

# “CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC INTERNET CENTRES (PICs) TO ADULT EDUCATION IN EUROPE”

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## Comparative Study on Anti-Discriminatory Practices in the Public Internet Centers from Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

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### **1 The Study**

In the five countries participating in our transnational project Grundtvig, 40 PICs underlined their anti-discriminatory access. This is a limited overview and does not allow giving a general appreciation of characteristics in each of the countries. The social structures are different and complex from one country to the other and the lack of research on PICs makes it impossible to come to a generalized appreciation. Therefore this cannot be the objective of this study.

Despite of this general remark the study of the 40 projects allows to recognize general principles, trends, target groups, problems and interesting approaches.

### **2 General data and facts**

#### **Approaches to identify the projects**

Among the 40 projects identified 8 are situated in Spain, 4 in France, 9 in Italy, 13 in Germany and 6 in Czech Republic.

The approach to identify interesting projects varied from one country to the other. In Germany there was the chance to build on the existing data base of 8000 PICs elaborated by the foundation Digitale Chancen ([www.digitale-chancen.de](http://www.digitale-chancen.de)). This data base uses a search engine which allows identifying PICs on the basis of a variety of criteria from address to target groups, qualification of staff, activities, etc. This database gave also the opportunity to establish the typologies most represented in Germany. The situation in the other countries was not so easy. In Czech Republic and in Italy the first approaches were to look for centers belonging to the partner

organization of the project itself, in France belonging to the popular educational movement and in Spain to public administrations and networks on different levels.

## **Target groups**

Nevertheless the study allowed identifying the main groups considered to be in risk of digital exclusion and targeted by the centers in order to diminish discrimination:

The following groups have been mentioned by the PICS

- socially disadvantaged people
- people in rural regions
- unemployed people
- women
- young people / children
- elderly people over 55
- disabled people
- migrants - migrant women

Some of the PICs just address one of these categories, others several and some of them are considered to be open for everybody with special activities to address especially groups of discriminated people. These target groups have been indicated by all of the countries and therefore this is to acknowledge as a similarities between the countries

## **Responsible organization**

More or less 50 % of the centers identified belong to public administrations and around 50 % to Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or self help-organizations. Two private holders were identified in Germany.

It is to underline that in Italy, France and Spain the centers identified often belong to larger networks allowing exchange of experience and cooperation.

## **Numbers of training courses/ numbers of users**

There is a big variety of training courses offered in the PICs from 2 or 3 hour workshops, weekend trainings till courses with a specific group during half an year or even longer. Many centers work with the method of assistance on demand of the user. Being of different type it's difficult to compare the quantity of training courses or the number of users. Most of the centers mentioned around 250 to 600 users. Some mentioned smaller numbers and some projects in Italy, France and Spain mentioned between 1000 and 90000 users per year. The large numbers can be explained by the fact that the centers belong to regional and national networks integrating up to 90 local clubs.

## **Main activity / complementary activity**

Two different types of centers can be identified, those who offer computer activities as main activity and those who offer different activities like socio-cultural activities or training for integration or for the job. These centers add computer activities to their regular program since they consider this knowledge to be necessary for the participation of all in the information based society or they respond to an interest of their public. 20 centers have indicated that it is their main activity and 20 say it's a complementary activity.

### **Motivations of the users**

The motivation of the users is different depending on age and type of centers.

Whereas in France, Italy and Spain the identified centers generally indicate that their users are motivated by all three of the purposes (economic, private and social) mentioned in the questionnaire, there are small differences to find in Germany and Czech Republic. For Czech Republic the centers indicate first of all economic and private purposes and not so much social purposes like sharing interests, meeting friends. In Germany there are also variations to state, for example the users of centers for elderly people and young people indicate more private and social than economic interests and some computer schools are more oriented to the labor market and economic purposes.

