

DIGITAL LITERACY

A KEY QUALIFICATION IN THE GLOBAL COMPETITION

Today, more than 250 million Europeans are regular visitors to the Internet. Despite this enormous figure there are still around 250 million Europeans who do not have access to the Internet and are excluded from its use. This digital divide cannot satisfy. Especially regarding the Lisbon Strategy's objective to develop Europe into the world's most dynamic and knowledge based region. If Europe wants to achieve this goal it is important that the people of Europe are suitably qualified. The efficient use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) like the Internet and mobile media is a decisive factor. These pivotal technologies are progressively driving social innovation, growth and competitiveness.

Only recently the World Wide Web has celebrated its 15th anniversary. At the beginning nobody could imagine which key role it was going to play regarding the acquisition and distribution of knowledge. Nowadays a life without ICT is almost unimaginable for most European citizens. Digital information and communication technologies are continuously making convenient access to information and maintenance of relationships faster, more extensive and more up to date. New Web 2.0 technologies provide extensive scope for virtual cooperation as well as for the formation of social interest groups. Thanks to the Internet, social contacts are maintained and active help is provided to shape processes within society and business world. Anyone who is excluded from these media does not have the option of participating in this rapid development. An up-to-the-minute and comprehensive knowledge of digital media is an essential prerequisite for personal success.

It is true that sociodemographic and economic factors such as age, sex, advantages at birth, income and the overall educational environment still have a major influence on whether, how and to what extent people make use of information and communica-

tions technology. If equality of opportunities is to be achieved, measures for digital integration of disadvantaged groups must focus on teaching digital literacy: more and more, it is becoming the key qualification to equip a society for the future. It is consequently all the more important to develop efficient methods and reliable standards to facilitate common development in the various regions and guarantee sustainable global competitiveness.

SPreaD – A European Initiative to Strengthen Digital Literacy

Against this background, three project partners – MFG Baden-Württemberg (D), the Directorate General for Modernisation of the Valencian Region (ES) and the Centre for the Innovation of Education and Training CINOP (NL) – have pooled their resources in the framework of the



(Picture: doit-online.de)

SPreaD initiative co-financed by the European Commission to exchange knowledge and experiences and collaborate on the development of a toolkit. Six best practice projects (“start und klick!”, “klick – mach mit!”, “do.it regional”, “Internauta”, “compeTIC”, “Elektronisch Leerdossier”) that have already been successfully realised in the partner regions served as the basis for the SPreaD toolkit. It describes innovative approaches for planning and implementing large-scale digital literacy programmes and provides a wealth of useful information.

Parallel to work on the toolkit, the project consortium has built up a European network of experts in the field of digital literacy. This network bundles European ex-



pertise and acts as a source of additional support by sharing its members deep knowledge and experience with other educational institutions who have not yet such large experiences in setting up digital literacy initiatives.

Challenges for the Future

Within the context of lifelong learning digital literacy is becoming even more important. Especially the use of digital media open new and better educational opportunities by offering new forms of knowledge management and forms of individual and social learning. It was never so easy to get access to up to date information and to exchange knowledge with others by using web 2.0 applications. But on the other hand digital media bear the risk of not being used responsibly and capably by everybody. Especially low educated groups as well as elderly people require further support in this context. The need of new initiatives respecting the special needs of these groups is still very large. Initiatives, such as SPreaD, give practical hints for setting up and realising large scaled educational projects.

“The New Digital Literacy” is also the subject of the [SPreaD final conference](#) in Stuttgart (D) on 10 July 2008.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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