Closing the digital gap:

Study visit on e-skills and e-inclusion

15 October

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Introduction

More and more societal activities rely on access to computers, the internet, and the skills to use them. This can mean that those who already have limited means or who are more vulnerable may find themselves even more excluded if they are unable to use ICT tools to apply for benefits, housing, training and jobs. Programmes to combat poverty and social exclusion therefore should take into account the digital divide.

This report is based on a study visit on e-skills and social inclusion, which took place on 15 October in Bordeaux, and was attended by over 15 representatives of large European cities. It explores city initiatives to close the digital gap. The report is divided into three sections:

Part 1 describes the Bordeaux Digital Bus, which was the central project of the visit. It goes out to the city's most deprived areas to provide access to ICT equipment and digital skills trainings.

Part 2 describes the projects from other cities that were presented during the study visit:

- Digikriebels - from Ghent develops the e-skills of children, parents and grandparents.

- 'A society in which I am learning and feeling good' - from Rijeka is on access to ICT tools and skills for the elderly.

- Sheffield Community Network - a project that helps to create and safeguard jobs in the city by supporting entrepreneurship with digital skills.

- 'Faster than I can handle' - Utrecht's approach to help vulnerable citizens keep up with technological developments.

Part 3 presents a set of key messages that arose from the discussions among the participants at the feedback session.

The report concludes that city administrations are strategically well-placed to develop e-inclusion projects that address specific needs, especially since combating digital exclusion often requires tackling a range of different, interconnected challenges. The specific strength of local administration lies in its ability to build and promote broad and innovative partnerships to match the expertise of various stakeholders with the different issues that need to be addressed. An ongoing challenge lies in the constant need to connect issues, policies and stakeholders, working in a transversal way both within and outside the city administration.

Recognising the urban dimension of the challenge, and the pivotal role of the city in tackling digital exclusion when setting strategies and targeting funding will help ensure coordinated policy, and contribute to closing the digital gap in a more effective and efficient way.

Part 1: Bordeaux city's Digital Bus

To improve access to ICT for residents living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the city of Bordeaux launched a Digital City Bus project, with computers, internet and e-training provided on-board. Moving between three different neighbourhoods of the city, the Digital City Bus combines accessibility, visibility of services and proximity to the residents.

Context

As more and more societal activities rely on access to and the ability to use ICT, digital exclusion can further exclude those who are already poor and vulnerable. A 2014 survey[1] on digital technology highlighted that 20% of the French population does not have access to ICT and as a consequence lacks basic ICT skills. This has important consequences on an individual's social and professional inclusion, as it can prevent them from identifying and applying for benefits, housing, and training opportunities and jobs, as these activities often require the ability to use ICT tools. The digital dimension is an important factor in combating poverty and social exclusion.

Local policy

'Bordeaux Digital City' is a strategic framework to promote digital development in the city by fostering the growth of online services and e-government, and improving the digital infrastructure. The framework has 10 working priorities, one of which is a 'digital solidarity' axis to combat digital exclusion.
Under this axis, the city has developed different initiatives to overcome social inequality through e-inclusion. The starting point is to promote access to digital tools and help people develop basic ICT skills. The Digital Bus project is one of the tools used to achieve this.

Project summary

The Digital Bus provides access to and training on ICT skills to people in disadvantaged areas. The service is designed based on a 'low threshold approach', meaning that as many barriers as possible, both physical and psychological, are removed. There are no complicated application and registration processes to access the services provided by the bus. This makes access straightforward and quick for the resident.
To improve the accessibility of e-learning services for vulnerable groups, the Digital Bus travels to three of Bordeaux's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods Les Aubiers, Grand Parc and Bastide. All of the districts have a high proportion of people with a migrant background. The bus visits each neighbourhood one day per week and is always parked at the same location in the neighbourhood, close to the local library. The project partners (see below), provide information to the residents about the bus, its arrival times and what services it offers.