## **3 Anti-Discriminatory Access for Specific Target Groups**

### **3.1 Socially Disadvantaged People and Open Access for All**

#### **Centers open for all**

Among the centers that are open for all you can find those who address everybody because of the widespread character of the center like the public libraries in Germany. These public libraries are generally in several quarters of the towns and also located in socially disadvantaged parts of the towns. The public libraries are well known but still not everybody goes there and generally they do not have specific targeted activities to address the most disadvantaged people except their regular work of public relations. Still they are very interesting because of being widespread and offering a low cost access to internet. They offer also special researching possibilities and sometimes training courses. Example: public library Münster, Germany

The other centers that consider them self open for all generally are to find in quarters of the town that are socially disadvantaged, with low income housing. For them open for all means to give a chance to socially disadvantaged people to have an access to

computer, so that they can participate in the knowledge based society like all the others.

### **The choice of the location**

The choice of location is an important factor in the conception of these centers in order is near of those who generally are marginalized and concerned by digital exclusion.

Extract of the interview with the project ARCI Salerno: "This PIC is Guidance and Training Centre entirely managed by ARCI together with the social co-operative "Luci della Città" and it is fully backed/funded by the SALERNO City Hall within the AREA SOCIAL PLAN S8. It represents an excellent application of the Social Welfare Community Model. PASSWORK is strongly oriented towards a concept of life-long learning and of user's self organization. The position of this PIC – in a popular very disadvantaged district of Salerno – is in itself a great measure to avoid discriminations."

### **Adequate prices for users**

These centers get and need very often public support in order to propose their services free of charge or at a good price. The low costs are a condition sine qua non to be able to involve people with little money.

### **PICs as complementary activity**

Very often this type of PIC is part of a social or cultural center and the activities of the PIC complete the other activities with the objective to contribute to social inclusion. The people coming to the PIC participate also in other activities of the center and get motivated for other activities.

### **The didactical approach**

The PICs in these disadvantaged regions underline the importance of a friendly welcoming informal approach, listening to users' expectations/fears/problems, following them constantly and assuming relevant actions to guide/support them (ARCI project Salerno)

The ARCI Center in Caserta describes very well the necessary strong focus on social inclusion with specific welcoming strategies, guidance and facilitation methods, which have also been underlined by centers in other countries:

- "1. The moment of the initial contact between user and PIC's operator is very carefully planned, followed and monitored to the extent to meet users' expectations and to secure them
2. Great work on the language with a view to simplify it and to put forward and as clear and honest message as possible.

3. The course on the Italian language is taught in a way to make learning as easy as possible thanks to the daily action of intercultural mediators/trainers"

The activities proposed are various. This may be individual assistance in specific needs, small workshops on different topics like internet, writing workshops, discussion and search on internet or producing a film on local life. The training activities have to be motivating and attractive for the people and take into account their needs and wishes.

The family center Barmbek in Germany goes in the same direction. The atmosphere in the courses must be good; people should feel well and accepted and like to come. The individual rhythm in learning has to be respected and has to consider those who are slower than others in learning.

### **Empowerment of the individual and integration**

These PICs underline the necessity to really take into account the various needs of their public and to trespass personal barriers in front of the ICT in a first step. Therefore it's necessary to look for the empowerment of the individuals through the enhancement of their self-organization capacities and of their relational potential and group/social abilities as well as for the encouragement of self-help groups of users. The Centro Guadalinfo de Alhama de Almeria is convinced that the trainings themselves are a means for integration and inclusion

### **Volunteering and networking**

Some centers mentioned the importance of networking in order to establish contacts, communication, working opportunities and social cohesion. In this context to underline also the PICs of the public administration of Esslingen in Germany who in a sense of solidarity and mutual help motivate volunteers to assist the training in their centers.

### **Problems of the PICS in socially disadvantaged parts of the towns**

The fact that the training on the Information- and communication technologies (ICT) cannot be done straight ahead but has to be combined with personal assistance, social inclusion, empowerment and promotion of communication is considered to be time consuming compared to other training courses limited on the ICT.

Part of the centers complain also lack of money and resources and consider that there are not enough centers, not enough equipment with enough staff in these socially disadvantaged parts of the town allowing to offer trainings at adequate prices or free of charge to people in need. Therefore sufficient public support must be available.

Two Italian PICs mention the existing Italian antiterrorism law (legge Pisanu) as being a barrier for organizations to create more PICs and a great difficulty in daily work because the antiterrorism Law obliges to buy/develop expensive servers and software to treat with the personnel data of all user and a complicated system of

every-day accounting reports (signed in original by each user) on their time of connection, use of Internet, etc.

