60 Selected Regional Information Society Projects

Innovative Actions Network for the Information Society+

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Contents

PREFACE

A central aspect of the IANIS+ work programme (2005 – 2007) has been a focus on analysis of, and learning from regional ICT projects. The regional members of the consortium agreed the selection of domains as the focus for the work of six thematic work groups: eBusiness, eGovernment, eLearning, eHealth, eInfrastructure and, lastly, Indicators & Benhcmarking. Understandably, most of the project case reports collected during the work programme fell into these domains.

Project case reports have been collected from a variety of practitioners and activists in the IANIS+ work programme. These have included the members of the thematic work groups (the regional experts), those who attended the Torino intensive course in October 2006 (the regional information society 'students'), the regional practitioners who carried out peer review visits to another region, and those who presented their projects at one of the IANIS+ annual conferences.

The analysis, evaluation of and selection of projects has been carried out by an independent expert hired by the IANIS+ Secretariat: Jane Tebbutt. Jane has followed closely the IANIS+ work programme from the beginning and has become attuned to its peculiarities, realities and difficulties. Not least amongst these has been the fact that writing up projects that have concluded or which are close to conclusion is not a high priority for those charged with undertaking this task. Moreover, researching, capturing and adequately describing such projects is something of an art form and not everyone is well qualified to do it. Nonetheless, by means of various forms of encouragement and cajolement, IANIS+ was able to gather some 140 project cases

In many cases, Jane worked with the case authors helping them to produce useful documentation and making good the deficiencies of first drafts. Jane has undertaken a separate thematic analysis of these projects based in part on the outputs of the thematic work groups that were each charged with producing a guide good practice for their domain based upon practical project experiences in the regions. As part of the agreed deliverables, we were also required to select and publish 60 of the project case reports which we do here.

The projects have been selected by Jane based on her reading and knowledge of all the cases submitted and the final selection has been determined, inter alia, on the basis of geography and a balanced coverage of the thematic domains. Apart from these, the main criterion was to elect the most interesting projects – not necessarily those that might have been considered the best projects.

The objective of capturing descriptions of these projects has, of course, been to try to exchange information and good practices. Too often across Europe, we repeat the mistakes already made by others before. By learning about the mistakes made by others, by knowing which are the blind alleys others already encountered, regions have the change to accelerate development, reducing development costs and associated risks.

While the task of capturing the project case reports has been far from easy, we hope nonetheless that this selection of 60 of them will be interesting and useful. We appreciate the efforts of those that compiled them. I wish also to thank Jane Tebbutt for her invaluable contribution.

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August 2007

INTRODUCTION

Dear IANIS+ regions and other readers,

This is to welcome you to our selection of case studies which have been collected during the IANIS+ project.

We received 140 case studies over the lifetime of the project. Most of these came from you, our participating regions, supplemented with one from each of the 'students' who attended the intensive course held in Torino in October 2006. We also asked a panel of experts to contribute a few as well.

From all these sources, we have made a selection of 60 cases. These represent all the domains and working groups in IANIS+ and are takwen from across the EU. We chose them all because they had something interesting to say. Sometimes they demonstrate a new or novel approach for a region, sometimes they have been well executed, and sometimes they show good lessons for us all.

So, I hope that you enjoy reading this publication, and that you find new ideas for projects in your own regions.

Jane Tebbutt
IANIS+ Expert

e-Administration Framework for Small Local Authorities

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This is an eGovernment project which aims to improve and support the administrative procedures of small local authorities (SLAs). The project is aimed at increasing public access to 15 SLA's with less than 20,000 inhabitants in regions in Spain, Portugal and France. The budget is €1,962,398 of which 68% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The regions are characterised by a large number of municipalities with small populations. Due to the high initial per capita costs, and the on-going resources and staff training required, the adoption of new technologies is often not viable, economically. SLAs have been slow therefore to adopt new technologies. Previous attempts to encourage adoption of new technology among small local authorities have been piecemeal and have led to software integration issues both between SLAs and within an SLA.

The aim of the project is to develop a technology framework which integrates new and old software. This will provide access to e-Government services for the public in, and workers of, SLAs. The project will enable the public and workers to perform administrative procedures (such as making applications for various services) and tasks, using portals. The project uses open source, and the idea is that the basic framework can be adapted to meet the individual needs of each SLA. It will support multiple languages, and permit interoperability between different administrations, using standards based technology. An international user and developer association will also be created - to coordinate all initiatives arising from this project.

How did the project help?

Within the project there are 3 main areas of activity:

- Identification of common organisational structures and administrative procedures and e-administration opportunities within the SLAs
- Specification, creation and validation of the technological framework
- Deploying the framework and training staff in its operation

The common organisational and administration processes were identified using business process analysis. This activity was performed jointly between the users and technological partners in the project. The technical partners created a series of templates and a web based application for the users to fill them in with detailed information from local authorities. Where necessary, users received assistance from technological partners, either by email, phone, or visits.

This resulted in 30 interesting processes (10 per country). Originally the consortium finally selected 11 of these processes upon which to develop the prototype. These included building permits management, water management, complaints processing, registries, national identity cards (for France), and social services requests. However, in order to be manageable, these had to be reduced down to 3 common processes. Eventually those relating to the granting and management of building permits were selected for trialling – chosen because of their comparability.

The specification, creation and validation of the framework form the major part of the project activities. The e-ASLA framework is an open source and process-oriented technological framework. It focuses on the integration of third party software and compatibility with external entities. The technological partners identified many open source solutions and a few of these were analysed in detail. This resulted in the following choices. The workflow engine used is jBPM, with the open source J2EE stack Jboss, and the MySQL database. This platform can be deployed into Windows or Linux servers.

The framework has a graphical process modeller which is designed for use by local SLA users, not programmers.
It allows the user to adapt existing business processes to each local administration and create totally new processes.

The portal guides users and SLA workers to the tasks they have to perform, through structured processes. Portal users have access to a dashboard with the list of the activities to be performed. Users can see and analyse their process execution history – this enables citizens and SLA employees to be integrated in a single system, using shared information. The portal also offers the common elements seen in other e-Administration portals: news, content management, general information about the city council, contact information, etc. It is multi-lingual.

The prototype is validated by user partners guided by technological partners. They give their feedback about the prototypes developed. This is obtained using web based surveys, bug reporting tools and mailing lists. Technical partners analyse feedback data, perform the changes needed to the prototypes, and create a final results report.

The deployment of the framework and training of staff is still in its early stages. Initial staff training has been given as part of the validation process.

What did the project achieve?

The framework is available and used in Portugal, it will shortly be available in France and Spain. The project has mapped 33 (11 per region) public administration processes which will be used in the further development of the framework. The project also benchmarked the available solutions and has gained a deeper understanding of the marketplace and the frameworks place within it.

And what did it learn?

The project demonstrated that it could make partnerships between the University sector and Public Administration sector work. This is largely due to the SLAs recognition that a technological solution was desirable. Indeed, the SLA's were involved at an early stage and the writing of the proposal was jointly undertaken. All partners therefore had a shared understanding of what they wanted to achieve.

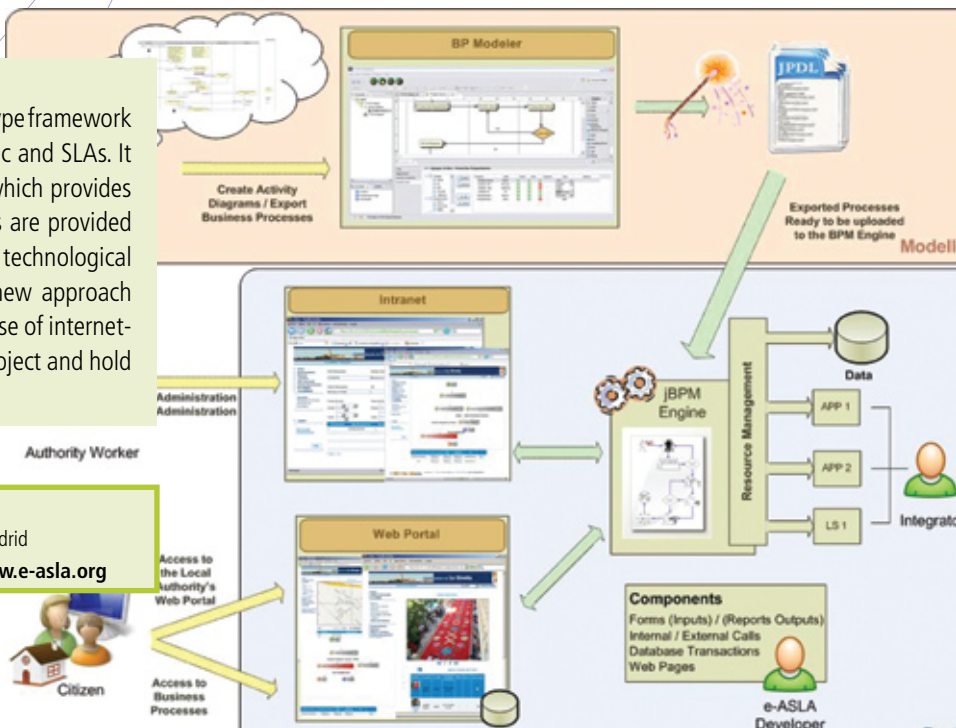
There is a gap between the technology-driven processes and the way that people actually work on a day to day basis which was overcome by the greater involvement of the technical partners mediating between the software developers and the SLA users.

And finally….what happened next?

The nature of the technological platform means that it is a readily transferable technology. The intention is to realise an e-ASLA II project, to increase the administrative procedures automated, and enhance the supporting technology. The final objective is that the e-ASLA network becomes a sustainable knowledge and software sharing network.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects. The prototype framework allows a two-way dialogue between the public and SLAs. It is integrated into the SLA's existing systems which provides cost benefits to the SLA. Further cost benefits are provided to the SLA as they have access to expert technological advice and support. The prototype offers a new approach for the regions. In addition, the project made use of internet-related tools to monitor the progress of the project and hold meetings between different regional partners.



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The Emergency Response to Coastal Oil, Chemical and Inert Pollution from Shipping (EROCIPS)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This is an eMonitoring project aimed at developing common, trans-national methodologies, tools and techniques for dealing with the shoreline response to coastal pollution incidents. The budget is €6,060,079 of which 57.83% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The project stems from a decision of the Atlantic Arc Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions following the Prestige oil spill to improve counter pollution responses. This was strongly supported by regional politicians. The project is key in determining the capacity of regional authorities to get involved in maritime safety and pollution response. It involves a partnership of regional governments from France, Spain and the UK.

How did the project help?

The project consists of a series of work packages designed to provide shoreline responders with the necessary information to ensure a targeted response to pollution caused by shipping. The activities of the project are designed around 7 work packages, plus dissemination:

- Analysis of pollution threats
- Development of response information
- Development of counter pollution resources
- Provision of training information
- Provision of pollution modelling
- Management of Information
- Environmental Monitoring

Pollution threats were analysed to inform existing and developing contingency plans by producing a regional inventory of natural, human and built environment features, together with coastal, oceanographic and meteorological profiles.

Response information was collected and developed concerning regional priorities and spatial plans for shoreline clean-up, boom/ barrage deployments and waste transport, to augment existing contingency plans.

Counter pollution resources were developed, including collecting regional expertise on the responses to coastal shipping pollution – previous incidents, specialist pollution response equipment (such as booms/barrages and skimmers), certificated pollution contractors, etc.

Training information, courses and guidance material were developed. An awareness-raising training package for elected officials and spatial planners was developed alongside a short training package on clean-up, waste management, health and safety, etc for contractors and volunteers involved in shoreline response.

Pollution modelling applies existing models to the new pollution threats which have been identified. Innovative modelling methods are being piloted in the UK and Spain, and good practices and experience exchanged with France's CEDRE (national and international experts in water pollution).

Information was managed by providing and disseminating pre-incident publicity material to stakeholders and the general public via leaflets, information displays, public seminars and a website. More specialised information is needed by the bodies responsible for responding to pollution threats. This includes applying ICT solutions to identify coastal assets, deploy staff and equipment to deal with a major pollution incident effectively, and to control and log the clean-up and the costs incurred.