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1 [1] *Les Français et le numérique*, Baromètre INRA 2014 – TNS Sofres. Available at : file://sec1/Users$/SOCI/Downloads/Barometre2014_DOSSIER_PRESSE.pdf [in French]

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9h30   11h30   13h30   15h30   17h30

Each day, the Digital Bus provides two training slots of two hours each, and three hours when computers are available on a 'first-come, first served' basis. Training sessions are mainly designed for new computer users and cover topics such as using a word-processing programme or creating an email address. People who would like participate in a training session register by phone. A maximum of five people can use the computers on the bus at any given time and a maximum of eight people can participate in the training sessions. Ten different training topics are offered which change from week to week:

INTRODUCTORY MODULES (in the morning)	ADVANCED MODULES (in the afternoon)
1. Guided tour of tools and equipment, basic IT vocabulary 2. Internet basics: how to connect to the internet (3G, 4G, WiFi), how to search/browse 3. E-mail: creating an account and using Gmail 4. Data retention: saving, organising, file formats 5. Security: understanding web-security issues, anti-virus programmes	6. Word Processing: writing and formatting in LibreOffice Writer[2] 7. Carrying out administrative procedures through the local authority portal (bordeaux.fr) and the national public services portal (service-public.fr) 8. Transporting and downloading files: using USB sticks and cloud 9. Using social networks (Facebook, Twitter etc.) 10. Internet tools to simplify your life e.g. google search, online forums, e-learning platforms

Project partners
The project is an initiative involving cooperation between a number of city departments and other stakeholders;

- The city of Bordeaux

- The IT System and Digital Innovation department manages the project.

- The Urban and Social Development department manages the relationships with local associations.

- The Public Libraries department coordinates the services provided by the bus.

- The public libraries in the target neighbourhoods provide the Digital Bus with access to the city Wi-Fi network.

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[2] LibreOffice is a free and open source software, developed by OpenOffice

- Social landlords are the local government owned companies which own the majority of social flats in the target neighbourhoods. They also have an interest in reducing poverty and exclusion in the neighbourhoods and making the management of the buildings easier.

- Local and community associations working on social issues and social centres play an important role in engaging hard-to-reach residents using their insider knowledge of the community in the target neighbourhoods. They are also part of the communication strategy of the Digital Bus project and the monthly conferences.

- A private partner, the cable operator Numericable, was already collaborating with the social landlords to provide a social offer on internet access[3]. The company provides communication materials and a system for managing the registrations for the trainings.

Funding

The two trainers who provide support and training in the Digital Bus are city staff. Bordeaux City Council provides funding for the bus equipment, such as ICT materials and electricity supply (around €30,000). The private partner cover the costs related to communication materials (e.g. flyers) and the system to register for the trainings.

Contact

Daniel Penicaut – Project coordinator

Email: d.penicaut@mairie-bordeaux.fr

Website: http://citedigitale.bordeaux.fr/solidarite-numerique.html#.U8-Lu_mSyVM

Discussion

Following the presentation of the Digital Bus, the study visit participants provided their feedback. The features highlighted as the most commendable were:

- Easy access and movability: the bus can be where it is needed, and where it will be most utilised.

- Proactivity: in reaching out to the community, the services come to the people, not the other way around.

- Flexibility: the bus can cater for any technology and for the needs of any resident. It can accommodate a range of technological solutions and provide different courses.

- Innovative partnerships: working together with social housing landlords as a trusted intermediary with an intimate knowledge of the target group was perceived as a strength of the project.

Whilst working with social housing landlords was seen as a strength, the participants also highlighted that social landlords could be more likely to refer and encourage those who are more ready to benefit from the Digital Bus. There could be a risk that people lacking language or literacy skills would be overlooked, and considered not yet able to benefit

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[3] The 'social offer' provides internet access (2MG) and phone with in-calls only, for 3 euros per months. This is added to monthly flat charges and available to all inhabitants of the social flats. In return, the social landlords cover the costs of distributing the cables in the building, and the cable provider Numericable can make profit on selling other products to the tenants who can afford it.

from engaging in the project. These could be the groups even more digitally excluded and in need of an intervention.