## **3.2 Migrants**

Migrants are among the groups in the European societies who are particularly disadvantaged in education, income and employment. So the criteria mentioned by the projects under the point PICs for socially disadvantaged people are also valid for projects paying special attention to those migrants living in difficult situations. 5 projects have been identified even if more centers like youth centers, clubs, libraries etc. indicated migrants among others as their target group. Often these migrants come from very different countries and therefore do not form a homogenous group

### **Intercultural communication**

Communicational skills, mutual understanding and the multicultural living together facilitating and encouraging interaction and mutual help among people from different ethnics and religions are perceived as an important objective in socio-cultural centers that address also migrants. The computer trainings are therefore considered also as a mean to reach this objective. Example: extract of the interview of the French center EPM kerourien in Brest which describes this very well. "The cyberspace supports projects that take into account the cultural diversity of the neighborhood and is part of a local group Vivre Ensemble (live together) to support intercultural and intergenerational connections. The cyberspace organizes cultural trips at the initiative of the users and- with the support of the Centre Social de Brest - Web reportage on the habits and customs of the inhabitants, etc"

Concerning teachers, the centers underline the necessity of intercultural competences and empathies. Some centers demand intercultural trainings for their teachers, other centers are implicating experienced migrants as teachers or assistants

### **Integration and participation in social life**

In two of the German projects the computer trainings are part of the federal program of integration activities for migrants. The welfare association AWO has developed a specific program for migrant women with a low educational level. This includes meetings to talk about topics of particular concern for the women on the basis of their personal situation, activation and motivation to continue their learning and a more active participation in social life. The computer training is considered as one of the activities in this program helping to get out of isolation.

### **Language**

PICs in contact with migrants indicate concerning the staff that the knowledge of the languages of the main target groups is an important tool for understanding. But still language is indicated as a barrier where there is no staff speaking their language in

the PIC. The implication of migrants of these countries already speaking the language of the hosting country is a help in the intercultural process in order to assist the newcomers.

The Spanish center NCC Talayuela/ Nuevos Centros de Conocimiento is mainly frequented by Maghreb's immigrants with scarce knowledge of local language and culture and low level of education. Therefore, Digital Literacy is proposed to them as an objective to reach, a medium for a wider literacy (read and write Spanish, cultural integration, communication) and a tool for their daily lives. In this context digital programs are also used for learning the language of the hosting country.

### **3.3 People living in rural regions**

7 PICS have been identified in rural regions ((1 in France, 2 in Spain, 2 in Italy, 2 in Czech Republic). The most important objective of these centers is to reach people in areas particularly disadvantaged because of their geographical isolation.

#### **Motivations of the users**

The motivations are various:

- Labor market insertion, improving small businesses in the direction of sustainable multicultural development, development of rural tourism
- Contact to public administrations,
- Contact to relatives that had to emigrate to other countries

#### **Methods**

Some interesting methods have been applicator in these isolated regions:

- training at the distance, use of videoconferences (Public Internet center Parma)
- mobile Team (Association pour le développement touristique des vallées Roya Bevera, France): The animators get around isolated rural areas to offer basic Internet skills and access to persons that do not have easily access to ICT. 2 animators, with 8 laptops thus travel from one little village to another every week to sensibilize people to ICT uses. This project has known some difficulties notably as it was difficult to find hosting structures with high speed connections access. The original concept was to equip with ICT tools a bus but this project could not be realized for lack of funds. The other problem concerns the irregular frequentation of the PIC in the villages as it depends a lot on interpersonal relations within each village.

#### **Need of expansion of PICS in these isolated regions**

3 PICs underline the big interest of users in these isolated regions which becomes evident by the number of users and waiting lists which for example in one center are five times higher than the capacity of the PIC

### **3.4 Jobless people**

Most of the PICS addressing discriminated socially disadvantaged people respond to the need of people in searching for a job. That's why assisting in looking for a job in the Internet, learning how to write a CV by computer is a widespread activity in many centers as they try to orientate their activities respecting the needs of their users. In the context of this study are therefore mentioned only characteristics of projects that specialize on training on the job or suggest interesting aspects linked to this type of public.