The environment of coastal areas was monitored using a system of measurement and an assessment methodology developed by the project.

Innovative aspects

This intervention on the whole coastal zone of the Atlantic Arc is on a new and unprecedented scale. The co-operation and exchange of experience based on regional networks is new.

The project incorporates geo-spatial data managed via GIS tools. Use of GIS on a large scale (Atlantic Area) basis to develop a technical response capability in shipping pollution contingency planning is innovative. GIS also provides a platform on which the wider stakeholder groups, and media, can be briefed and kept informed.

The project makes innovative use of ICT. A web service provides access to trajectory models which are linked to pollution response command and control systems within the Atlantic Area. A pre-existing integrated management information system is configured to meet the needs of coastal pollution response - this includes the use of hand held devices to log on-scene surveys using mobile phone links. All the documented project outcomes, GIS derived maps, reports, manuals and training information are available for downloading.

What did the project achieve?

The environmental vulnerability of coastal regions provided an incentive for end-users and local authorities who have identified weaknesses in their own systems of response, to ask to share the best practices of other partners across the Atlantic Arc. The project has capitalised on the regions will to be involved and quest to know what to expect and how to react. It provides the impetus for partners who share the same objectives, to compare and improve their skills by sharing them with other partners.

The EROCIPS project provides real applications which can be used immediately. The GIS is Atlantic-based and could be adapted for wider ICZM (integrated coastal zone management).

And what did it learn?

The project was able to take advantage of problems encountered in other similar co-operation projects. These include the clear definition of end-users, and provision of the necessary means to avoid difficulties of multi-lingual information and dissemination, meeting and seminar funding, compatibility of information systems etc. By using the experiences of others, the project was able to overcome these issues and the burden of administration was reduced.

Some partners had difficulties in changing or accepting a new system that differed from what they knew or had already implemented. But all project partners were enthusiastic about the project, and the setting of high targets and political expectations motivated all of them. The partnerships formed were robust. Political support was strong.

Establishing continuity in the project is an ongoing challenge. Retaining project staff is hard, especially as the project becomes more complex as tasks are progressively completed.

And finally....what happened next?

The project is on-going, with funding by Interreg IV as it focuses on maritime safety. The project is being integrated by the partners.

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Public Information System for Community Empowerment (e-Democracy)

Attica, Greece

Background Information

This is an eGovernment project which aims to provide a more open, inclusive and productive public sector (particularly at the local community level), improve citizens' access to public sector information, and expand citizen participation in the regional decision making. The budget is €462,000 of which 80% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The Attica Basin is the urban conglomeration of the Cities of Athens, Piraeus and suburban towns with an estimated population of 3,600,000 people (about 35% of the national total). It contains most national financial and commercial activities (eg 55% of the banking activity, 80% of the heavy industry, 80% of seaborne commerce, etc.). There are 9 Universities.

In Greece, there is an increasing need to provide easily accessible public sector information. This is particularly felt in the region of Attica due to its large size, importance and strong market position. Responsibility for this type of service is spread over different levels of administration - which do not necessarily co-operate on a regular basis. This task is even harder when the municipalities lack the necessary ICT infrastructure to provide services.

This pilot project aimed to design and implement a local information system for the collection, certification and diffusion of electronic content regarding the ongoing work of five municipalities within the region of Attica. It is a partnership between the region and its municipalities with a private sector partner providing technical expertise.

How did the project help?

Public internet access was made available in info-centres or Internet cafés (either within municipal buildings or the local development agency) to enable easy access for those citizens without internet access at home. Within the project there are 4 other main areas of activity:

- Analysis of the needs and priorities of the participating municipalities
- Development of the website architecture
- Training of municipality staff
- Marketing of the project

A thorough needs analysis in each of the participating municipalities identified its needs and priorities together with a thematic structure for the web-based service. Examples of the types of service to be offered to citizens include:

- Enhancing access to municipal information, services, officials and councillors
- Providing access to a range of local services and locally relevant information
- Facilitating administrative transactions between citizens and municipal services
- Providing information on public projects and plans
- Locating municipal and other local services on a map of the municipality

- Welcoming citizen comments, opinions, complaints and proposals
- Consulting citizens through opinion polls and surveys

This resulted in an interactive, database driven, web-based service facility, targeted to local citizens and entrepreneurs. It is shared by the five municipalities and is built on three interacting servers (main database server, map database server, web server) and an interface with system administrators in each municipal authority.

The architecture of the website was developed so it could be adapted the individual requirements of each municipal authority as they change. In addition, content updating does not need specialist personnel. Information is entered in pre-designed pages through a simple process similar to saving information in a Microsoft office environment. The design of the web facility is based on programs that are already familiar to the average personal computer user.

The maintenance and full exploitation of the facility does not need rewriting software code or website development; it only requires basic ICT skills and its administration can be decentralised within the municipal authority. This is due to its structure which resembles a tree diagram. Branches can be removed or added and filled with information according to specific needs. Moreover, the facility is directly transferable to other municipalities who will only have to collect information content and input it in the database, always maintaining the same basic platform structure.

Training was offered to the municipality staff but because the software was designed to be easy to use, only two sessions were required.

Marketing was extensive and fun. A publicity campaign advertised the pilot action through the use of posters, the mailing of thousands of leaflets to all residents of the participating municipalities and announcements in the local press. Posters with "catchy" messages were displayed in the main streets of the municipality to attract attention. The message "Municipal buildings full of mice!" received a lot of press coverage and became a subject of conversation in local communities. Leaflets invited the residents to visit the website and submit queries, comments, complaints and suggestions, and respond to questions or opinion polls.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects. The design of the e-democracy pilot action brought about organisational changes in the municipalities that had to be introduced in order to be able to proceed with the implementation of the work. It created a network of contacts among municipalities that otherwise would not have worked together at all. The project raised awareness among public servants regarding the importance of marketing.

Overall, access to municipal information and services through the internet is innovative for the region.

What did the project achieve?

The project has provided the municipalities with a powerful technological tool to deliver their services and 300,000 citizens now know how to access it. The project has raised awareness of the possibilities open to a public authority and the ways that it can cater to its citizens. This means that the public sector has become more user-centered, transparent and inclusive. In turn, public servants' time is being used more effectively for specific consultation instead of routine questions. This has led to a drastic reduction in inconsistencies caused by human error in routine administrative tasks.

Citizens have also benefited. They now have a better understanding of what the municipality can offer and have easier and quicker access to information and services.

And what did it learn?

Political support and commitment was important to the success of the project. The political understanding of the "new role" of the municipality (a modern organisation that adopts a service oriented culture and that is an inclusive, open and transparent) underpinned the project. The region and municipalities were very pro-active and allowed and supported necessary changes within their structures to accommodate the management of the project.

Promotion and marketing became an important component of the overall exercise and played a significant role in its success. The municipalities designed and led an energetic campaign introducing the new services. The strategy was to focus both on design and a provocative message, a "teaser". Here the approach is also innovative in that the emphasis was to present publicity material that is aesthetically pleasing and attracts attention for maximum impact.

And finally....what happened next?

The project has resulted in the introduction of an inclusive, open and service oriented municipal organisation. The municipalities are in charge of the portal and are committed to continuing the project with their own funding.

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Avanthotel

Balearic Islands, Spain

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project consisting of a direct on-line booking and reservations system for the tourism industry. It aims to provide support to small and medium enterprises in the hotel and accommodation sector in the Balearics. The budget is €670,000 of which 38% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The Balearic Islands consist of Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, and Formentera. The tourism industry is key to the economy. It mainly consists of small independently run businesses which had been very slow to adopt the internet and related technologies as a promotional tool. In addition, the market for hotel rooms in the Balearics was changing. There was an increase in the number of independent tourists wishing to book direct with the hotels at the same time as a decrease in the fortunes of the traditional tour operators.

The aim of the project was to increase the level of internet use within the sector, to develop and enhance competences among existing businesses in order to attract new business, and improve the way that accommodation can be booked.

How did the project help?

The project developed a system for the on-line management and publication of available bed space. The project was initiated as a partnership between the hostel federations of Menorca, Ibiza, Formentera, Playa de Palma and Mallorca and the Balearic Islands government. Within the project there have been four main areas of activity:

- The development of the on-line booking and management system
- Encouragement of the hotels to adopt the system
- The training and support of hotel staff in the use of the new technologies
- Maintenance of the technical aspects of the system

The Avanthotel system was developed between IBIT (a technological innovation centre and the lead partner) and the hostelry associations. Both partners agreed the specific design and functionality of the system. The associations own the platform and the content of individual hotel pages is the responsibility of the participating hotels.

Hotels are encouraged to adopt the on-line booking system through a series of meetings and presentations. They are shown the business benefits which can occur from incorporating ideas from hotel chains and are reassured that the project will give them the tools needed to implement these new ideas and ways of working. The key messages that were communicated to the hotels were that the on-line booking system enabled their customers to:

- Browse in several languages (Catalan, Spanish, English, German,French and Italian)
- Search for availability of rooms by a number of different criteria such as geographical area or a specific hotel

- Book a room directly with the establishment
- Pre-pay for reservations by credit card via a secure server

Hotel staff is trained on how to upload and maintain their information. This was a very important part of the project and took a long time as the technical knowledge and skills of the participants was low. The hotel staff was trained to administer their own information in real time. This means that they are now able to:

- Manage prices by type of accommodation offered
- Publish and manage room availability and release a room on cancellation
- Handle reservation deposits that are paid directly into the bank account of the hotel, via a virtual POS terminal
- Generate reports on reservations

The technical aspects of the on-line booking system are maintained by IBIT. Some small ICT companies have been involved in the project, and were responsible for some concrete areas of the system. This way, the local technology providers are both suppliers to, and beneficiaries of, the project while IBIT co-ordinates all the technological aspects. Control remains with the one organisation which is best equipped to lead the project, but the benefits are spread widely.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects. The technology was quite innovative when it was developed, however, the main innovation was based on changing the processes and the way that the hotels did business. It is a new approach for this region.

What did the project achieve?

The project has created an on-line reservation system which is used by 430 enterprises in the Balearics. It has enabled these businesses to control their selling to direct clients and to travel agencies. It has reduced the commission that the hotels pay to tour operators and so has increased the profitability of the hotel sector. The system is now being used in Chile and the Czech Republic. This process is enabling technology transfer from the Balearics to other parts of the world, and is contributing to the local and regional economy of the Balearics.

And what did it learn?

The project has demonstrated that it could make partnerships work between public sector and private sector businesses. This is partly due to the involvement of trade associations and the hotels who are the direct beneficiaries of the project. There was some initial reticence on behalf of the hotels who saw the system as giving them extra work. Culturally, the way that business is conducted has had to change. However, the additional revenue and greater control offered to the hotels has helped the project to face these difficulties.

Technologically, the project has solved problems of interconnectivity with other systems by the involvement of third party enterprises.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is continuing. There are plans to expand the system to more users in the Balearics and to spread the technology to Romania, Bulgaria, Argentina, Costa Rica, etc.

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Wireless Initiative Sweden (WI.SE)

Blekinge, Sweden

Background Information

This was an eBusiness project aimed at creating regional business growth by generating new companies and business ideas that use wireless technology. This was achieved by supporting ideas with business potential and providing assistance on the development of prototypes. The project was aimed at students, researchers, entrepreneurs, companies and public bodies. The budget was €623,000 of which 36% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Although ICT in general, and wireless technology in particular, was very important for the development of the region of Blekinge in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in recent years the region has started to lag a little in the field of ICT. There remains a high level of competence, but at a regional level new thinking, innovation and development is needed to maintain a leading competitive edge.

The WI.SE project is a continuation of the RIAP initiative TANGO (Thematic Arenas Nourish Growth Opportunities) which was operational in southern Sweden in 2002-03. TANGO created 4 or 5 thematic 'Arenas' in which research and development, businesses and public sector players combined to create a knowledge and competence base. One of these 'Arenas' was for mobile communications, which was continued as WI.SE.

How did the project help?

The project developed an arena for experimental development where end-users, technicians and businesses could co-operate in the development of useful and fun ICT and telecoms solutions. The activities sprang from the users' needs (and also the amount the user is prepared to pay!). The project explores whether it is possible to create a business model using a technical solution as the basis for a profitable business.

