective member. The membership entries were sent out to update the ALADIN Directory of Members, which was realized in parallel to the impact assessment. The deadline for sending back the questionnaire and the updated membership entry was fixed for one week after receiving the mail to avoid delay in answering the request. In the last week of May 2010 an electronic version of the questionnaire and membership entry were sent out by email together with a reminder, to increase the response rate.

## 5 Project results and analyses

From the 95 ALADIN members<sup>1</sup> who were asked to take part in this impact assessment, 36 returned the questionnaire. Of these, 20 members replied via e-mail, 14 members replied via mail and two members delivered the questionnaire personally. This number of responses corresponds to about 38% of all ALADIN members. A higher response rate was hoped for, but it was also expected that several members do not have or do not take the time to fill out an 7-page questionnaire. It is interesting to note that 52 members returned the update for their membership entry, showing that 16 members showed interest in updating their membership information, but did not take the time to fill out the questionnaire. Additionally it has to be taken into account that some answers were received after the deadline, for example with one member stating that they received the questionnaire letter three months after mailing it. It is remarkable that the response rate from North America was very low, whereas members from Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America made more effort in answering (five of 13 ALADIN members from Africa; six of 15 members from Asia/Pacific; one of two members from Arab States; 15 of 38 members from Europe; two of 15 members from North America, six of 12 members from Latin America/Caribbean and one not reported). This is particularly surprising as one would expect a lower response rate from poorer countries due to postal and electronic challenges. It could be assumed that ALADIN has a higher relevance in poorer countries as they

<sup>1</sup> All the following data and results are based on the impact assessment on the ALADIN network.

see more advantage in being an ALADIN member. Members in North America might need less support from a global network as they have their own networks, training opportunities, support and so on.

All in all it is difficult to base a statistical analysis on a group of 36 answers, and the number of responses cannot be considered as representative for all ALADIN members. Nevertheless conclusions can be drawn from the results of this survey for the existing and future work of the ALADIN network. Below, individual components of the ALADIN network are presented, together with the most important results and analysis of the impact assessment.

## **5.1 ALADIN Email Listserv**

The ALADIN Email Listserv is the main communication platform within the network. During the impact assessment on ALADIN a statistic<sup>2</sup> was created considering the different senders, the number of mails and the mail topics within the Email Listserv for the period of March 2004 to April 2010. In this statistic it became clear that the ALADIN coordinator is the main sender of messages or the broker between other members and the Listserv. The main topics of the messages are information on relevant websites, databases, publications and information on relevant conferences and meetings. As for responses to messages within the Listserv, most concern the free sharing of surplus publications.

For the ALADIN impact assessment the most important questions relate to how useful ALADIN members consider the Listserv to be, what kind of information they appreciate and whether there is any information they would like to have which is not yet included in the Listserv.

### **5.1.1 Results and analysis**

The results of the impact assessment show that the ALADIN Email Listserv as a whole is, on average, considered to be quite useful among responding ALADIN members and is always read by about 31% of them. According to respondents, the most useful information which is disseminated over the Listserv is information on the ALADIN network itself, followed by information on relevant websites, databases and publications as well as on relevant projects, conferences and meetings. Research requests and the sharing of surplus publications seem to be less important. Interestingly, most of the responses within the Listserv are on offers of surplus publications, so probably the sharing of surplus publications as well as the researches sent out via the Listserv are of interest and of use only for particular ALADIN members.

Regarding future work within the network, keeping the Email Listserv active is considered to be the most important task for the future. According to network members, information and news from and about individual network members and relations between members could be useful additions to the future Listserv. Another point would be to include reports and case studies on national, regional and global ALADIN workshops and meetings that have taken place and various ALADIN projects that have been implemented. For particular ALADIN members it would also be interesting to receive information about publications and other information resources concerning or published in a certain region, or information on institutes working in a certain region. Another idea for future supplements was interactive realtime discussion on specific topics such as adult education and globalization or civic participation and engagement.