#### **Target groups**

The identified projects for jobless people indicate especially the following target groups

- jobless people
- long term unemployed,
- migrants,
- handicapped people,
- youngsters looking for job, vocational training or dropping out of school, - women
- small businesses in rural areas trying to progress by the ICT
- people with low educational level

#### **Computer training combined with labor market integration and social inclusion activities**

Successful job integration needs more than a pure training in ICT or on the job, there might be other social problems to be resolved by accompanying social inclusion activities (housing, health, self-consciousness etc.)

The German computer school Viernheim is specialized on computer trainings for jobless people. They combine their training with regular search for job in the internet, writing of CVs by computer and providing information on job opportunities. Their training courses (generally 4 weeks) are organized in form of a working day in order to accustom long-term unemployed to the daily rhythm of work in enterprises. They train also in specific programs required by some enterprises and give in this sense a better chance to the people to get the job. The PIC assists the jobless people in their contact to enterprises with some success since their computer school meanwhile got a good reputation. Once per week a psychologist comes to see which further problems people could have in finding a job. They have a good cooperation with the local job center which sends people looking for job and in need of ICT knowledge in their PIC.



Passwork, Italy indicates that especially beneficiaries with low educational levels can have a chance in finding a job by having computer and ICT knowledge.

A very special aspect is indicated by the computer school Viernheim. The fact that jobless people of different educational level are sitting together in one training gives a very good opportunity for a better understanding and for mutual help within the training. Being able to assist others within training is perceived as an important factor for people long-term unemployed and with a therefore reduced self-consciousness. In this way these activities with people from different background contribute to social cohesion.

### **Public support in the context of labor market policies**

The French Cyberspace de Bollène like the above mentioned project computer school Viernheim underlines that public support for these targeted activities for jobless people can be available through the local "job centers" (Germany) or "missions locales" (France) which send people directly in these training courses. The computer training courses become like this part of the integration activities within the national or local labor market policy for jobless people.

### **Networking**

Establishing local partnerships is indicated as an important factor for PICs working in the field of labor market integration. This concerns relations to enterprises as well as public institutions and other organizations in the field of labor market integration. Passwork -Sportello di Orientamento e formazione al lavoro, Italy underlines the need of networking within the own network and with outside partners in order to assist the people in finding a job. They mention how difficult it is, if this cooperation on local level does not work well.

## **3.5 Centers for children, young people and families**

5 centers have been identified which address especially young people or even children and families, 3 in Germany, 3 in Italy. Among these PICs one center in Germany is specialized on computer activities, all the others computer activities are a complementary activity.

### **Communication and social cohesion**

Communication, social cohesion is for all of them an important guideline in their work with young people.

The Center specialized on computers Medientreff Zone in Germany for example underlines that in order to promote communication they place the computer working

places in form of a star in order to promote communication and avoid computer work to be an isolated activity for an individual. They propose also games to establish and develop contact among the young people and quiz for new users. They underline that computer activities allow to bring together different groupings of young people: The punk is sitting near the migrant or the student working together in training without difficulty on the same basis. In this sense also the ARCI circolo Zona Franca of Bari brings together Erasmus Students from different countries underlining the communication among the students.

### **Critical media education**

The family center Barmbek in Germany addresses parents and children with activities in the field of education. They introduced also computer even with small children. A special activity is critical media education with the parents in order to raise awareness among the parents for the dangers of internet for children and the use of computer and internet with prudence. The topic is also treated in other of the identified youth centers.

### **Cultural activities and computer**

The ARCI cultural youth clubs in Italy like other youth centers in other countries use computers and ICT to develop cultural products with the public of the clubs.

"ARTISTI IN RETE is based on a network of ARCI Local Youth Clubs placed in the Emilia Romagna Region. The Network aims are to: 1. guide/update/train artists on multimedia technologies and web opportunities; 2. spread an aware use of the potential opened by new technologies in the cultural sector; 3. disseminate e-democracy values; 4. enhance contacts, exchanges, joint seminars amongst identified ARCI YOUTH LOCAL CLUBS' groups of artists; 5. foster Youth cultural entrepreneurship and promote youth productions: in the first half of the Year 2006 some 160 events have been organized.