Within the project there are 2 main areas of activity:

- Development of an innovation process for development projects
- Industry research projects

The projects for development provided knowledge about how industrial methods and processes are applied, whereas the research projects provided a more profound understanding of industrial methods and processes. So there was a good cross-fertilisation between the two activities.

Both sets of activities were underpinned by the need to **establish and maintain partnerships** between the public, private and university sectors. The project encouraged co-operation between students, the unemployed, researchers, entrepreneurs, companies and public bodies. By involving students and the unemployed, they would get practical experience of the development of mobile services. The idea was that by developing skills and experience, these people would become in demand from companies in the region. The project also operated more traditionally by forming of

consortia between industries and researchers, and taking part in research projects where commercialisation was imminent.

The project established a coherent process for innovation with Proof of Concept/Proof of Business approaches to projects. Usually, between 2 and 6 people made up from private and public sectors worked together on a project. A project had maximum lifespan of 6 months. The idea for development could have been generated from any of different actors involved. Within the project the necessary resources for the innovation process were made available. The results were always focused on growth. The desired outcome would either be a marketable product or service, or knowledge that can be used to generate new businesses and jobs.

The project also participated in industrial research. These projects were aimed at the commercialisation of wireless technology products or services (following a specified innovation process), or providing support to establish new companies in the wireless arena.

Innovative aspects

The unbureaucratic environment to stimulate innovation, and the engagement of all relevant actors is a different approach. There has also been a lot of technical innovation in the project, and the testing of methods to try to ensure product/service commercialisation and sustainability are also new.

What did the project achieve?

The project has evaluated 70 project ideas and created 33 prototypes. 20 business ideas have been developed involving 36 participating companies. Some 106 people have actively taken part in the project, 4 new companies have been established and 15 jobs created.

And what did it learn?

Having enough resources is always an issue, especially when a project is getting close to its end. Projects are supposed to be able to experiment – and it should be recognised that not everything will work – but some results or outputs should be sustainable after the project ends. In the case of WI.SE a strong and mixed partnership was one reason why project activities did continue after the funding stopped. It is also necessary to plan for the future during the project's lifetime.

The project had to overcome scepticism between the different kinds of actors involved and the cultural differences between the different sectors. Cultural differences can be overcome. Within the project, researchers and business actors had the opportunity to work together and developed a better understanding of each other's role. Such co-operation can be beneficial for all concerned but has to be built on a foundation of mutual trust and with a clear understanding of the desired outcomes.

Development always takes time, and for businesses with new concepts the process is even longer. This can be frustrating for them. Pilot studies and test groups are two ways of managing the inevitable delays between prototypes and the final end product which is available commercially.

And finally….what happened next?

The project continues with Blekinge Institute of Technology (BIT) as "host" and with several of the former project partners as sponsors. Some projects within the concept of WI.SE have found funding (from national funds and Structural Funds) for parts of their activities until 2007, and in some cases until 2008.

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eCulture Factory

Bremen, Germany

Background Information

This is an eCulture project aimed at uniting design and technical ideas within the creative industries sector. It is running from May 2005 to December 2007.
The budget is €3,191,000 of which 33% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The aim of the project was to make the region one of the leading locations for new media technology in Germany by establishing a competence centre for application oriented research and development in the field of eCulture.

The idea is to offer cultural actors and industrial players, as well as researchers, new instruments to create and communicate knowledge. The project is creating a platform which explains interactive products and processes to politicians, representatives of the business world, cultural industries and interested citizens.

The underpinning rationale for the project is to help Bremen's economic development by becoming a leading player in new media technologies, and to promote industry/university linkages. There is also an economic imperative – to demonstrate ways of attracting third party funding, to help counteract the impact of declining regional funding.

How did the project help?

The project has created a physical space (the Showroom) as the locus for the development of concepts and prototypes for new eCulture projects and products focused on the development of new interfaces for mobile and networked playing, living and working. The Showroom allows visitors to experiment with highly developed interactive play-, learn- and think devices. In total 13 demonstration products and services have been developed, in two areas: "Intuitive interfaces" and "Knowledge tools".
Within the project are 5 main areas of activity:

- Support and advice to creative industries on the development of new products and projects
- Organisation of eCulture events to demonstrate new products and projects
- Marketing of the project
- Community building
- Test bed and showcase

Support has been provided in the form of space, as well consultancy and help from universities and other partners in Bremen, including marketing companies to bring the prototypes to market. The development of concepts and prototypes for new eCulture projects have been very successfully exhibited in the Showroom attracting large audiences. It has proved to be a useful shop window - for example, the project succeeded in obtaining further assignments with a value of €256,000, which has made it possible to involve a wider pool of people, includding freelancers.

Business and cultural events have been organised by the project. The event 'eCulture Trends 06' was a major conference to position Bremen at the heart of digital cultural industries. It attracted 400 people. The exhibition 'Knowledge Art from the eCulture Factory' looked at innovative solutions for opening up digital information.

Marketing was extensive. As well as traditional channels, online media are extensively used. Activities are communicated on the internationally known internet platform for digital art and culture **www.netzspannung.org** which receives around 100,000 visitors per month. Of course, there is a website developed for the project itself which has all encompassing information system about eCulture – regional, national and international. It has about 8,000 visitors per month. An interactive map – the Bremen eCulture Map – presents local firms that are active in the creative industries as a way of embedding a feeling of participation and collaboration. A Google map and the eCulture blog have been used and are very popular. This will be a permanent legacy of the project.

Community building in relation to the topic "eCulture" is of vital importance. The community is composed of participants who create new media, who work with new media and who buy or sell new media.

Products developed by the project are being used by clients at various industrial fairs. This enables the testing of the developed products in a real life situation.

Innovative aspects

The main innovation is that eCulture is the starting point for further development of the economic, education and leisure industries. To achieve this, the project uses a new approach for the region - a visible network bringing together the economy, culture and science.

What did the project achieve?

The project now has experience about developing specific ideas and concepts and implementing them with the suitable partners. In particular, the cooperation of enterprises and research institutes has been successfully demonstrated for the development and marketing of prototypes. This is of value to SMEs and the regional economy.

Marketing and dissemination activities have been successful, reaching large numbers of people, and the Culture Factory demonstration products have won various prizes and are now being marketed. The project was elected as one of the "Places in the land of ideas" a national competition attracting a lot of public attention.

And what did it learn?

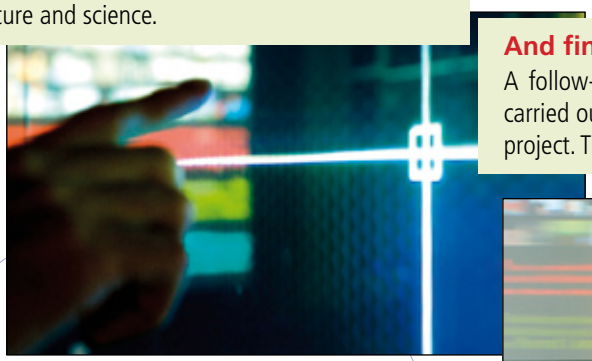
By locating the project next to the local university, the project was in the right place to identify partners who were interested in the project objectives. The project was able to use these contacts to strengthen the links with the University sector and is planning to collaborate with them on the running of a digital media course.

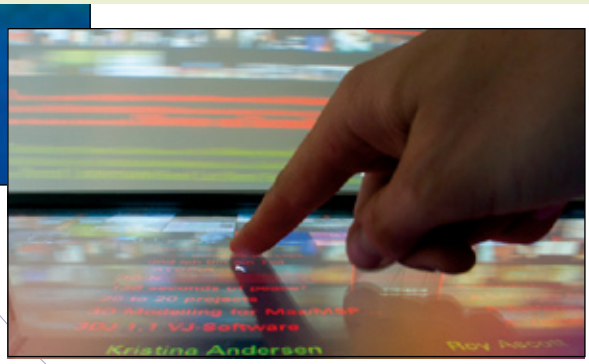
The cooperation of enterprises and research institutes has also been strongly promoted for the development and marketing of prototypes. Such a partnership between a company, a polytechnic university and the Fraunhofer eCulture research group has resulted in sub-projects like Momeus (Mobile Media communication-Environment for Urban Screen Scenarios) – which examines the technical development of convergence solutions for mobile and stationary types of media.

The project has had to overcome some barriers. For example, the project owner merged with another organisation which meant that the project had to accommodate new structures and new people had to be informed about the project and convinced of its objectives. This took a lot of time.

And finally….what happened next?

A follow-up project, to run until December 2008, will be carried out assuming there is a successful evaluation of this project. This has been planned from the start.





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Mobile Applications for Health Care

Bremen, Germany

Background Information

This was an eHealth project aimed at identifying and evaluating groups which were actively involved in mobile health care services, ascertaining how they use it and identifying further developmental opportunities. The project was aimed at healthcare workers in the region. The budget was €127,000 of which 50% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Mobile ICT has reached a stage where it can be widely employed to offer economic and social benefits. To maximize the potential of mobile activities existing working processes and business processes need to be analysed. One application area with an high proportion of mobile activities is health care - for example on-the-spot emergency and out-patient nursing as well as the work of hospital staff. Although ICT, including mobile devices such as pagers, have been used in this area for a long time, mobile solutions offer considerable potential for the improvement of working processes.

The project was carried out in the framework of the RIAP "Mobile Bremen Initiative" (MBI). MBI's main task was to raise awareness about new mobile technologies and to support the development of mobile solutions. There are three thematic focus to MBI – mobile services and solutions for citizens, for SMEs and for healthcare.

The aim of this project was to produce a survey of current mobile ICT use in healthcare and develop a strategy for its further implementation. Special attention was given to a survey of suppliers and service providers in the economic area Bremen/ Bremerhaven, and to the identification of future users - with priority given to regional fields of application. The results were presented at a final congress to spread the findings to the relevant players.

How did the project help?

The project was divided into two closely linked parts. After the first part of the project (a survey) it was decided to carry out a follow-on activity, as the healthcare sector needs long term information and other support for mobile solutions. The second part of the activity took the form of a symposium on state of the art mobile solutions for health care.
Within the project there were 4 main areas of activity:

- Analysis of the applications and market for ICT in the healthcare sector
- Survey of existing mobile ICT users in the region
- Marketing of the project
- Organisation of a congress

The project identified and analysed mobile applications for healthcare. This desk work was augmented by a survey of regional suppliers and service providers (focusing on solutions for healthcare using ICT) and preliminary interviews with users within the healthcare sector.

The user survey was commissioned by the project leader TZI (Centre for Computing Technologies at the University of Bremen). Approximately 70 interviewees were surveyed about their mobile activities, needs of communication, and situation-based information (qualitative interviews about

specific requirements for mobile solutions). The survey and related activities provided the basis for a systematic analysis of current activities, potential activities and future demands as well as the raising of awareness in the area of mobile applications in the health care sector.

The project was marketed at 7 events. Firstly, a start-up presentation introduced the purpose of the survey and the forthcoming events, then 6 topic-centred workshops were organised according to the requirements of the participants.

A congress on the state-of-the-art of "Mobile Solutions for Health Care" combined with open discussions about practical applications and experiences and a mobile solutions presentation was organised by the project leader at the end of the project.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects to this project. Application-oriented and interdisciplinarily developed mobile solutions did not exist in the healthcare sector before the project began. So the approach which involved all the relevant players was both relevant and innovative. The dialogue between the different interest groups - users, developers, decision-makers etc - were systematically moderated and shaped by the project developer. This was a new approach.

What did the project achieve?

The project was an important first step in introducing innovative mobile technology into the healthcare sector. This task is still on-going and more activities are still required. Ideas for new projects were generated and a closer cooperation with regional players was achieved within the project. It raised the awareness of solutions developers and delivered new insights for them. It also provided decision makers and users with an increased awareness of what ICT can deliver.

Over the lifetime of the project, an increasing number of mobile applications for the health care sector were developed. The project provided an overview of available applications and included the participation of all relevant players: developers, users and decision-makers in interviews, workshops, events. Approximately 250 representatives of the healthcare, technology and regional government participated in the congress.