Part 2: Project from other cities

Four projects were presented in the second part of the study visit. This chapter will cover them in the following order:

2.1 Digikriebels from Ghent – develops the e-skills of children, parents and grandparents.

2.2 'A society in which I am learning and feeling good' from Rijeka – a project on access to ICT tools and skills for the elderly.

2.3 Sheffield Community Network - a project that helps to create and safeguard jobs in the city by supporting entrepreneurship with digital skills.

2.4 'Faster than I can handle' – Utrecht's approach to help vulnerable citizens keep up with technological developments.

2.1. Digikriebels -Ghent

Digikriebels aims to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds develop adequate e-skills by providing equipment and online educational games. The project engages parents and grandparents to help them understand ICT and in turn allows them to support their children.

Context

Children from families with lower socio-economic status often have fewer educational opportunities to develop ICT skills. This digital gap is an educational setback that can influence their future educational attainment and impact on their life chances.

The disparity in e-education opportunities arises not only from a lack of access to digital tools, but also from the fact that vulnerable parents lacking digital skills are less able to support children in learning. Often these parents are less involved in general in their children's education, with weaker links to the school. The home environment is very important for the educational attainment of a child. Children from poor socio-economic backgrounds are at a higher risk of developing numeracy and literacy problems.

Project activities

The Digitkriebels project offers educational online games to pre-school children, and works with families to ensure children receive educational support in both gaining e-skills and making the transition to the first grade of primary school. The project also organises access to multimedia equipment to help development of e-skills in a fun and creative way.

Educational games

Digikriebels provides a web based collection of educational games. The games support the development of a range of motor and computer skills, for instance practicing mouse movement and use of keyboard arrows through games involving catching objects or colouring pictures. Many of the games teach computer use whilst also improving numeracy and language skills.

Support to parents and grandparents

To support parents and grandparents in their role as educators, Digikriebels teaches them digital and media literacy skills. This increases their self-confidence in this area and also provides them with tools to practice various skills such as mathematics and language with children at home. The courses are organised on school premises, so parents can stay for a few hours after dropping their children off at school in the morning. This removes many barriers (e.g. the need to register and get to another place), making it easier for parents to attend. Embedding the courses in schools also strengthens the relationship between the teachers and parents. The course is comprised of four classes during which parents or grandparents are introduced to the website of the school and the educational games on the Digikriebels website. They learn how to use the computer, which can lead to discussions and learning about many other media literacy aspects. During the final lesson, parents are encouraged to practice the use of the website together with their children. Professional interpreters support parents during the course. The extensive use of icons on the website also helps parents whose Flemish language skills are not well developed to use the tools.

Digital toolboxes

The project provides Digiboxes. Each Digibox contains digital equipment and a series of guidelines for fun hands-on activities to discover multimedia and explore what the digital world has to offer (see below for content and activity examples). Schools can borrow the Digiboxes free of charge to organise multimedia workshops for parents, grandparents, and their children. The Digiboxes are used to inspire children and their families to discover their digital talents and also as a method to encourage children and parents to keep using multimedia tools after the Digikriebels course has ended.

E-books Watching and listening to digital picture books.	**Gaming** Playing tennis and other sports in the classroom on Wii.	**Digital photography** Making animal portraits with a digital camera.	**Educational games** Discovering website based educational games on www.Digikriebels.be
Digital school board Drawing huge pictures with Tux paint.	**Recording sounds** Recording a song with a Media player.	**Digital video** Creating a reality TV show.	**Tablets and apps** Discovering apps to practice literacy and numeracy skills

Outcomes

Between 2010 and 2014, Digikriebels provided 125 lessons and supported 180 pre-schoolers and 173 vulnerable parents. After attending the Digikriebels course, 40% of parents signed up for another adult education course, which was a largely unexpected spin-off effect. The courses vary from Flemish, English and French language courses, ICT, mathematics, job search courses, childcare courses, and courses to obtain a driving license, which can increase both labour market prospects and independence.

