

Chapter 112

Information Policies: Agenda for Digital Inclusion in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

EU policies for digital inclusion outline strategies and action plans based around the implementation of a digitally inclusive society in its member countries. The governing principles of these policies are based on the concept of a knowledge society for everyone, with no place for digital divides that might threaten cohesion and prosperity in Europe and, as such, these policies must encourage greater use of the Internet, increase broadband coverage, promote digital literacy and uphold the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. In 2010, the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Regions Committee, publishes the Digital Agenda for Europe, (2010). A key document that outlines the European policy for ICTs and establishes the priorities of the EU in this area until 2020. The purpose of the Agenda is to outline a space that allows maximization of the economic and social potential of ICTs and specifically Internet as an essential support of society.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews decisions, strategies and plans of action of the European Union in digital inclusion policies. In this framework, we proceed to establish a short diagnostic on the guidelines for implementing these policies based on the principle of a society of digital inclusion for all, avoiding the digital gap that affects Europe's cohesion and prosperity. Then we analyze the European Digital Agenda as an essential policy whose purpose is to draw an area to maximize the economic and social potential of the ICTs, especially the Internet. We will stress that the ultimate purpose of this Agenda is promoting innovation, economic growth and the improvement of the knowledge society. Finally, as an added point of reflection, we discuss Spain's Digital Agenda and its importance in the digital inclusion society.

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DIGITAL INCLUSION IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

From a historical point of view, over the past century we have witnessed huge changes in the field of science that have been driven by new technology. As a result, these changes have brought cognitive resources, knowledge and research to the heart of the development of knowledge societies.

On an international level, this vision of the future was detailed in the last UNESCO Global Report, in 2005, entitled *Towards Knowledge Societies*, in which scientific research was highlighted as an implicit activity in the knowledge society project.

At the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in 2003, UNESCO supported the idea of one single and global knowledge society, reflecting the trends at that time and defining a vision of a desirable future. However, its current view is that this society will only manifest in its truest sense if it becomes a means of supporting the construction of multiple knowledge societies that provide ethical and practical responses to key human development issues. In the words of Koichiro Matsuura, the Director-General of UNESCO, “*the Report emphasises the need to renew an ethic for the guidance of emerging knowledge societies, an ethic of freedom and of responsibility. An ethic that, let us repeat, will rest upon the sharing of knowledge*” (UNESCO Report, 2005, p.6).

In this respect, the 2005 Report’s focus on knowledge societies highlights two key premises on which the entire document is based:

1. It suggests that we are currently immersed in one type of knowledge society and need to evolve towards a knowledge society in which all different fields of knowledge are interconnected and able to evolve alongside scientific and technological progress.
2. It offers the following distinction between an information society and a knowledge society: *if the first is based on technological progress related to communication, knowledge societies encompass social, ethical and political dimensions. Knowledge societies are referred to in plural in recognition of assumed cultural diversities.*

In fact, diversity and creativity are equivalents in a true knowledge society in a virtuous cycle breakthroughs in knowledge generate more knowledge thanks to technological innovation. As is widely known, information and knowledge are indispensable to creation, giving rise to what Manuel Castell defines as *a cycle of accumulative feedback*, understanding that shared information grows and multiplies of its own accord. As such, it appears that connections must be established between research and action so that communication and information can be used to foster knowledge transfer. It is also clear that current realities need to be recognised in order to make proposals for converging channels, respecting and emphasizing diversity at the same time.

Elaborating on this point, it is important to remember that the most recent theories of economic growth point to knowledge as a production factor seen in all the most effective production and organization methods, and in the best products and services. This all suggests that infrastructure plays a decisive role in boosting productivity and that the development of such infrastructure requires a great deal of scientific knowledge, which, in turn, tends to generate new knowledge.

In this circular society, where information generates more information and knowledge innovation creates more knowledge, broader access to information is essential for creating knowledge and reducing inequality among citizens, (Cuevas-Cerveró, 2014, 35-48). Along these lines, and from diverse branches of academic and intellectual knowledge, there is a growing consensus that new Information and Com-

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