## **5.2 ALADIN Website**

The ALADIN Website, which was set up in 1998 and completely updated and redesigned in the first half of 2008, provides general information and the latest news about ALADIN. In addition, the electronic version of the ALADIN Directory of Members is integrated into the website and in November 2002 about 200 Adult Learning Links were added to the website. Those links are grouped by format (for example links to databases, reports and statistics) but also by topics in the field of adult learning (for example literacy, health or special education). Another section presents two different training tools, PALDIN and ALADIN Toolkit (UNESCO b).

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<sup>2</sup> The statistic was created on the basis of the ALADIN Email Listserv archive.

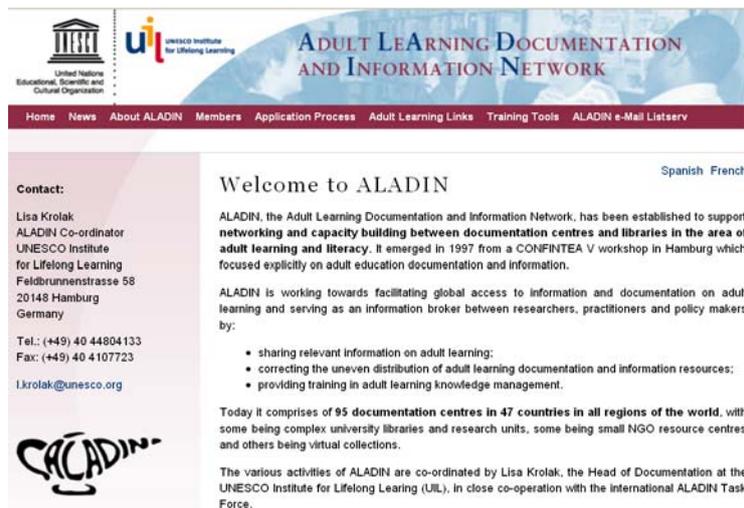


Figure 2: Extract from the ALADIN Website

### 5.2.1 Results and analysis

Among network members the ALADIN Website as a whole is considered to be quite useful. The most useful parts of the website are the current ALADIN news, followed by general information on ALADIN, and Adult Learning Links. The information on the training tools PALDIN and ALADIN Toolkit seem to be less important to respondents.

### 5.3 ALADIN Directory of Members

The ALADIN Directory of Members is currently available in two versions: an electronic version of the ALADIN website and a printed version, last updated and distributed free of charge to all ALADIN members in 2007/2008. The printed version contains one entry for each network member (91 in the 2007/2008 directory), including a short description including contact data as well as, for example, the size and type of collection and some basic institutional data. The printed version of the directory also gives general information about ALADIN and lists its history from 1997 to 2005 (Krolak 2007; UNESCO b).

With regard to the directory, the most important questions within the impact assessment concern which of the two versions, the printed or the electronic one is preferred among network members and which information in the directory is considered most important. The answers to these questions are very important for future development, because updating the printed directory is much more time-consuming and expensive than updating the electronic version.

While conducting the impact assessment, the ALADIN directory was updated, the first update since 2007/2008. Each ALADIN member was asked to check and correct their current membership entry, if necessary. As a result of this update, members who did not answer and were not reachable, and those who expressed no further interest in being a member of the ALADIN network, are to be taken out of the network to ensure its currency.

#### 5.3.1 Results and analysis

About 53% of the respondents occasionally use the Directory of Members. The electronic version of the directory is preferred by about 53% of the respondents. Below the advantages for both the electronic and printed versions are summarized.

Pros for the electronic version

- It is practical, user-friendly and environmentally-friendly as well as more up-to-date compared to the printed version.
- It is easy to disseminate.
- It provides easier and faster search options and functions, so it is easier to search for a member and find the information needed.

Pros for the printed version

- It can be accessed at anytime and anywhere, whether there is electricity, internet or not.
- It can be placed and shared, for example, in a library and it is easier to browse.

ALADIN members particularly from Africa (four out of five responding members) prefer the printed version of the directory to the electronic version for the reasons mentioned above. It can be assumed that this is due to limited access to electricity and to fast internet connection.