Partnership and funding

The Digikriebels project is provided in cooperation between the city of Ghent – 'brugfigurenproject' (a project to create a bridge between home and school), a regional adult education institute 'CBE Leerpunt Gent-Meetjesland-Leieland' and Digitaal.Talent@Gent, the e-inclusion program of Digipolis, a non-commercial inter-municipal ICT services organisation.

Each project partner contributes to the Digikriebels project with activities, which are covered from each organisation's own budget. Evens Foundation grant for European media literacy projects[4] provides funding for certain costs related to those activities.

Partner	Activities	Partners	Evens Grant
Digipolis	Hosting / editing site & project management	own budget	
	Upgrading Digibox materials		1.300 €
CBE	120h teaching	own budget	
	Printing & transport		300 €
Brugfiguren project	130h coaching	own budget	
	Interpreters		4.400 €

Contact
Sara Van Damme – Program coordinator Digitaal.Talent@Gent
Email: Sara.vandamme@digipolis.be
Website: www.digikriebels.be

2.2 "A society in which I am learning and feeling good" - Rijeka

The project reduces the digital exclusion of the elderly by providing ITC training and equipment in elderly day centres.

Context

In Rijeka, 22.25% of the population is over 60 and the city's average age is higher than the Croatian average. In response, Rijeka adopted a healthy ageing strategy to improve the social integration of elderly people.

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[4] This is a grant for projects to include actively parents or grandparents in media education activities. The Evens Foundation stimulates efforts to increase media literacy in Europe to contribute to the development of highly aware, active and responsible citizens

The elderly population often have weaker psychophysical capabilities and can be in a difficult financial situation. These factors can put them at a greater risk of digital exclusion. This leads to difficulties in using city portals and in accessing information on social benefits, social services and other public sector information. Before the start of the project, the elderly day centres were not equipped with adequate computers and only five out of twelve had internet access. On a daily basis, an average of only 0.4% of the day centres' members were using computers.

Project activities
To promote social inclusion of its senior residents, the city of Rijeka decided to equip its elderly day centres with ICT equipment and develop adapted ICT training for this target group. The city also created a dedicated web portal for the elderly and a web application aiding access to social assistance.

Establishment of Digital Services Centres
Digital Services Centres were established in the city's fifteen elderly day centres, providing computers, printers, cameras and free internet access.

ICT training
The city developed ICT training modules for elderly people, with basic and advanced educational modules. The participants learn basic computer skills, including Word processing, working with spreadsheets and how to use the city's online services. In addition to the formal courses, mentoring is also organised in the day centres, during which the elderly receive help from volunteers in an informal and relaxed environment.
To accommodate different needs, aurally impaired people receive special assistance during the courses. For elderly people with visual impairments, special software and training on using it are available.
The city of Rijeka has also established a helpdesk and training support procedures. A dedicated position was created in the city administration to take care of equipment maintenance and to provide IT support and informal classes in all day centres.

Web portal for the elderly
The dedicated web portal (http://penzici.rijeka.hr) features useful information for the target group, such as advice on health and healthy ageing, social and legal protection, and information about cultural events. It is therefore a tool to foster social inclusion and the well-being of elderly people in ensuring that they stay active, are able to participate in social life, and are not at risk of isolation.
To make the website creation a participatory process, each of the day centres was given a space on the portal to report on its activities. Each club has organised a small web editorial team that creates content for this space. A 'Top Online Pensioners' competition encourages greater activity on the portal. The jury declares winners at the end of each year, based on the quality and quantity of the content created. The winning day centres receive cash prizes while individual contributors receive thank you letters. The portal is

maintained by the editorial board composed of two employees with the IT support provided by the city of Rijeka.

Social programme web application
The city of Rijeka created the 'eBenefits Calculator'[5] to facilitate access of citizens to social benefits. The application provides a needs assessment and information on social benefits that the user is entitled to.