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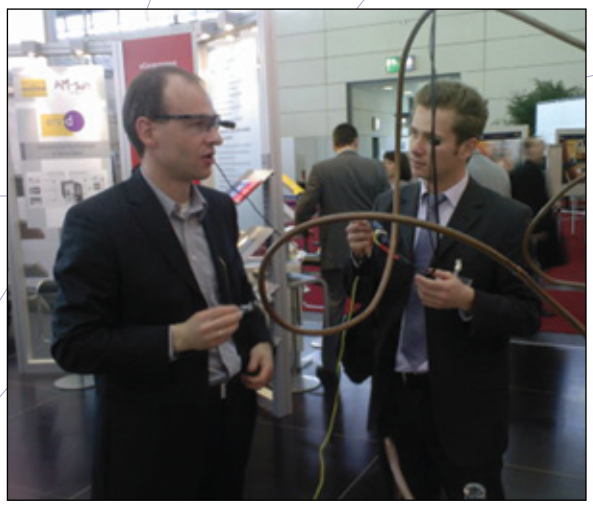
And what did it learn?

Introducing innovative technologies into the healthcare sector is still a difficult task. The challenges that it presents are not easily resolved as these issues are not only present between the different interest groups but within them.
By developing a platform for moderation, the project made it possible to resolve such issues and move forward.

Exciting the interest of the users is also difficult. They had other problems and priorities regarding work organization and resource management. It was only by engaging them personally and spelling out the potential benefits afforded by ICT and by providing concrete demonstrations that they became interested in the topic.

Ultimately, general changes can only be made by through the political and legal framework. However, current innovative healthcare projects (supported by the regional development agency "Bremen Investment Agency") focus on the service sector in order to involve the widest number of users.



And finally….what happened next?

The project has ended but follow-up activities are being continued. Subsequent mobile solutions projects in the region have included the healthcare sector. The University of Bremen founded a Mobile Research Centre in July 2004 which includes "Mobile Solutions for Health Care" as one focus. The region now funds a demonstration centre for mobile solutions, which includes Mobile Health Care. The EU-project wearIT@work chose health care as one of four use cases for the implementation of wearable computing technologies. The same institution (TZI) is initiator and coordinator of this EU-project.

Since 2006, a regular event with the same partners has been carried out: "Gesundheitsforum Weser-Ems.

eCare: Integrated Network for the assistance of Elderly and Disabled People (eCare)

Emilia-Romagna, Italy

Background Information

This is an eHealth project aimed at creating an integrated network of health and social services (e-Care) for the benefit of elderly and disabled people. The budget is €336,000 of which 38% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Emilia-Romagna is a region with a large and increasingly elderly population. More than 25% of the population is aged over 64 years old. Around 30% of them need care, treatment or specific assistance. Many of them live alone. It is largely recognised that many patients prefer to be taken care of in their own home rather than in hospital. Assessing the patient's immediate and potential needs may need the input of several medical and social stakeholders. Welfare, medical and voluntary services are not integrated. ICT can help overcome these barriers by providing better sharing of information as a patient progresses through various stages of the care system.

The project's aim was to create and develop a unified access point for all the health-care and welfare services. This represents a fundamental improvement for the quality of life of elderly and disabled people in the region, reducing the need for hospitalisation and reducing costs.

How did the project help?

The project focused on the integration of the management of services dealing with prevention, treatment and assistance. The project developed an ICT network which assists in the management of personalised assistance of the elderly and disabled. Within the project were 3 main areas of activity:

- Development of a multi service, multi channel platform
- Development of the Electronic Patient File (EPF)
- Training on the use of the platform

A multi-service, multi-channel platform was developed to put the citizen in touch with the health and welfare services. This platform also improves the flow of communication between the different private and public service providers. It was important to make the services accessible so contact can be made by telephone, by using the internet, by visiting any healthcare provider, or by visiting chemist's shops. The network links the citizen and his family to the healthcare services, verifying information, providing access to assistance (booking appointments, check-in, service contracts), informative feedback (such as medical references or bills for services rendered), and homecare services.

The Electronic Patient File (EPF) is at the core of the project. It allows complete management of the functions of both the welfare and healthcare structures. In this way, the patient and all their information are at the centre of all processes. The system is secure and ensures privacy.

The project integrated the different systems used by both

health and welfare practitioners and administrators. The resulting system consisted of two main parts: one part containing file management functions aimed at the administration and planning of services; the other part containing functions relating to the management of the clinical information accessible by health practitioners such as doctors.

From a technological point of view the system was developed using Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) methodology. The system integrates diverse data which is made available by using several applications developed on the 'ambient internet'. Its advantages are that data need only be entered once, it is available to a variety of people in a variety of formats (but it is secure) and it integrates data from different sources. The main functions of the software are:

- Management of cases
- Computerisation of the homecare assistance which is integrated with nursing care, the rehabilitation services and medical check-ups
- Computerised management of requested services
- Integrated management of the activities for the disabled
- Computerised management of administrative procedures
- Computerised management of access for different operators

Specific training on the use of the platform has been given to healthcare professionals.

Innovative aspects

The innovation is not technological. Rather it is the approach to the patient and the way healthcare processes have been adapted. The patient is put at the centre of the care process. All the information relating to a patient is integrated and centralised and all the procedures relating to patient care are shared among the different stakeholders. This is a new approach for the region. From the patients perspective, the system is a unique entry point for all the different services that may be required regardless of the specific service they may be accessing at that time.

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What did the project achieve?

The project is up and running, offering a single entry point to integrated and updated patient information, something which had not existed before in the region.

And what did it learn?

The different healthcare and welfare stakeholders did not share common workflows or processes and had different understandings of how the project should implement its aims. The project overcame this issue by organising meetings with the operators in order to understand the peculiarities of each workflow and organising specific training sessions for the different kinds of operators. The project benefited from strong political support which provided the necessary leadership and consequently the right commitment.

From a technological point of view, the project had to deal with a large number of different applications developed to solve individual specific problems. These did not communicate with each other. This meant that several specific interfaces had to be created for their integration in the global system.

And finally….what happened next?

The region has adopted the system and a number of new projects have also been financed. The three most important are related to the enlargement of the present system to target all of the citizens in the region, the development of telemedicine applications and the development of a number of call centres for the booking of services.

Furthermore a project on telemedicine has been successfully presented at European level within the strategic objective of 'Ambient living assistance' of the IST programme.

Finally, a new experiment related to the booking of the services and the traceability of the EPR on digital TV has been recently launched. The success and the consensus reached by this first project is proved by the new funds made at disposal by the Regional Government for the enlargement of the system to the totality of the population.

Wireless protocol for Cardiological Monitoring

Emilia-Romagna, Italy

Background Information

This is an eHealth project aimed at developing and marketing a new technology for the cardiological monitoring of patients, based on a standard wireless protocol for the communication of patients' physiological functions. The budget is €414,000 of which 19% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The Emilia-Romagna region has an increasingly aging population, but fortunately the region's health care system has always been quite innovative. The region benefits from state-of-the-art technology, and utilises the multi-disciplinary skills of its staff to interact with researchers and industry personnel to continually develop new projects and processes. This particular project falls within an important sector in the region – medical instrumentation engineering.

Existing cardiological monitoring systems usually include a monitor installed at the patient's bed and telemetric systems equipped with proprietary communication solutions. This monitor is connected through a wire to a central station, which enables the visualisation of patients' physiological functions and vital parameters, and which generates video and audio alerts. However, the current systems pose a number of problems because the frequency bands are unable to handle increased data rates, proprietary solutions do not use the available bandwidth most effectively, and they are not harmonised at an international level.

The aim of the project was to overcome the use of proprietary communication systems, to allow the management of a larger set of data, exploit communication bands more efficiently and enable remote monitoring by hospital staff.

How did the project help?

The project was a partnership between the private and public sector which designed developed, tested and brought to market a workable solution. The main areas of activity were:

- Feasibility study
- Product development
- Laboratory testing and validation

The project carried out a feasibility study for the adoption of standard wireless communication protocols for patients' cardiological monitoring. The work plan included an analysis of the most suitable commercial products, their customisation, the pilot application of the resulting solution in a real hospital environment and the identification of times and costs for the development of the industrialised product.

The activities carried out included defining the specifications from a functional, electrical and mechanical point of view for each application:

- Transmission of the patient physiological signals for continuous use

- Repetition of the signals for non continuous consultation use
- Remote transmission of the alerts generated by the central station

This phase included also the analysis of critical factors such as consumption, reliability, electromagnetic compatibility, data rate, costs, etc.

The feasibility study and development stage were divided into sub-projects carried out by different partners according to their expertise. For example, the in depth analysis of electromagnetic compatibility was carried out in collaboration with the University of Bologna, and took into consideration the increasing diffusion of wireless technologies in the hospital environment, including mobile phones and handheld devices such as PDAs.

There was a sub-project called "Nurse" which tracked all the activities needed to enable hospital operators to monitor the patients' conditions remotely through the use of wireless communication systems. These activities were carried out by the co-ordinating partner in collaboration with the private sector. The adopted solution required the installation of a WiFi Access Point to the LAN Network, to connect a PDA to the monitoring system. Functions implemented in the PDA included consultation and alarm repetition.

There was another sub-project called "Patient", devoted to the feasibility study of a non proprietary wireless technology for telemetry. This was co-ordinated by a private sector partner. After the analysis of specifications, activities were concentrated on the choice of the most appropriate standard from DECT, BlueTooth, IEEE 802.11x, HomeRF, HiperLAN, and WMTS. The most suitable choice was IEEE 802.11x. An analysis was carried out of collisions, transmission times, hand-over and consumptions and a test bed was constructed.

After laboratory testing, the prototypes were validated on site, including the collection of statistical and qualitative data on the system functionality. A final evaluation of the exercise both from a technological and cost-benefit point of view was then conducted.

Innovative aspects

The innovation is not technological. Rather it is the approach to the patient and the way healthcare processes have been adapted. The patient is put at the centre of the care process. All the information relating to a patient is integrated and centralised and all the procedures relating to patient care are shared among the different stakeholders. This is a new approach for the region. From the patients perspective, the system is a unique entry point for all the different services that may be required regardless of the specific service they may be accessing at that time.

What did the project achieve?

It resulted in a proved and tested prototype system

And what did it learn?

The expected return on this particular product did not justify by itself the development cost – it would not have happened without external funding. The project has generated a lot of new knowledge – for example about the safety aspects of wireless technologies in hospitals, and even the aspects which did not entirely work (the 'Patient' sub-project) have been useful.

Overall, the system has resulted in significant "interesting aspects" within the product lines of the company, which should allow it to compete with much larger competitors. However, in order to achieve this successful outcome the company had to find new funding sources to complete the work – it received funding from a regional programme (Spinner Technology Transfer') for the recruitment of a young researcher working in collaboration with a university.

And finally....what happened next?

The prototype was formalised and the product is now available on the market. In 2006, the system had been installed in about 170 cardiological monitoring stations in hospitals. The approach is now part of the private sector partner's portfolio of products.

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Pole of numerical and molecular modelling (Supercomputer)

Haute-Normandie, France

Background Information

This is an eResearch project aimed at building a total tool for the calculation, storage and diffusion of services based on the existing data-processing resources. It is aimed at the scientific community. The budget so far (from 2000) is €4,100,000 of which 20% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The power and range of numerical modelling using ICT has increased significantly in the last few years. It is now possible to model many things virtually, whilst it would still be impossible to do them via experiments in the 'real world'.

CRIHAN (Data-processing Resources Centre of Haute-Normandie) supports a wide range of modelling activities using its powerful equipment and leading edge expertise. This demand has resulted in the creation of an Interregional Pole of Modelling for Engineering Science and the Norman Network of Molecular Modelling. CRIHAN is the regional data-processing resource for higher education and research laboratories and it provides extra capacity for several industrial partners.

The aim of this project is to join together within the same logical architecture all the data-processing resources available in the region for the scientific community. This is a manifestation of GRID computing, where a network of geographically dispersed computers can be combined to form a 'virtual supercomputer'.

How did the project help?

