

**Vit@I Society**

**MANIFEST**

on

**THE SOCIAL USE OF ICT**

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**De InformatieWerkPlaats**, the Netherlands  
(EQUAL project *My Portfolio Online*)

**LIKTA**, Latvia  
(EQUAL project *Training Unemployed People in Latvia*)

**Peabody Trust**, London, United Kingdom  
(EQUAL project *Thresholds*)

This Manifest is the result of collaboration by the Vit@I Society transnational partnership consisting of project teams working in the Netherlands, the UK and Latvia, supported by the EU EQUAL programme.

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## **Social Use of ICT**

The use of ICT is moving into a new phase of 'social use', beyond uses which are essentially individual and functional. We believe that this social use of ICT will play an increasing role in overcoming barriers to social inclusion and creating dynamic and competitive economies. It enhances the ability to actively participate in social, cultural and economic networks. The social use of ICT will be at the heart of a vital society.

## **Strengthening citizens and their communities**

A new generation of digital tools and services has broadened and extended the benefits of a wired society by stimulating the relationships between individuals. It shows a fundamental shift in focus from an individual 'end-user' to the citizen and his or her community. These tools stimulate social cohesion and break down barriers to social inclusion as they support participation, communication and cooperation in personal networks for increasing quality of life.

## **Need for new policy**

It is our contention that the social use of ICT has such an important role to play in creating a vital society and a competitive economy that it should be stimulated and encouraged as a fundamental capacity. Current policies build the necessary prerequisites in high quality access and skills. We believe new policy is needed to address and develop the new possibilities.

## **Raising awareness**

There are a number of challenges to creating new policy. The first being to raise the awareness among policy makers that the social use of ICT provides citizens with the ability to increase their quality of life. We propose that new policy should be developed and resources allocated to the promotion of awareness and the stimulation of social use of ICT that empower citizens to realize their potential and contribute to a vital society.

## **Recommendations**

We propose that the EU and national, regional and local governments should target policy and resources to actively develop the social use of ICT in order to overcome exclusion and improve social cohesion. Our recommendations for developing the social use of ICT are:

## Awareness

- We recommend a shift in perspective that centres on the use of ICT by citizens (a citizen's perspective). This shift recognises that ICT has wider application than commerce and access to mainstream government services (an institutional perspective).
- We recommend measuring and monitoring not only access to computers and the internet but also the effectiveness of their use by and for citizens.

## Skills

- We recommend that ICT training should aim to develop not only functional, but also strategic skills that allow citizens to use ICT as a mean to improve their quality of life.
- We recommend more innovative approaches to ICT training with more extensive outreach to digitally excluded groups and special programmes that connect to the ambitions of the participants.
- We recommend improving awareness and skills among professionals on the social use of ICT.

## Services

- We recommend monitoring the availability and quality of e-services (access, diversity, transparency, safety, content) from a citizens' perspective, and to stimulate the way they are used by citizens.

## Funding

- Because the social use of ICT involves a range of disciplines across the public and private sectors, funding and control can be challenging. We recommend that the multidisciplinary character of the social use of ICT should be recognised and addressed through targeted funding streams.
- The EU and national governments should establish special agencies or programmes to stimulate, fund and support initiatives on the social use of ICT by citizens.

## Pilot projects

- We recommend that funding be made available for a range of pilot projects to demonstrate the value of the social use of ICT. These projects should be supported to create models which can be replicated throughout the EU.
- To create replicable models such pilot projects should enable research and stimulate the development of methodologies.
- Special attention should be paid to up-scaling experiences from small to larger scale implementations.