Project outcomes
Overall, the project has contributed to the social inclusion of the elderly. They use more information from the internet and participate in new activities, making new acquaintances and decreasing isolation. They also have improved access to digitised city services new knowledge of ICT. Since 2005, more than 2,500 Rijeka residents (the elderly over 65 years of age, housewives over 55 years of age, war veterans, social benefits recipients and people with disabilities) have received ICT training.

Since 2012:
- 77,000 visits to the web portal were recorded.
- 258,000 pages were opened.
- 770 articles were published.
- A pensioners' group on Facebook was created and currently has more than 2,500 friends.

The project has received an award from the Association of Croatian Cities, which recommended that similar projects be implemented in all Croatian cities.

Funding & partnerships
The project is 70% financed by the city of Rijeka. The rest of the finances are provided by two EU projects, the e-Government for you (EGOV4U) and Speeding Every European Digital (SEED) funded under the Information and Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP), a sub-programme of the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme.
The project is delivered in partnership with two associations, the 'Matica umirovljenika' Association, a network of nine day centres, and the 'Home for the Elderly and Disabled', a network of six day centres, which are in charge of implementing the project in the day centres.

2.3 Sheffield Community Network – Sheffield
The Sheffield Community Network (SCN) project aims to develop local digital facilities and business incubators to support growth of social enterprises and private businesses throughout the city, with the focus on disadvantaged areas.

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[5] https://e-usluge3.rijeka.hr/apex/f?p=101:2:0::NO:::

Context

Sheffield's over reliance on large industrial employers in the past has had a negative impact on the overall socio-economic situation as these industries went into decline. Small and medium enterprises can help mitigate this risk. However, self-employment rates in the south Yorkshire sub regions have remained below 10% over the past decade, which is below the national average of 14%. At the same time, Sheffield has a large number of people excluded from the labour market. There is also a need to positively engage with the numerous minority communities and promote mutual understanding between different groups. At the same time, the city has made a number of investments in ICT infrastructure, which remained under-utilised and thus the city region was failing to capitalise on them.

Project activities

The Sheffield Community Network (SCN) responds to economic inactivity and unemployment by stimulating digital entrepreneurship in deprived areas. It promotes the use of ICT tools and infrastructure, providing incubation space, and business and training facilities. It also ensures that digital business opportunities are extended into disadvantaged communities.

Development of 'Digital Media Centres'

The project supported the establishment of a 'Digital Media Centre', with 12 separate units across Sheffield in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. They assist individuals with an idea for a new business and new and existing social enterprises to increase their digital engagement.

The centres provide digital media hubs, an open access space with computers and AV equipment, which act as free hot-desking for businesses and social enterprises. The project also offers training courses at the centres, to help people acquire digital skills linked to their business projects. In addition project business partners who work in the creative digital sector provided business support, mentoring, and advice to the entrepreneurs through one-to-one sessions and newsletters.

Grants to support entrepreneurship

The project has provided two types of grants to support people from disadvantaged backgrounds in setting up enterprises. The 'Digital Media Centre Grant' went to local voluntary and community groups and allowed for some room refurbishment and funds to employ a business adviser for one year. The 'Social Enterprise Equipment Grant' funded the purchase of specific digital equipment in cases where the business support programme assessment identified that this would fast-track business growth. A grant panel comprising of business experts, representative of the council, local voluntary organisations and universities selected project proposals for the grant.

Digital content infrastructure

The digital centres provide access to a city-wide virtual platform, which hosts tools for web development, podcasting and webcasting, and knowledge sharing facilities to support entrepreneurs, including a:

- Digital Content Exchange website - an open digital library for sharing resources.

- Virtual Community Network - a web streaming, recording and video conferencing service accessible to everyone. It helps promote Sheffield businesses to a global audience and facilitates social inclusion by enabling non-traditional users to access these tools.