### **Addressing specific groups and NGOs**

Some of these PICs take contacts to specific target groups like kindergartens, handicapped young people, project groups or schools, etc. especially in the morning at hours when young people go to school. The Medientreff Zone took contact to reach street children and homeless young people even if till now without success.

## **3.6 Elderly people**

4 PICS, 3 in Germany, 1 in France indicate that they address specially elderly / retired/ and in part also handicapped people.

### **Motivation of the users**

For all of them private and social purposes are in the center of the motivations of the users. Elderly people in these PICs look for knowledge to allow them to participate in the knowledge based society in a friendly atmosphere. The knowledge in computers are various from beginners to people with basic knowledge. Often people may have a computer at home but have difficulties and don't know whom to ask. This may concern questions like digital photographing, problems with virus or security in the internet among others. The working methods therefore are generally basic trainings and individualized assistance y answering on specific demands even within a group

### **A variety of responsible organizations**

In this field could be identified a self-help organization of elderly people computer without stress Biberach, a day care center of the NGO AWO, a private holder: Silbermedia in Berlin and a public administration Icom in France

### **Volunteering**

As well in the self-help organization computer without stress in Biberach as in the AWO day care center the training is exclusively organized by volunteers, being themselves elderly people and offering their knowledge in computers free to others once per week. The day care center underlined that it was quite easy to find very well in computer knowledge specialized elderly retired people ready to help others by a simple announcement in the newspaper. These volunteers support completely the PIC for the elderly people.

### **Physical difficulties**

It is underlined that a specific attention has to be given to physical difficulties that elderly people might have like difficulties in seeing, hearing or moving.

## **3.7 Disabled people**

Many among the identified PICs indicate disabled people as one of their target groups. Some of them have also physical facilities like ramps and elevators, for example youth centers, neighborhood centers, public libraries, centers for elderly people among others. 8 of the identified projects (4 in Czech Republic, 1 in Germany, 1 in France, 2 in Spain) pay special attention to handicapped people. Among these centers are to find centers for handicapped people with multiple activities among which the computer activity, centers specialized in the work with of ICT and addressing especially handicapped people or socio-cultural centers with computer activities addressing handicapped people

### **Architectonical barriers**

All 8 centers indicate that they dispose of physical facilities like ramps and elevators. From the description of the interviews it's not clear to see if these facilities are sufficient or if there are missing some necessary equipment like doors or toilets accessible for wheelchairs.

### **Assisting technologies**

The centers underline especially technologies like keyboards helping blind people and acoustic signals for people with difficulties in hearing. Here too it's not clear if it's possible to respond to the various individual handicaps existing

### **Websites and adequate software for handicapped people**

One center in Spain mentions the creation of websites accessible for handicapped people.

On the website of the German foundation [www.digitale-chancen.de](http://www.digitale-chancen.de) it's possible to find criteria, recommendations and links how to create websites without barriers. A book can be downloaded in German language with many ideas of how to create an internet center. The foundation is actually working on a book aiming to better access for disabled people in accessing ICT.

### **Training methods**

The centers all insist on the necessity of an individual approach in teaching the ICT either through personal assistance or by respecting the individual handicaps within the training course for example people who do not hear placed well near the teacher etc.

### **Consultation in assisting technologies: [www.barrierefrei-kommunizieren.de](http://www.barrierefrei-kommunizieren.de)**

Disabled people are confronted with the problem that very often the hard- and software does not correspond to their specific needs and excludes them from using computers. On the other side for many of them being bound at home computers constitute a very important way to communicate with the exterior world.

Taking into account the various very individual handicaps and the sophisticated material existing on the market the German Computerschool "communicate without barriers" specialized for handicapped people in Berlin and Bonn has developed an important action in the field of consultation. The center establishes the contact to handicapped people passing by associations and institutions or assistants of disabled people and by the disabled themselves. In the individual contact with the disabled person the necessary software, programs assisting technologies are defined.

The center has meanwhile developed a very interesting database in German, English and French language with a search engine adapted to the specific needs like hearing, seeing, movement, learning and speaking. The database contains a

collection of disability-compensating techniques and technologies for computers and the internet. It is completely independent of all producers and manufacturers.