The main purposes for using the directory are summarized below:

- To search for and get in contact with other members working in the same field – national, regional and global
- To share information, experience and materials or work together in projects
- To find information about publications and data on adult learning and literacy in the world
- To understand the most useful data management systems

The points above confirm what was stated in the closed questions of the questionnaire, that the most important parts of a membership entry in the ALADIN Directory of Members are the contact information and short descriptions of member organizations. For the future development of the network, keeping the membership information up-to-date is considered to be important by respondents. It is recommended to continue producing a printed version of the directory as there are members who prefer it to the electronic version.

#### **5.4 ALADIN meetings and networking**

Since the beginning of ALADIN in 1997, 20 national, regional and international meetings and workshops have taken place, for example at international adult learning conferences, by various regional members meeting to discuss and implement projects at regional or national level.

To better understand the many different faces of ALADIN members and its work, two ALADIN members will be briefly presented as they could be important forerunners for the future development and organization of the ALADIN network according to their special method of operating.

- ALADIN-India was brought into being in March 2005. Currently the national network is composed of 47 documentation and information services dealing with literacy and adult learning in India. National workshops for the members of ALADIN-India are organized on a regular basis and the network runs an Email listserv. ALADIN-India developed the training-tool PALDIN, already mentioned (UNESCO b).
- ACCU-LRC (Literacy Resource Centres for Girls and Woman Network) is a regional programme established in 1994 by the Asia / Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO, ACCU, in cooperation with UNESCO and its Member States in Asia and the Pacific region. The LRCs were established to provide information, material and training on literacy and non-formal education for government agencies, NGOs and other organizations. Currently the ACCU-LRC network consists of 18 members (2007) from 17 countries in Asia and the Pacific region (ACCU; UNESCO b).

Looking at the successful work of those two ALADIN members one question concerning the future development of the ALADIN network is whether ALADIN should focus on international projects and meetings or should concentrate more on and strengthen national or regional projects and meetings in the future.

##### **5.4.1 Results and analysis**

The results of the survey show that only 25% of the responding ALADIN members have ever taken part in an ALADIN meeting or workshop, but 50% of the reporting members have already met other ALADIN members or networked with them. Currently the ALADIN workshops and meetings are not considered as useful as, for example, the ALADIN Website or the ALADIN Email Listserv. Also the number of “do not know” answers for the section on ALADIN workshops and meetings is quite high compared to other network components. However, organizing international ALADIN workshops and facilitating regional and national ALADIN meetings and projects are considered to be an important part of the future work within the ALADIN network. Strategically it might be more effective to focus more on strengthening national and regional ALADIN projects and meetings. For example ALADIN-Nepal was established in June 2010 (UNESCO b) and there are plans for the German ALADIN members to meet for the first time and consider the establishment of ALADIN Germany.

## **5.5 Capacity–building and training**

### **5.5.1 ALADIN Toolkit**

The ALADIN Toolkit is a training tool that was developed to support those who have less or limited skills in the field of information management and would like to improve their skills. The development of the ALADIN toolkit was discussed in detail for the first time at the ALADIN Toolkit Workshop in Cape Town in September 2004. The ALADIN Toolkit Website went online in October 2005. Its content is based on the outcomes of the workshop mentioned above. The website is split into several sections. One section contains a special checklist for the establishment, organization and management of a documentation centre plus recommended training manuals, available as full-text. A second section offers cataloguing tools like a basic ALADIN classification and a basic cataloguing template which was developed in 2007, based on cataloguing software offered by UNESCO free of charge. Another part of the website lists information and contact details for several donation agencies and funding sources (*ibid.*). The ALADIN Toolkit is referred to when requests are received on assistance for setting-up basic libraries and documentation services. The impact assessment should clarify if the Toolkit is known among network members, if it was used by members and for what purpose. Network members were also asked to indicate if they need or would like to have any other support or training on specific topics that could be offered by ALADIN in addition to the ALADIN Toolkit.

### **5.5.2 PALDIN**

PALDIN (Participatory Adult Learning Documentation and Information Networking) was developed by ALADIN-India during 2006-2007 in order to extend the skills and capacities of staff working in the field of adult learning. The training tool consists of 31 different units containing self-learning materials on adult learning and literacy, including units on information management. In 2009 a 6-month Post-Graduate Diploma in Adult Education (PGDAE) based on PALDIN was launched at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (*ibid.*).