Research and innovation strand

The SCN also has a number of research strands to help establish a better understanding of the digital use and needs of Sheffield's population. Research projects have been used to test and demonstrate new and innovative digital tools and strategies to improve internet access, support digital inclusion and promote entrepreneurship within deprived communities and disadvantaged groups.

Outcomes

ICT equipment worth €683,000 was placed in the twelve 'Digital Media Centre' units. Over 500 people attended knowledge sharing and practical advice sessions on enterprise creation and business. The Social Enterprise Support Programme and two grant schemes have led to the creation of new businesses and new jobs, as well as to safeguarding existing ones (see table below). The total investment made to date is €699,589.

	Current position	Forecast by mid 2015
Jobs created	52.5	55
Jobs safeguarded	43.5	50
Businesses assisted	77	100
Businesses created	21	51

Partnerships

The Sheffield Community Network was managed by a group of representatives from the EU, central government, local government, and various businesses from SMEs to micro-businesses. The final evaluation showed that this cross-sectorial approach was a successful, coherent and innovative method of working.

Funding

A total of €3.1 million from the European Regional Development Fund was matched with €3.1million from the Sheffield City Council.

Contact

Robert Walker – Project Manager, Sheffield Community Network
Email: Robert.Walker@sheffield.gov.uk
Website: www.sheffieldcommunity.net

2.4 Faster than I can handle-Utrecht

The rapid digitisation of private and public services can put citizens at risk of exclusion, if they are insufficiently able to use ICT. In partnership with public and private organisations as well as volunteers, the municipality of Utrecht is developing a programme to decrease the digital divide in the city.

Context

National figures indicate that at least 10% of the Dutch population lack the digital skills to use essential public and private online services. This poses a threat to social cohesion, participative democracy, and economic innovation. Organisations, public and private, can miss citizens (or customers), due to the digital gap. Utrecht is therefore investigating how many people lack basic digital skills in the city, who they are, and what they need. This is significant given the fact that the city of Utrecht plans to digitise all its public services by 2017.

Project activities

The Utrecht project aims at reducing the digital gap by enabling as many citizens as possible to use and benefit from digital services. It does this by providing basic media-literacy training and improving accessibility, legibility and attractiveness of the services. The city also addresses the concerns of the users on privacy and data protection.

Current educational programme to increase digital literacy
There are currently many educational initiatives in Utrecht aimed at acquiring digital skills, ranging from courses to workshops and lectures. Several educational organisations; neighbourhood training centres, as well as central and neighbourhood libraries offer them. Courses are generally focused on people with low levels of literacy, people with cognitive limitations, and elderly people.

Volunteers supporting the programme train to use the digital educational programmes and to recognise language deficiencies, which prevent some beneficiaries from learning ICT.

The current educational programme is implemented by:

- Educational and welfare institutions: which are responsible for access to the target groups and venues for the courses.

- City services: which are responsible for contact with the target groups and responsible for setting the strategy in the field of digital literacy.

- Utrecht public library: This is a central information point for basic skills courses, helpdesk for digital questions, venue for computer and tablet courses as well as thematic workshops and events.

- Volunteer organisations: which are responsible for selection, management, and training of volunteers to teach the digital educational programme.

Addressing data protection and privacy concerns
Alongside the educational programme, Utrecht also facilitates the local debate with NGOs and citizens who are increasingly concerned about their privacy in the use of public

and private digital services. Although legislation on protection of personal data is quite advanced in the Netherlands, questions arise due to the double role of the government, as both a public service provider and a law enforcer.

To address these concerns in an open and transparent way, the city of Utrecht participates in public debates on this topic organised by Studium Generale (the discussion platform of the University of Utrecht), in libraries, and local NGOs such as SetUp (an association for digital culture and innovation). The city has also recently appointed a privacy officer who advises the local government on the implementation of privacy laws, handles questions or complaints from citizens, and participates in public debates on privacy. The privacy officer also represents the local government in the Studium Generale debates.