### **Social inclusion and integration in the labor market, high schools or universities**

The German center communicate without barriers proposes training to both disabled and non disabled people as a way of inclusion and has the specific objective to help disabled people especially also those after an accident to reintegrate into the labor market by their competences in the field of computer but also by their capability to use a computer thanks to specific assisting technologies.

The Czech centers address particularly blind people and assist students of high schools or universities to follow their studies by using computer and Internet.

The Spanish center Guadalinfo de Huescar insists on the good social cohesion and communication within its center concerning multicultural groups as well as disabled and non disabled people.

### **Financial support**

Nearly all of these centers indicate the difficulty to be dependent of public support or not to have enough financial support since the sophisticated specialized technologies and physical facilities are expensive either for the center or for the disabled people themselves.

## **4 General conclusions**

### **Differences and similarities among the countries**

Even if the structures and types of centers, the responsible organizations, the financial support for the PICs and the quantity of centers may be different from one country to the other there are similarities in the anti-discriminatory access to state:

### **Working methods**

In all the countries the PICs insist on an individual approach, personal assistance, respect of personal rhythm of learning within the training groups, creative methods, respect of special needs, empowerment.

### **Lack of training material adapted to specific needs**

There seems to be a lack of adequate material to use in the training with specific groups. Most projects speak about using standard material, sometimes in different languages and are working in the same time by the method of personal assistance trespassing in this way difficulties that may exist with standard materials

### **Social inclusion and networking**

Generally the centers aim for digital inclusion but combine this with activities aiming at social inclusion, integration, empowerment and communication. Also local involvement, contacts to job centers, enterprises, public administrations, NGOs gets importance in this context to avoid isolation and exclusion.

Here are also to underline the various networks of PICs on regional or national level existing in France and Spain or the fact that PICs belong to large NGOs like ARCI, in Italy, AWO in Germany, La Ligue in France and internet centers in Czech Republic which includes the chance for exchange of experience, material and common use of resources and transversal activities.

### **Lack of financial support, not enough centers and not enough qualified staff**

Even if some centers say that they are well equipped using different types of public support including European funds generally there is a need for more support for discriminated people either by expanding centers in socially disadvantaged or rural regions either by specific support for specific groups. Especially for disabled people and migrants a need is expressed for more and qualified staff and a better availability of techniques and technologies.

## **5 Transferability**

The main conditions concerning transferability indicated by the projects are

- equipment with adequate computer material and rooms,
- staff qualified for ICT and for the different target groups
- working methods combining computer training with social inclusion, integration and networking activities as well as promotion of active citizenship.
- adequate prices or free access  
To underline that in the field of socially discriminated people an access to adequate prices or free of charge is very often a condition for transferability. So the political will of public administrations is necessary to create conditions allowing transferability.
- The choice of the location  
The choice of location of the PIC may vary from one country to the other taking into account the existing structures of centers. It is underlined that the PICs should be in proximity of the people targeted. Therefore places where people in need meet should be used/equipped as a PIC. This may in one country be a school, in another a social center or an integration activity, a public library or the clubs and neighborhood centers of associations / NGOs.

In socially disadvantaged areas and rural areas a lack of PICs has been stated.

So it seems not to be so important to transfer a special structure from one to another country but to adapt interesting methods and take innovations and good ideas from other countries into the existing structures in the own local context.

## **6 Recommendations to expand the PICs with an antidiscriminatory access**

### **Awareness rising**

For increasing the number of centers we need a sensibilization of the public and the politicians concerning the problems of digital gap for discriminated people so that the necessary public support is given.

We need also a sensibilization of all those, persons and centers working with discriminated people in the field of social inclusion and integration in order to introduce computer activities in the existing centers as part of the inclusion activities allowing people to participate in the knowledge based society.

### **Profound analysis and information tools for specific target groups**

Information on interesting materials, technologies and access conditions for specific target groups should be made accessible by internet platform. This needs to include what already exists for the specific target groups so that an online pool of information can be created with links to interesting already existing platforms. For some interesting platforms it would be interesting to provide translation so that they can be used also in different countries. The most important target groups for further studies in this field seem to be disabled people and migrants since there are very specific situations to take into account.

### **Exchange of experience**

An exchange of experience around working methods, innovations, good ideas should be organized in an internet platform and in practical exchange programs or conferences.