### **5.5.3 Results and analysis**

The results of the impact assessment show that so far about 19% of respondents have used the ALADIN Toolkit. Their reasons for using it are summarized below:

- For re-organizing an adult education collection at a university or organizing and managing a documentation centre
- For collecting/sharing information with the communities that they serve
- To refer students to it when asked about setting-up resource centres for their organizations

Based on the high number of “do not know” answers concerning questions on the ALADIN Toolkit and PALDIN in the survey it can be presumed that both of the toolkits are unfamiliar to many of the ALADIN members.

Apart from the toolkits some other training needs were mentioned by the respondents and are summarized below:

- Help on information technology in general, help with data management techniques/systems and online cataloguing systems
- Training on the ALADIN Toolkit itself, planning and management of resource centres and libraries, materials development, dissemination techniques of information/material, methods / techniques to motivate target groups
- Workshops and conferences on information retrieval in educational databases as well as for capacity-building
- How to work in European projects and networking strategies
- Developing an adult literacy curriculum

Concerning future work within the ALADIN network the topic of capacity-building and training as a whole is mentioned as important. One future task within the ALADIN network should be to increase the visibility and accessibility of the ALADIN Toolkit and PALDIN. This is particularly so as some of the additional training needs mentioned above can be already addressed by the ALADIN Toolkit and PALDIN.

## **5.6 Languages within the network**

Asked about the languages that ALADIN members understand, English was indicated by all 36 respondents, in addition French was indicated by 13 respondents and Spanish by 11 respondents. Fifty per cent of the respondents would like the ALADIN Website to be translated into French and Spanish in addition to the English version. Translations of the ALADIN Membership Information (indicated by about 28% of respondents) and the ALADIN Email Listserv messages (indicated by about 22 % of the respondents) were also suggested. The translation of the ALADIN Brochure and the ALADIN training tools was in each case mentioned only once by respondents. However, 17 respondents did not answer the question concerning the translation of ALADIN tools into a Spanish and French version.

## **5.7 General advantages of being a network member**

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were asked to list general advantages of being a network member. Answers are summarized below:

- Getting/searching relevant and updated information concerning adult learning, lifelong learning and education, useful for own work or for clients
- Getting in contact with other institutions worldwide, sharing experiences, information and materials, learning from each other, working together in projects and supporting each other. "Re-invention" of the wheel is avoided.
- To have good lessons from workshops/seminars
- To use the materials developed for adult learning, literacy and library management
- Sharing of duplicate material, that would otherwise not be available
- Strengthening their own library/resource centres and having an opportunity to create a good literate environment in their own community
- Capacity-building of personnel through sponsorship to the Coady International Institute's resource centre management certificate course

## **5.8 Further comments**

At the end of the survey, respondents were free to give further comments. Some are summarized below:

- Make provision for information to members about organizations or countries requesting qualified persons to assist in the area of adult literacy/education
- Regular meetings and brainstorming would be a good idea.
- Maybe ALADIN could be integrated in social networks such as facebook?

Concerning areas of future concentration within the ALADIN network, the following two suggestions were mentioned as being very important:

- Fundraising for members
- Exchanges or assisting members to work for other organizations or countries

## **6 Conclusion and outlook**

The results of this study give very important information to assess the past and current work of ALADIN and discuss future developments with key stakeholders. Overall the ALADIN network and its individual projects and tools were evaluated positively by respondents. According to the results of the impact assessment the most important tasks for the future are keeping the ALADIN Website and the ALADIN Directory of Members updated and maintaining an active ALADIN Email Listserv.

Other projects and tools of ALADIN are considered to be less important, but are nevertheless appreciated. An important aspect that becomes apparent from the results of the impact assessment is that in the future less prominent ALADIN projects such as the ALADIN Toolkit and PALDIN need more visibility. International meetings seem to be less important than national and regional ALADIN projects and meetings.

Having such concrete answers from more than one third of all ALADIN members will be very helpful to shape the future work of ALADIN according to their needs and wishes.

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