E-inclusion 2014-2016 - towards public-private partnership

Between November 2014 and April 2015 Utrecht City Council commissioned research to identify the number of people lacking basic digital skills in Utrecht, and nature of challenge. Digital exclusion can be caused by a range of issues, including lack of basic literacy, numeracy and language competence skills. No one organisation can solve the issue on its own. The city of Utrecht is bringing together stakeholders and establishing a network to gain an in-depth understanding of the underlying issues, to share responsibilities in addressing them, and to use the strengths of all stakeholders to come up with the most efficient and effective package of measures. The network will further develop and implement the project.

The organisations in the network are:

- Public and private organisations that are moving towards increased digital provision of their services (such as the local government, banks, and electronic ticketing organisations for public transportation).

- Representatives of the target groups (such as neighbourhood social centres, language training centres and libraries).

- Innovative businesses and academics that are specialised in improving digital skills and media-literacy.

The first phase of the Utrecht project (2014-2015) is to find out, with the partners in the network, how many people lack basic digital skills, what the reasons are for a lack of basic digital skills, what motivates people to learn basic digital skills, and what methods best suit different groups. The project then maps all solutions currently implemented by the partners and identifies what is missing. The city wants to identify opportunities for collaboration with partners in reaching specific target groups, and for developing new approaches and services (e.g. game-based learning tools). The project will initially be funded by the network partners, whilst seeking national and European co-funding.

Contact

Peter Budel (Social inclusion)
Email: p.budel@utrecht.nl

Muriël Pels (European affairs)
Email: m.pels@utrecht.nl

Part 3: Conclusions

Based on the exchanges at the study visit and its closing session, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Addressing digital exclusion is increasingly important. Gradual but steady digitisation of public and private services puts people at greater risk of exclusion. Digital skills are also a prerequisite for participating in many every day activities; in employment, in searching for a job, and in education and schools. The digital sector also has huge job creation potential, which cities can capitalise on, by supporting businesses and entrepreneurship in disadvantaged areas.
City administrations increasingly see e-inclusion as an integral part of combating poverty and social exclusion. In response, they design projects to assist their vulnerable citizens in accessing ICT tools and skills and to enable and support entrepreneurs and social enterprises in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

2. Addressing digital exclusion requires a holistic approach. Those who are at risk are already vulnerable and a range of issues has to be taken into consideration. These include:

- basic competences which are needed to use ICT, such as literacy and numeracy,

- cognitive and mental barriers,

- language barriers,

- childcare issues, and

- parental support and home environment in early childhood education.

City administrations, as the level of government closest the people, are well placed to understand digital and social inclusion issues and how they are interconnected. They can design services to provide what is really needed, making projects more effective and efficient.

3. Combating digital exclusion is complex and requires innovative approaches. Some success factors for digital inclusion projects at city level identified during the study visit are:

- Proximity to users and ease of access

- Flexible services, to respond to specific needs of vulnerable groups

- Embedding the e-inclusion projects into a broader city e-strategy.

Broad and often innovative partnerships and building networks of local stakeholders was identified as a key success factor, for example working with social landlords, business partners, schools, educational institutions and elderly day centres. People experiencing digital exclusion can be hard to reach and a trusted intermediary with an intimate knowledge of specific neighbourhoods or even individuals can be invaluable. Each partner

brings in different knowledge and expertise. City administrations are strategically well-placed to broker such partnerships for successful e-inclusion projects.

These effective partnerships require that the groups working on social issues are better connected with those working on digital issues. The former do not always have the knowledge of digital issues, whilst the latter can lack knowledge and experience of supporting vulnerable groups. Creating mutual understanding, learning terminology used by people working in different fields, and creating a culture of transversal work in the city administration is all important.

4. A range of different elements are needed to combat digital exclusion, including know-how, infrastructure, hardware, software, staff and financial means, strategy and political will. City administrations cannot combat digital exclusion alone. The EU and national governments can help when setting strategies and allocating funding, by recognising the urban dimension of the challenge and the pivotal role of the city administration in tackling digital exclusion.