At the heart of the project are the resources and expertise of CRIHAN itself which has long been a leader in distributed calculation. The first objective is to connect CRIHAN's computers and resources with those in regional laboratories and the universities. By providing the software tools for interrogation or 'mediation', then this network will become a total and distributed resource for calculation and modelling. In essence, the concept is the globalisation of all data-processing resources in the region. A consequence of this will be a lowering of barriers of access to the resources of CRIHAN – by introducing a wider range of users.
Within the project are 3 main areas of activity:

- Creation and maintenance of partnerships
- Development of software tools
- Inclusion of a range of users and applicationss

The project has put a lot of effort into building partnerships between the public, private and university sectors. It is important that the project is responsive to the needs of the users - the software coding was done simply so it could be adapted where needed. The system used to reserve the supercomputer is very simple to follow. Because the project wanted to offer access to the resources to a number of people, the length of time it can be reserved for, are restricted compared to national data-processing resources.

Software tools for the mediation of all the computers in the scientific community allow them to be used like a total and distributed calculation resource. Any user is able to reach the network in a completely transparent way, according to his real needs. The mediation tools (middleware similar to GLOBUS or UNICORE) are now available free and can be deployed on any type of architecture.

Other users and applications are included in using the project's resources. The range of services offered goes beyond the strict functions of scientific computation. Data is disseminated via a Web-interface, and can accommodate databases in the fields of, for example, cartography, economic data, bibliographical data, and directory functions.

An important consideration in terms of gathering together the resources and data is the respect of access rights. These include data ownership, the problems of intellectual property, the obvious need to ensure the authenticity of the exchanges by guaranteeing the identity of the computers and the users, the integrity of the transactions and possibly the confidentiality of the exchanges. To deal with all these requirements, an infrastructure of double-keys (public and private) is proposed. This will have to be interoperable with systems in all the users – ie universities and other higher education institutions, research organisations, and public administrations and other decentralised services of the state.

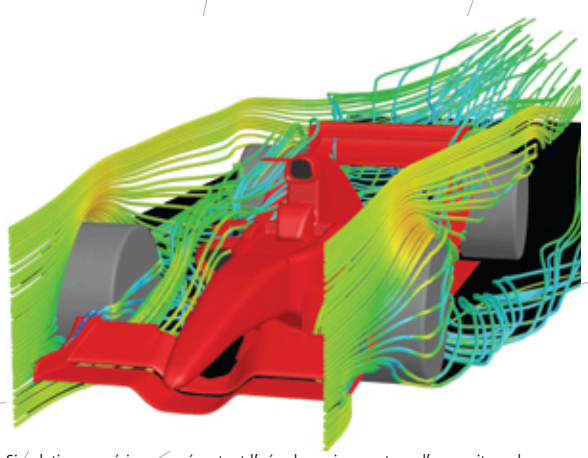
Innovative aspects

The project was particularly innovative in creating new partnerships that brought together laboratories and researchers with mutual intellectual aims. Previously, this community had been quite competitive. The project has fostered a new way for researchers to work together and a new way to use existing data-processing resources.

What did the project achieve?

Today, the researchers regard themselves as a new community. The technological advances made give the researchers the real feeling that they are making progress in the field of numerical modelling. This has brought about a higher level of visibility, and researchers, particularly in the field of the organic chemistry, are regarded as being a very powerful network. It's now possible for them to compete competitively for contracts.

At least 14 research laboratories in the region and 22 national laboratories regularly use the supercomputer. In fact, because of the supercomputer, CRIHAN is now ranked fourth in terms of academic centres with data-processing resources, in France. The region now has a much higher profile in this field.



Simulation numérique représentant l'aérodynamique autour d'une voiture de course. Calculs réalisés par Mr David Taieb élève ingénieur du département mécanique de l'INSA Rouen.

And what did it learn?

The success of this project lies in the cohesion between various partners, in particular in the sharing of technical and intellectual resources. The goodwill of each one made it possible to deliver a reliable and decentralised tool which is sufficiently powerful to answer the majority of needs.

The project is successful in terms of public research but private sector researchers are more reticent. Only a small number of industrial partners have been attracted to the project. Historically, the private sector doesn't have the same ethos as the public sector research community and is more reserved about working collaboratively.

And finally….what happened next?

Although the initial development work has ended, the supercomputer is updated once a year.

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MONIKIELISEN VERKKOVIESTINNÄN YRITYSLABORATORIO

MONEY

The Business Laboratory of Multilingual Network Communication (MONEY)

Kouvola, Finland

Background Information

This is an eLearning project aiming to help citizens in general and in particular adult learners, students, SMEs, local authorities and the project partners themselves (ie higher education institutions). Its budget is €332,315 of which 26% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

There has been a long tradition of translation services being offered in the region. However, there were also quite high levels of unemployment amongst translators in an industry which had not been noted for its use of technology. In the short term, the project saw an opportunity to provide qualified translators with the skills to operate effectively in the knowledge economy by providing them with training and real assignments in local businesses. It also recognised a chance to build new relationships between higher education and professional institutions in the region, by encouraging a first-of-a-kind collaboration between three education suppliers, and between the translators and other students.

In the longer term the project had an underlying aim. It sought to strengthen Kouvola's role as a national (maybe even European) region known for its expertise in Language Industry, and to enhance the attractiveness of the region as a home to new companies, particularly those exploiting technology. To make this ideal a reality, it was necessary to have some real pilot projects to develop and test the concept – and MONEY provided this opportunity.

How did the project help?

The project basically existed to give unemployed translators and interpreters better skills; particularly ICT-based skills. The idea was that using materials and teaching support provided by the co-operation between the 4 learning providers, they worked with student translators, and students from media courses in a mutually supportive way. The students could help coach the older, unemployed translators, whilst in turn they shared their real-world experiences and tips with the students. Local employers provided 'real life' assignments, which they paid for, undertaken by these mixed teams. The Laboratory Coordinator was the daily link between the participants, the institutions, the companies and the project management/steering committee.

Training was available in network communication, project work, marketing and entrepreneurship for example. The training programme was designed to provide the students with skills needed in today's job market and also to prepare them for starting a business of their own.

Actual work assignments from companies were an important part of the training. A typical assignment could be to design and create a multilingual website, although translation, interpretation and language consultation services were also available. Companies were attracted to the programme by advertising, local news stories and general awareness raising. It took a while to get sufficient interest because the training was in a new area, using new technology. Because the City doesn't have its own University, there wasn't a 'university culture'. It was quite hard to get companies to

realise the teaching wasn't about being in an 'ivory tower' but about real, practical work and jobs. In the end, 'mouth to mouth' communication was the most powerful way of raising awareness and commitment to the project. Indeed, in some cases employers ended up hiring professional graduates who had participated in the MONEY training program, or creating new projects with the research and educational organisations.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects to the project:

- A new concept to enhance the cooperation and joint use of resources between universities and polytechnics located in the same region
- Direct contact with the companies and working in real-life assignments gave the students and the educational staff a chance to pilot the working-life orientation of the Bologna-process
- A new kind of resource was found in the innovative combination of both university and polytechnic students with their latest academic know-how and the unemployed with their working experience studying and working together in the lab and being encouraged to continue together in an incubation centre. The latter was available, but not used, during the project, for students who wished to set up a firm
- With the project the kick-off for a national new line of business was launched in Finland: Language Industry
- Interaction with companies produced ideas for master's theses and thus speeded up graduation

What did the project achieve?

The project over-achieved on several of its targets – helping an average of 59 students per year rather than the 20 forecast, placing them on 45 assignments, rather than the 10 originally envisaged. Six out of the 16 previously unemployed students found jobs, one set up a business and 2 continued their studies.

And what did it learn?

The project initiated collaborative working between partners who had not participated jointly before. Although it took a while to break down 'organisational cultures' by clearly specifying partner roles, and involving everybody, early on, good collaboration was achieved.

This co-operation has been extended to businesses and potential employers who now have a clearer view of the calibre of the students – this is evidenced by the continuing strong demand for both undergraduate assignments and post-graduate employment. This has mutual benefit as local employers now have access to a very high quality talent pool, and local universities and polytechnics can attract students more easily, onto higher education degrees as well.

Lastly, the students and the previously unemployed translation professionals now have better skills, increased confidence etc. Again, this did not happen 'overnight' it was initially hard to market this new approach, and for some of the group to realise the benefits that were on offer in terms of privileged access to employers for example, and the opportunity to network.

And finally….what happened next?

Although there is not a formal follow-up project, the institutions continue to place students with local employers. The experiences and outcomes of the project have been capitalised upon in other higher education/business linkage projects in the partner organisations.

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Building of regional broadband communication network in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (K-PSI)

Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland

Background Information

This is a project to provide a broadband network for the public administration, schools, libraries, hospitals, SMEs support organisations, innovation centres etc. The budget is €19,190,000, 75% of which is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Kujawsko-Pomorskie is a rural region in Poland. It does not have a broadband network and this lack of infrastructure was identified as a major barrier to competitiveness and social inclusion (ie avoiding depopulation and the digital divide) in the Regional Strategy for Innovation. In particular it was shown that a broadband network would have the following benefits:

- **Administrative ones** – providing the skeleton for the regional council network, thus connecting public administration bodies as a part of an eGovernment programme
- **Educational ones** – enabling implementation of the regional teaching network, focused on the eLearning services,
- **Improvement of the health service** – providing the basis for the implementation of the build of tele-medical network, as a part of an eHealth programme

It is the first, and the largest, project to provide a broadband infrastructure to a region in Poland.

How did the project help?

The idea was to build a network, using public funding, so that it did not belong to any one operator. The frame network (skeleton) consists of a frame layer (connecting the main cities of the region), and a distributional layer (connecting frame nodes with distributional nodes which are located in county cities). This is a fibre optic network.

The access layer, connecting distributional nodes (in counties) with the edge nodes located in remote and rural areas – is a wireless network.

A significant benefit of such solution is obtaining a homogeneous, independent network, which can fulfil current and future requirements of users and deliver more advanced services, especially in remote and rural areas.

A feasibility study was conducted to decide which technologies to use. Users were consulted via questionnaires and meetings with hospitals, libraries, local authorities and offices (there were "face to face" meetings, consultation meetings, conferences and workshops). Although the network is really designed for public institutions, it is also open for citizens via local ISPs.

There was an open competition (ie tender opportunity) to create the network. Money has also been spent on developing services/applications – so far a Telemedicine Network has been developed.

Innovative aspects

The project was innovative in its scale, its approach (creating a regional network, unowned by a single entity) and the technology involved.

What did the project achieve?

Around 60% of the outputs have been achieved so far. By the end of 2007 the project expects this to increase to 100%. So far, there is a 900 km optical fibre network which is connecting all 19 counties in the region, 19 distributional nodes and 144 access nodes have been created in rural areas (ie all villages in the region), and hospitals have the new tool which should help them be more efficient.

And what did it learn?

This has been a complex project, requiring high levels of co-operation. It has been essential to have a good team for both the planning and the implementation phases, and support from experts (technical, legal, University etc) has been essential. It was not always easy to attract users to participate, and sometimes it was hard to agree plans. This happened because there were different expectations from end-users (for example public administrations at the regional level, county level and rural area level) and so the action plan had to be agreed and repeated many times.

And finally….what happened next?

This is a plan to develop more content (eg modern broadband e-services and a regional eGovernment platform) but nothing has been agreed formally yet.

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eBusiness in Kymenlaakso

Kouvola, Finland

Background Information

This was an eBusiness project to increase the competitiveness of local SMEs by improving their eBusiness capabilities through both technology deployment and employee training. The key target groups were SMEs and eBusiness service providers who were willing to develop their business through participation in the project. The budget was €1,200,000 of which 21% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Kymenlaakso is an industrial region with 200,000 inhabitants, largely still living from the proceeds of pulp, paper and allied industries. It has low levels of entrepreneurship. The vast majority of SMEs have less than 5 employees. Medium-sized enterprises are almost non-existent in the region. The region has very low ICT uptake within the business community.

The aim of the project was to improve the eBusiness capabilities of SMEs in the region and to support regional ICT service providers.

How did the project help?

The project was a continuation of an earlier project in the neighbouring region of South Karelia. From the outset it sought to secure the support of key entrepreneurs' organizations (Chamber of Commerce and Kymenlaakso Entrepreneurs' Association) as well as some key service providers, a major telecom and mobile operator, and local banks. Within the project there were 4 main areas of activity:

- Provision of, and training on, an online tool for SMEs to develop their own eBusiness development plans (ePlans)
- Project implementation and financial support
- Development of the portal through which all project activities are administered
- Marketing of the project

e-Plans are provided by the project through the portal. Registered service providers (ie companies supplying ICT hardware, software or consultancy) discussed the project with an SME who needed assistance. The SME would register on the portal and complete a 30 minute online questionnaire. This then produced their ePlan - a checklist of their current eBusiness capability and future development needs and possibilities. The portal includes learning materials on eBusiness that the SMEs can use in preparing their ePlan.

