Chapter 11
Discussion on Digital Inclusion Good Practices at Europe's Libraries

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the social role of digital libraries as agents to promote digital inclusion is discussed. It analyzes how European policies of promotion of the Information Society, aimed at digital inclusion were developed and incorporated by the European Libraries, mainly through projects and efforts for the dissemination of good practices. Assuming a broad concept of what good practice is, some experiences considered good practice for digital inclusion in the various stages of this process in European Libraries are shown. Dissemination of good practices has had uneven success without having established a stable formal and institutional channel that favors it.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are one of the major pillars in our society for their outstanding role in different phases of the information cycle (selection, access, dissemination, preservation), as well as their contribution to the cultural and educational life of the citizens. Since the emergence of the Information Society (IS) this role has become a key factor, in particular in the area of digital inclusion and, therefore, in the efforts to achieve social inclusion for all.

The European libraries have been adopting policies of impulse of the Information Society in the EU, since they are aware of their role as a cornerstone in this process, adapting and expanding their services to traditional users. In general, this feeling has been planned taken into consideration its function as educator and facilitator agents for social inclusion. The importance of each of these aspects has varied depending on the type of library: national libraries and heritage libraries have become more involved in accessing to their documents through its digitization, promoting their use in the field of culture and research, through digital libraries; the university libraries have opted for information literacy for the

university community; public libraries are those that have had and continue to have an activity more closely to the promotion of digital inclusion, as a result of their social function, that inspired its emergence in the 19th century.

However, despite the recognition made of the role of libraries in the documents issued by the EU in relation to their key position, few efforts global nature have been made to promote it, strengthen it and create support networks that enable European libraries sustain their activities providing free access, digital literacy and lifelong learning for social inclusion. Most of the initiatives are developed at local level, been implemented and carried out thanks to the efforts and motivation of librarians that are who, aware of the needs of their users, plan new services. Many of these activities are not known beyond the limits of action of the libraries. Others have transcended through its links to projects, awards or broadcasting through existing collaborative networks or publications. Knowing about these activities, their scope and outcomes obtained in their development allows the dissemination of good practices and, therefore, improves their reuse elsewhere with a guarantee of success, providing they are adapted to the local context.

The European Union is a supranational body formed by European countries considered members of the developed world. Since the proposal of its first policy to promote the Information Society in 2000, e-Europe 2002, as a means to achieve that all citizens can benefit from their advantages in the future, the EU as a whole has been making great strides. And this, even though they have not been as fast as desired due to the incorporation of members with poor figures in digital inclusion. The challenge that is facing at this time was explained with great clarity by Neelie Kroes, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda, in a conference on Innovation for Digital Inclusion some years ago (2011):

Soon, 90% of jobs, whatever the sector, will require some level of digital literacy. But about 25% of all EU citizens have never touched the Internet. And Internet usage is particularly low - 20% lower in fact – among groups like the elderly, the poor, the lower-skilled and the unemployed. Even though these groups are more likely to be excluded in other ways, and would stand to gain the most from getting online. This link between digital and socio-economic exclusion must be kept in mind, because a "digital divide" could have significant social and economic consequences.

At present, end of 2014, the percentage of non-users is 20% according to the latest published data (European Commission, 2014). The Digital Agenda for Europe has a key performance target to decrease by half the number of non-users from 30% in 2009 to 15% by 2015. We are very close to 2015 and reduce this figure a 5% in a year is probably an overly ambitious goal.

Libraries are not alone in this effort. There are other agents involved in it, of various kinds, but none of them has a network so homogenously spread over Europe. Consequently, they are able to act as a general distribution system across the EU: a circulatory system that distributes the good practices throughout the country in both directions, successful ideas and implementation, to increase the effectiveness and the results obtained.

BACKGROUND

In 1994 UNESCO and IFLA adopted a revised version of the Public Library Manifesto (UNESCO, 1994). The Manifesto proclaimed UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture

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