Assuming the SME wished to proceed **to implementing a project**, then a contract would be drawn up between the SME and the service provider. A typical project involved website development, although the largest and most ambitious projects were ERP set-ups. The service provider invoiced the project for the work done. In turn, the project deducted the amount of financial support the SME was entitled to (a maximum of 50% of the implementation cost, up to €2500) and invoiced the SME for the remainder. The SME paid the invoice - which formed the private sector portion of the project's funding. The payment was also an indicator of the approval of work performed - that it was 'fit for purpose'.

The portal formed the online hub of the project. It was the tool for collecting the ePlans, provided a database of service providers, plus an information source on eBusiness issues. The content was continually updated. Just as importantly,

all administration was carried out online via the portal. This proved to be very efficient.

Marketing was extensive. There was a large direct mail campaign, advertising and reporting in local newspapers, a monthly newsletter, on-line and printed information about e-business etc. The project also ran a number of seminars on e-business topics and used the portal. The aim of the marketing approach was to benefit from the existing trust and credibility of the partners and to use existing communication channels to keep costs down.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects:

- The project uses online tools to administer and run the project including the formulation of ePlans.
- The project shared a web portal with 7 other regions carrying out similar projects. This enabled the exchange of good practice information. The portal is also building a significant database of data of SME ICT usage and development plans. This is a unique source for research and analytical purposes
- The online ePlan system on the portal itself is an innovative, concise means for a SME to produce a quick yet structured overview of the company's current and future ICT situation
- The in-built data aggregation system of the portal provides instant information on ICT needs and development plans of the SMEs to the Project team and enables them to develop seminars and the eBusiness information on the portal according to those needs and plans

What did the project achieve?

The project has achieved a high level of awareness of eBusiness. Entrepreneurs' associations and organizations, a large number of SMEs and the regional development agencies all have now positive experiences of productive cooperation on eBusiness issues. Some 600 enterprises were involved with the project in total through seminars and ePlans and 340 enterprises have received project funds.

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(follow "Kymenlaakso" link)

And what did it learn?

The project has shown that it could make partnerships between the public and private sector work. This is partly due to the involvement and commitment of the partners at an early stage. In particular the project fostered close partnerships with service providers - to the extent that they did most of the project promotion and marketing as part of their participation in the project which made the project funds stretch further.

The use of online tools meant that the project could be administered with a light touch, making SME participation and project management easy.

The project has encouraged and supported a spirit of commitment and co-operation between the partners and other regions with similar experiences. This culminated in the formation of the eBusiness Network where information and resources are shared.

And finally….what happened next?

The work of the eBusiness project has been and will be continued at a number of levels.

- A follow-up project, with a more focused target group (Accounting Services Agencies) was launched in March 2006 and will continue for two years. The new project will largely follow the same conceptual approach as the preceding one
- The HP MAP – Microenterprise Acceleration Programme will be targeting microenterprises and aims to improve their ICT readiness and their ability to benefit from technology in business.
- The eBusiness Network continues its work, primarily by developing the **www.eliitetoiminta.com** portal further (for example English and Russian language versions are in development). It is likely that the collaboration will also result in other regional, national or European level initiatives.

Live Music Portal (LMP)

Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

Background Information

This is an eCulture project which is creating a web portal where live music sessions can be played over the Internet in real-time thereby supporting cultural diversity and integration. It is aimed at creators (musicians and the music industry) as well as consumers. The budget is €172,950 of which 49.6% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Using interdisciplinary methodologies, the International School of New Media (ISNM) investigates social, business, design and technology aspects of new media. The LiveMusicPortal project was motivated by the experiences of ISNM in developing streaming technology ideas around applying social aspects of the Internet to the area of music.

The success story of podcasting and video portals, like YouTube, show the interest and potential of portals for creative communities. LiveMusicPortal aims at providing an easy-to-use platform for everybody to participate in a European music community, regardless of location. With ever-increasing bandwidth, and the emergence of convergence (eg VOIP, interactive digital TV etc), the idea is to enable musicians separated by, say 1000 km, to play together via the Internet and for audiences to hear and even interact with them.

How did the project help?

The project created a web portal where the music industry (eg musicians, studios, labels etc) can register, create profiles, offer services, find matching partners, etc. The platform is designed to support the creation and management of all different music styles. Within the project are 4 main areas of activity:

- Software development
- Design of the portal
- Marketing the portal
- Supporting partners

Software for online music performance (Soundjack) was developed by the lead partner and is available to registered users via downloads. It allows for a connection directly between two or more endpoints using the Internet. Broadband connections were tested at endpoints in co-operating institutions within the public, private and University sectors such as the University of Lübeck, Deutsche Telekom, and Fraunhofer. Endpoints have been implemented and successfully tested in a number of online sessions with a number of European cities (Paris, Barcelona, Belfast, Berlin etc.).

The challenge of using the Internet for audio streaming is the delay introduced by network components and the speed of light at large distances. Using current technology, the imposed latency does not support real-time music collaboration. Soundjack optimizes the audio data processing for both the sender and receiver, minimizes the delay in the user system and allows music performances under certain circumstances and network conditions.

The portal was designed and optimized using the experiences of the project partners. Interested users can register free of charge on the portal and start to build a

music community by connecting with matching partners. Internet users at home with restricted bandwith (DSL offers only about 150-250 Kbps upload, whereas about 1.5 Mbps is required to obtain CD or studio quality audio streams), are supported by the use of data compression. However, current compression tools (such as MP3) introduce additional delay due to the complex algorithms involved. This delay is not suitable for real-time collaboration. So the project is investigating newly developed compression tools - eg from Fraunhofer as well as its own developments. The portal will be constantly enhanced with new functionalities to support activities such as a forum, chats, blogs, media profiles, virtual band rooms and so on.

To market the portal, events are performed with professional musicians and registered users. The first event celebrated the opening of the portal with a Jazz concert at the Media Docks in Lübeck. Professional musicians in Lübeck, Berlin and Paris have been connected using the portal and successfully demonstrated live music to audiences in Lübeck and Paris.

Business partners (studios, vendors, teachers, labels, etc) will be supported in the portal with possibilities for marketing (commercial banners) and value-added service offerings. Examples include special online offers in studios (virtual studio), customer-centred product placement, online sessions offered by teachers, online rehearsals for studios, etc).

Innovative aspects

The project offers new possibilities for using the Internet for every aspect of music: learning and teaching, practicing, jamming, performing, sharing, etc. It offers European citizens access to a music community regardless of geography, cultural background, or physical ability. Musicians of all styles, ages, categories can now come together to perform or enjoy music jointly, even if geographically remote.

This enables new methods of music production. It will be no longer necessary to travel to the studio in order to be present at a music recording. People can join rehearsals from home. Teachers can connect to the students from any place at any time.

All this requires the development of stable, reliable and affordable low-latency Internet connections. The software developed within the project is innovative providing real-time music performance in many different network conditions. This is the first instance of real time connections being offered.

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What did the project achieve?

The project has attracted a number of well known research institutions for collaboration in the project and has shown that it can make these partnerships work. Well-known and/or famous musicians were willing to play in live events and/or test the system (e.g. Sarah Morrow, Gottfried Böttger, Andreas Hirche, Stefan Kuchel, Pedro Rebelo, etc.). A first version of the portal was released in December 2006. A new version is being planned for release soon.

And what did it learn?

One of the most important aspects is the strong cooperation between different disciplines (e.g. technicians for the software development and portal infrastructure, designers for the portal interfaces, musicians for tests, feedback and requirement analysis). By working together the project has been able to be critical of its own processes and has achieved better results. Because the project has been located at the European Campus for New Media, synergies between media development and event management have been achieved, which would be hard to replicate elsewhere.

The audio streaming software to be developed within the project will be its core element. To end up with a stable and reliable version excellent programming skills will be required for the project engineers. For the project partners establishing high bandwidth access points are critical for providing contact points for testing, events and user participation. So partnerships have to be established and maintained. Ultimately, the success of the portal will depend on the number of registered and active users. It's very important therefore to get a critical mass very soon with good press feedback in order to attract a large user group.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is continuing. The portal will be maintained by the ISNM even after the duration of the project. The project is in discussion with the private sector to design a business model around the portal.

Piedmont ICT Observatory (ORICT)

Piedmont, Italy

Background Information

This is an eIndicators project which is collecting information on regional ICT developments. It is aimed at public authorities, citizens and businesses. The budget is €600,000 of which 33% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Piedmont is one of the largest and most populous Italian regions, but it has fragmented public administrations (with 1206 municipalities), a highly heterogeneous physical territory (43% mountains, 40% of the population live in metropolitan areas), and is trying to make the transition from a highly successful industrial economy to a service-based one. These factors raise the risk of digital polarisation and digital divide.

The catalyst for the Information Society development in the region is to ensure the availability of ICT infrastructure and equality of access to content and services for everybody. In time, once this has been achieved, more attention can be paid to 'softer' aspects and high level, concepts and services.

In the meantime, the only way to know whether or not the region is successful in achieving its goals is by measuring the progress of activities and the achievement of targets. So, the Regional ICT Observatory (connecting all the different actors who are studying the Information Society) was set up to become the regional strategic base supporting the "Sistema Piemonte" (co-ordinated actions to support Information Society development). Decision making is oriented by benchmarking and data analysis, creating strong governance of the Information Society development process.

The research and analysis not only informs policy making, but also 'drives' it as well, by identifying the upcoming important issues which need to be addressed, and creating models and scenarios to meet regional needs. In order to do this, good quality data is needed. The Regional ICT Observatory believes that its true users are all those agents implementing projects and programmes. By interacting with them closely, grass roots activities and decisions can be better informed – by being based on objective research and data.

How did the project help?

The project set up a regional ICT Observatory. It has a number of complementary functions:

- A database integrating Piedmont's data (including information from other sources and statistical agencies) on Information Society and on the socio-economic regional structure. It contains regional, national and commune-level data about citizens, business and public administration ICT activities and statistics (restricted to partners) and a public selection with updated statistics to describe the regional profile in relation with other Italian and European regions – such as broadband take-up
- The periodic organization of thematic seminars to present new technologies and their potential application in different organisational contexts. A key objective is to stimulate the involvement of regional actors not yet

directly engaged in the Observatory activities – such as high school or University students, regional members of local Public Administrations, councillors, researchers, Professors, etc

- Specific studies and reports on ICT and Piedmont's Information Society development. Various methodological approaches are used: surveys based on questionnaires (eg to estimate the diffusion of the technologies), collection of existing data (eg to estimate Broadband coverage of the territory), case studies (eg to search for best practices in the deployment of ICT-related tools). Three main analytical perspectives are used: 1) quantitative analysis; 2) qualitative analysis on best practices; 3) simulation analysis

- A yearly report on Piedmont's Information Society, containing regional benchmarks, for use at national and European level. The report covers issues concerning the diffusion and use of ICT equipment in Piedmont, broadband diffusion and territorial coverage, analysis of the interactions among Information Society actors, analysis of the ICT economic sector; and problems related to the digital divide

- A website is available; **www.sistemapiemonte.it/osservatorioICT** to disseminate all the above activity. It also hosts a specific space for ICT regional best practices and a news section

Innovative aspects

Some of the most important research institutes and public bodies in Piedmont (such as CSI Piemonte, CSP Innovazione nelle ICT, Istituto Boella, Politecnico di Torino, IRES Piemonte) have started cooperating, exchanging and sharing data, documents, analysis and best-practices in an innovative way, never-experienced before. The ICT Observatory experience could pave the way to an enlarged partnership between local ICT actors, under a common framework of the regional government, while taking up the challenge of building a new governance system for the territory.

What did the project achieve?

This is an ongoing project so it does not have firm targets, but the main output of ORICT in the first year of activity has been:

1. Reports and research papers
2. Methodology – first draft list of indicators
3. Workshop targeted to local policy makers, plus workshops on Advanced Information & communication solutions; New ICT services for SMEs towards i2010; Information and Communication in the global society.
4. First usage of results by policy makers
5. Active relationship with observatory activities in Europe and Italy

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And what did it learn?

Success factors in the project include the fact that local institutional actors (at all levels) have given positive support since the beginning of the ORICT activity. Policymakers have also clearly shown their interest via active participation in dissemination activities (seminars and workshops). In addition, via meetings and through ORICT staff, local ICT actors have begun to share their knowledge and to merge data, methodologies and relationships to study Piedmont's Information Society and to plan future research together. This has led to a better use of human and data resources and a higher quality of monitoring and reporting activity.

In summary, perhaps the greatest added value of ORICT is that it is independent – by merging different actors from different organisations (eg Universities, Polytechnics, regional public administrations, public and private research centres) it has avoided duplication of effort and created impartial, objective research.

Of course there have been problems. The Observatory partners agreed to follow a common research methodology, but the task was not easy. Each partner wanted to promote their own methodology in order to preserve the work already done for historical comparison. A second important issue was inter-regional benchmarking. The ORICT methodology must take into account national and European methodologies to allow comparability with other regions. ORICT participates in other EU funded projects such as UNDERSTAND to deal with this.

Data collecting processes were hard to define because they are expensive. As there is such a wide field of research, strict data selection criteria had to be created and agreed. Assignation of tasks between partners helped to distribute the effort. Another issue concerns the importance of keeping information up to date, and again by encouraging everybody to take part, responsibilities are shared.

And finally….what happened next?

This is an ongoing project, continually seeking funding.

Kursnavet – the Course Hub

Västernorrland, Sweden

Background Information

This is an eLearning project aiming to help adult learners, schoolchildren and researchers. Its budget is €1,290,000 of which 49.55% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Colleges in the sparsely populated regions in northern Sweden do not have enough interest amongst adult learners for all courses that they can offer. Because there is not a critical mass of learners it is not economic to put on all courses.

Therefore, a course based on well-designed online content would be a great help for students. Such online courses could meet individual needs and have the added benefit of raising the quality of the course programmes offered.

However, the problem has always been that the costs for designing and producing these online courses are very high. This means that only a few adult education organisations have the funds to produce such courses. The idea behind this project is that a joint venture of many different organisations sharing their products – both whole courses and small parts - would make it possible for many more organisations, and ultimately, students, to benefit.

The aims of the project were to:

- Make learning accessible through online tools in order to provide learning opportunities regardless of time, place and pace of study
- Encourage adult learning institutions and practitioners to produce and share learning objects (small pieces of content, typically produced in a digital format) with each other

How did the project help?

The basic idea of the Learning Hub was to bring together a number of learning objects, which individual teachers could pick and choose between to make up their own courses. The learning objects used sound, film, pictures etc.

Teachers could find which learning objects were available in the Hub by using an application called Contento Broker, which was developed in the project. Once he/she found the learning object that matched their requirement it was possible to add an introduction or other instructions to tailor the content exactly to the needs of individual teachers and their courses. This means that learning objects can be used extremely flexibly in a variety of situations.

The Hub was initially populated with content from partners, paid for by the project. In addition, a considerable number of courses were added which had been produced by the Stockholm Adult Education Board. This is publicly funded and thus offers open access to its materials. In addition to this, Contento offered distance education courses for teachers in co-operation with the Royal Institute of Technology

in Stockholm to inspire teachers to adopt the idea of the Hub. Once these teachers have learnt how to master the Contento Broker tool they have been asked to produce their own learning objects as part of their course work and add it to the Hub. In this way, it continually grows.

The Course Hub was promoted at a variety of conferences and seminars and presented through many regional and local networks.

Innovative aspects

The idea of sharing these resources on an equal basis using a tool like Contento is truly innovative in Sweden. It allowed all interested teachers to search through meta data, select and include small online course pieces into online courses, or in a blended learning situation (some online learning, some facilitated learning typically face to face) as they prefer. In addition, the tool allows the teacher to make her/his own embedding of the object into whichever kind of course they regard suitable for the student.

What did the project achieve?

The project achieved at least 75% of its planned outputs. Great interest was expressed by practitioners, researchers and school managers and policy makers. Perhaps the greatest achievement was the technical solution allowing teachers to access the packager tool (Contento) and embed the learning objects in their own course designs. A critical number of accessible learning objects and courses were made available in a relatively short time.

And what did it learn?

This project has identified both strategic and operational lessons. Firstly, co-operation was described as being very good, particularly between the public and private sectors. The courses were mostly produced by public education units. These had to be designed according to high pedagogical standards, but also to high technical standards to be compliant with the format of the private-sector designed Contento Broker tool. The project provided a good way to match public sector educational expertise with the technical know how of the companies.

An extension of the principles of co-operation is demonstrated by the fact that there have been good levels of contribution of learning objects to the Hub. It is perfectly possible just to 'consume' learning objects, without putting any new content into the Hub, but this has not happened, except for very small establishments which lack time or resource to create new materials.

However, one side effect of this principle of 'openness' is that there is a lack of quality control in terms of adding new content, and some users are wary of this – although obviously they have the final decision whether to actually use the content or not.

And there are some related Intellectual Property Right (IPR) issues. For example, the Course Hub would love to gain access to some high quality educational radio and TV productions, made by the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR) but the IPR is difficult. In addition, although the Course Hub is built on principles of free access, it is still not quite clear what IPR is connected to a course part produced by a teacher in his line of duty.

And finally….what happened next?

Although there is not a follow-up project, the challenge now is to make all sorts of course content available. One example of this is integrating easy access to the Course Hub through the most common Learning Management Systems in Sweden such as LMS Fronter and Moodle. In addition, all adult education units in the region have access to the Hub. A very strong co-operation has been formed between four municipal adult study units called Åskhöst, and it is dedicated to the use of the Course Hub.

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Fiber Broadband for All

Viborg, Denmark

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure project, but it is not about the detail of installing a new network, rather it shows an alternative model for network ownership.
When the network is finally complete in 2010 it will serve 170,000 people. The budget is €400,000 all of which 25% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Viborg in Denmark is a rural county, which did not have a broadband network. The county realised, in 2003, that if it didn't 'take charge' it was not likely to have access to high speed communications until after other parts of the country.

So, the objective of the project was to secure Viborg county and its citizens access to fibre broadband - by forming an informal public private partnership among 17 municipalities, Viborg county and the local energy company (EnergiMidt) with the IT Center Viborg as the coordinator and project owner.

How did the project help?

An informal public private partnership (PPP) was formed, based on a contract that divided the tasks among the participants. The county, the municipalities and the local energy company worked together to make a broadband plan, with IT Center Viborg as the coordinator.

The energy company agreed to finance and provide fibre broadband to all inhabitants in the county – in return it would own and run the network. The project was quite happy with this single sourcing approach to infrastructure, believing it saved costs, although there is open competition for services to run over it.

The planning process was perhaps the most important event in this broadband infrastructure project, as the digging costs alone (to sink the fibre optic cables) amounted to about 80% of the total initial investment. It was vital to have effective planning to optimise the digging schedules (eg putting cables in during other scheduled work) and save costs, and also to prevent any parallel structures being created.

The planning procedure was divided into three separate steps:

1. The county made a county-wide backbone network plan that connected all municipalities and institutions it owned. The backbone delivered 1 Gbit/s to all households and companies

2. Within this overall plan each municipality made a broadband plan covering transmission networks connecting all public institutions run by the municipality. Again excess capacity of 1 Gbit/s was planned

3. The local energy company plan access networks to connect each household and company based on the above mentioned transmission and backbone networks

Dissemination has been very important. At the outset of the project in 2003 a conference was held where the idea was presented to local and regional politicians, business development agencies and energy companies. The conference concluded that the project should proceed.

This was been followed up by numerous meetings with key actors, and every 6 months there was another conference to inform both stakeholders and citizens about progress.

Innovative aspects

The most important innovation that came out of this project was the organisation of the PPP described above which has been copied by other counties in Denmark, especially rural ones. A pre-requisite for this model, though, is that there are only or or perhaps two, energy companies in the area, otherwise collaboration is too hard.

By choosing a fibre-optic network it is possible to upgrade it to 100 Mbit/s if this is required (perhaps for medical or public sector purposes). This degree of flexibility means that the investment will be useable for many years into the future.

What did the project achieve?

The network exists and the approach has been shared with other areas in Denmark.

And what did it learn?

This project was based on a methodology towards broadband planning which came out of a two year research project conducted by the Centre of Network Planning at the University of Aalborg. The research produced a methodology that optimizes the routing and capacity of fibre cables, so the outcome is the most optimal and price efficient. The lengthy 'introductory work' has helped set this project up properly.

The PPP was the informal governing body of the project. It contributed to overall success by creating an informal atmosphere where problems could easily be solved.

Although there are substantial investments by the energy company (in excess of €100 million), there is still a good business case to be made which will benefit them, and everybody in the county.

And finally….what happened next?

The project was followed up by a RIAP project in 2004-5 which transferred knowledge about broadband planning and set forth similar developments in other regions in Denmark. Viborg has made many presentations to other counties and regions in Denmark to share experiences on planning issues and broadband development in rural areas. It has also created reports on various topics.

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Innovation and Change: Network of One-Stop Shops (ICHNOS)

Vysočina, Czech Republic

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project aimed at improving the existing system of business services for SMEs by creating Regional Competence Centres to support a network of 'One Stop Shops' offering business support. The budget is €1,108,670 of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Vysočina has a long term policy aim of providing support for entrepreneurs, trying to encourage people to start their business and to simplify the necessary formal administrative procedures. However, the region is characterised by a high number of small municipalities (729 municipalities in 5 districts) which creates a host of difficulties for implementing and developing G2B services.

The aim of the project is to develop and test a model for a Regional Centre of Competence (RCC), to provide methodical, expert and technical support for a regional network of One-Stop Shops (OSS) for Business. The OSS provides registration, authorization and business development services to firms. The project is a partnership between three European regions Vysočina (Czech Republic), Sardegna (Italy) and Galicia (Spain).

How did the project help?

In Vysočina, the project was extremely challenging because there was no previous experience with OSS for business in the Czech Republic, and the first legislative changes for simplifying business creation administrative procedures only started in 2005.

The pilot experiment with OSS and RCC was tested in a new network of 7 business incubators in the microregion of Trebic, using the experiences of the other project partner regions. The RCC provides the strategic overview together with support for the network of OSSs. There are 2 main project activities:

- The creation and development of a pilot OSS network
- The creation and development of the RCC

The OSS network consists of advisory and reception services, offering space for businesses, provision of research, monitoring and collection of information relating to, and for the use of, businesses, as well as providing appropriate business training.

The RCC is responsible for the organisation, management and control of the OSS network including specific training for OSS staff in order to be able to satisfy customers in the "front line" and to use a support software application called Sportello. Examples of other RCC activities include:

- Providing methodological assistance to OSS (for providing consultancy to entrepreneurs)
- Building/maintaining relationships with local public administration institutions etc
- Organising seminars and workshops between OSS and external organisations
- Promoting the activities of OSS
- Establishing and maintaining an observatory function for

businesses - eg legal information, and economic, social and marketing information on the region
- Entering and updating new data into the database of Sportello application
- Creating and maintaining forms for communication between OSS and entrepreneurs
- Consultancy - providing entrepreneurs with advice (face to face, by phone, e-mail)
- Gathering of frequently asked questions and entering them into a database Helpdesk
- Cooperation with experts on solution of more complicated issues
- Supervising on authorization processes and on forwarding of documentation
- Providing educational programs for OSS/CP OSS staff
- Providing educational courses for entrepreneurs

Innovative aspects

The very concept of creating a RCC, which can assist OSSs in developing and executing of their functionalities by providing support through consultancy, and more specifically through the development of methodologies and specific tools, is an innovative approach for the region. In terms of procedure process of registering and authorising entrepreneurs, an OSS is innovative in the region.

The project takes a very practical approach to the issues it seeks to overcome. It does merely address the needs of the business registration administration system, but provides quality advice and information to assist SMEs to give them a good start, and continued support. It is also acting as a demonstrator or test site for various approaches, including ICT tools; perhaps looking forward to the day when a virtual OSS or RCC will become the norm.

Alongside the model of OSS/RCC, the approach of encouraging dialogue between distinct stakeholders is innovative for the region.

What did the project achieve?

The project is the starting point in a dialogue between separate stakeholders dealing with different kinds of business support services and enterprise development. The project has shown that it can help to consider different approaches, based on experiences in other regions. The idea of RCC for supporting the OSS network in regions was developed into the common structured model with described functions and recommended organisational concepts, which is applicable to other similar regions. The project has had a high impact on its direct beneficiaries and has been highlighted in the national reorganisation of G2B relations.

The project has brought direct benefits to the network of business incubators, which were piloting the OSS/RCC functions. The network has become more visible in the region. It has a workable business model with a ready-to-use software application to provide good quality services - which can adapted to local conditions.

And what did it learn?

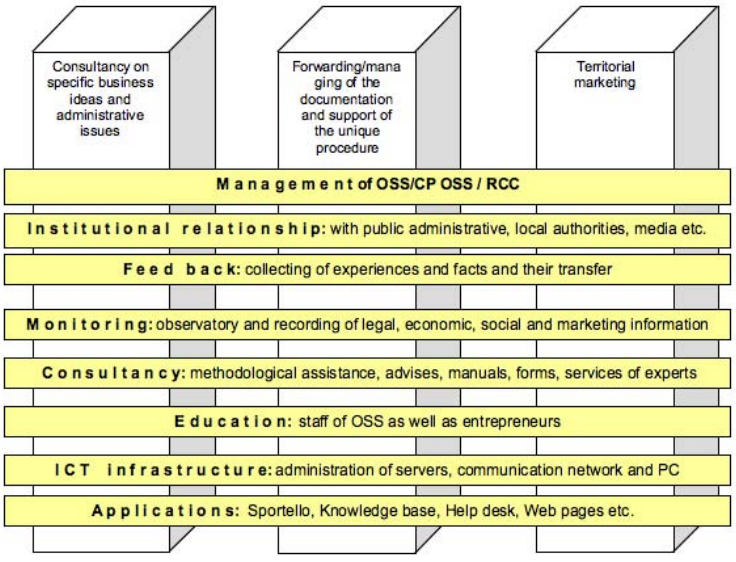
The project coped with partner regions at different stages of maturity in terms of business support, very different systems of national legislation and different ICT platforms used for business and information support in the regions. The consortium utilised smart and non-conflict management techniques which helped it to overcome difficulties. This task was made easier because the number of partners was kept low, people had complementary expertise (both technical and business focused) and the partners had prior experience of working together.

And finally....what happened next?

The network of business incubators will continue the process of simplification of administrative processes and development of business services for local enterprises. The project is suggesting solutions for sustainable development of RCC, based on knowledge of national and local situations and legislation, including the drafts of possible agreements with third parties in the region.

The project has been included in a film about European projects in the region made by Polish television.

Business incubator of Trebic subregion



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rowanet

Regional backbone fibre optics network (ROWANet)

Vysočina, Czech Republic

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure project which provides a high speed backbone network. It is aimed at everybody in the region. The budget is €1,113,000 of which 40% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Vysočina region has a population of around 600,000 people, covered by over 700 municipalities. It is mainly a rural region, with variable terrain. Only 5% of the population had access to broadband. Although there were around 30 municipal/metropolitan area networks (MANs) in existence, there was no regional high speed backbone despite demand from large public institutions (eg Universities and the new regional authority).

So this project, ROWANet, was created to provide a regional optical telecommunications backbone network (the rowan tree is the symbol of the Vysočina region). It is based on a system of optic fibre routes containing passive CWDM technology from Optokon, and active elements from CISCO. ROWANet provides network services to public organisations (the local government, state authorities, schools, hospitals etc.) and non-profit organisations in the Vysocina Region. It also enables communication (eg via WiFi) for citizens and individuals.
Its aims were:

- To create a non-profit telecommunications backbone network owned by the local government, based on optic fibre technology
- To indirectly support the market offer (the region 'owns' several optic fibres in the route, the rest mainly are available to commercial bodies)
- To support the development of local networks (metropolitan, regional networks)
- To support scientific research projects
- To provide support to the emergency services (high speed information and communication systems)

Apart from the public narrowband Internet, the ROWANet network does not provide direct telecommunications services to the region's citizens or companies at the moment. On principle, the network does not compete with commercial services.

How did the project help?

The project took a long time to plan. This was partly because it was necessary to bring as many municipalities and organisations 'on board', so that the project could meet their needs and have their support. The other reason was the sheer size and complexity of the project. Building a high speed network is difficult, expensive and complicated. We could not afford to get things wrong.

A large feasibility study was carried out to look at demand and supply issues in October 2003. This included looking at patterns of demand from regional organisations (eg Universities, municipalities, hospitals etc). Regional/national ICT statistics were used to assess citizen level demand. There was a separate technical project to specify what would be needed to build a suitable network to meet these

needs, carried out by a technical specialist. The outputs from this were used to form technical specifications – but the technical project supplier was not allowed to bid for the work to ensure complete fairness and transparency in the procurement process. The project concept was approved in June 2004, with finances approved in September. The tendering process took place in October 2004 and the build (backbone, PIAPs, WiFi) was complete by March 2006. In May 2006 tenders were let for the first services (eg VOIP, Video on Demand etc).

The network was designed to offer capacity for current needs and needs into the future. For example, WiFi hotspots have been created, despite the fact that the feasibility study showed that relatively few people had access to WiFi enabled devices. But, it was clear from developments in other countries that WiFi use would grow as devices became cheaper and more common – when the infrastructure was available. During the first 2 month of operation about 500 users joined up. They are mostly young people (who are more technologically aware), business people (who tend to have larger budgets) and tourists (who are used to WiFi).

A variety of network services are available:

- High-speed internet: Organisations (not citizens) have a high-speed connection
- User Roaming: Rowanet is a partner of the EDUROAM project (**www.eduroam.cz**), which aims to provide European-wide roaming through WiFi access points
- Public internet: Public Internet is provided through 15 PC/ WiFi hotspots
- High-capacity storage site services: users include hospitals for example, which have terabits of data to store (eg medical imaging)
- Hosting: The Regional Authority hosting services for applications
- GIS – map services: ROWANet provides these in a private networking environment
- Services for the integrated rescue system: data services to regional Integrated Rescue Service units
- Other (some planned) services: VOIP, an internal certification authority, an alternative low-cost ISP, eLearning hosting (LMS eDoceo), videoconferences, etc

Innovative aspects

There are several different perspectives to innovation in this project:

- **Technical:** first use of CWDM on a regional level, using new technical standards eg IPv6 and iSCSI
- **Financial:** first large project funded from EU resources in the Vysocina region
- **Systemic:** co-operation between the region and the municipalities, particularly around building 'last mile' networks, using standard interfaces to the backbone. This project could be example for other Czech regions or regions from abroad.
- **Strategic:** provision of a platform for the ICT development in the region, to make public authorities more effective, open and transparent, enabling them to provide useful online services for citizens. In turn, citizens will be encouraged to use ICT more. In effect, this is a demonstrator project

What did the project achieve?

100% of the planned project outputs had been achieved at the time of writing, although developments are ongoing. The region has a functioning backbone network and access to the variety of services outlined above.

And what did it learn?

The project believes it has implemented several good practices. CWDM technology was chosen because it is a long lasting solution. It is also cheap, and does the required job in a relatively small fibre-based network. In addition, there is a specialist supplier in the region, so negotiation and supply was straightforward. Other technical solutions were discussed internationally (with BT and also in particular with 3 Finnish regions (Turku, Kuortane, Kouvola). In fact, Turku's WiFi public cooperative network concept called SparkNet has been implemented in Vysočina as Open SparkNet. This technology-led development has accelerated interest in ICT from public authorities, and now the region is the most developed in terms of ICT in the Czech Republic.

Of course, there have been problems. These include dealing with EU funding requirements (at the time the Czech Republic was a new Member State), technical issues (overcome by the detailed planning phase, and choice of experienced contractors) and getting political agreement (which again took time, as this was a novel, complicated and far reaching project).

And finally....what happened next?

At the time of writing (2006) the programme was applying for new funds in the new programming period. It seeks to connect with the network other parts of the region (10 municipalities are connected now, the other routes are planned). New services are still being developed and more organisations are being connected with the existing network.

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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Wales SME-Business 2 (SME-B2)

Wales, UK

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project aimed at improving the competitiveness of businesses through the creative exploitation of ICT. It is aimed at SMEs in the region. The budget for this project is €3,554,000 of which 37.2% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The engagement of businesses in Wales in applying of ICT and using eCommerce has been modest when compared with other UK regions. Whilst Wales has already developed projects aimed at enabling small SMEs to take their first steps on the widely accepted e-adoption ladder (eg using e-mail, websites, and some e-marketing) this project is aimed at supporting, advising and mentoring larger SMEs (ie not microfirms) towards eBusiness and full ICT integration.

How did the project help?

The project provides one to one mentoring to SMEs to encourage, advise and support their adoption of ICT. There are 2 main areas of project activity:

- Provision of the one to one mentoring – in two stages
- Marketing of the one to one mentoring

One-to-one mentoring of SMEs is conducted by high quality (and rigorously assessed) private sector consultants who visit the SMEs to give tailored advice and support. The mentoring is in two stages. During the first stage, consultants spend an average of three days understanding the operation of the business and the core business processes, in order to identify its specific needs and the most appropriate technology and application solutions. A comprehensive report will be produced which will be used as a basis for stage 2. It is expected that on average 75% of businesses will continue to the next stage.

The second stage lasts on average 14 days. Consultants work on the requirements specified in the report and give independent procurement advice and implementation support. This is when actual investment in ICT is made by the SMEs. It is very important that the SMEs procure the most appropriate solutions so as not to waste money – to help guide them, continuing telephone support and guidance is available for a period of time.

The programme is open-ended and flexible as a number of SMEs are likely to encounter time and other business pressures during the programme - ie between stages. SMEs are expected to contribute to 33% of the financial cost of the support but no direct financial aid will be provided. In other words, the programme is subsidised, but not directly to the beneficiaries.

Marketing was obviously necessary to encourage SMEs to register on the programme. This is being achieved via a series of 10 high profile events across Wales with leading ICT and e-business experts. The seminars and conferences have concentrated on promoting and demonstrating the full potential of integration of ICT into a business, using exemplar companies. In addition both the lead partner (Welsh Assembly Government) and the private sector consultants have a role to play in recruiting SMEs.

Innovative aspects

The project is exclusively providing one to one mentoring to SMEs – this exclusivity is not common in most business support programmes – largely because of the cost implications. This high level of personal service gives beneficiaries access to expertise that they would not otherwise have been able or willing to afford.

What did the project achieve?

The project takes a flexible approach to working with individual beneficiary SMEs. Whilst guidelines exist regarding the level of assistance available to SMEs, each intervention is assessed individually as to its needs, on its own merits. Significant success has also been realised through the identification of complementary resources made available by other initiatives and schemes which may otherwise not have come to the attention of the beneficiary - a good example would be accessing capital expenditure assistance to aid SMEs investing in new technologies.

As of April 2006, a total of 106 SMEs have engaged with the programme and have either completed or are working towards implementing new ICT into their business process. This represents 50% of the target number of SME participants. A number of businesses have been involved in early stage participation meetings and are waiting on the availability of relevant consultants to proceed.

And what did it learn?

The project believes that it is vital to gain the buy-in and commitment of senior management staff within an SME. This ensures the project is driven and owned by decision makers, but it also avoids the problem, which can occur if there is a single 'champion' within a firm, if that person leaves the business. In part, this has been achieved by clear explanations of the project objectives to the beneficiaries by the project staff.

A vitally important aspect of the programme is the necessity for the beneficiary to contribute 33% of the consultants/ specialists costs - this ensures that the participating business engages pro-actively and wholeheartedly in the process. It also ensures that the Structural Funds are used more cost-efficiently.

The close management of the network of independent consultants (identified via a call in the OJEU) contributes significantly to achieving good and consistent quality control. It is also necessary to ensure impartial, objective advice is offered to SMEs through independent specialists.

A structured approached to the intervention with SMEs - with key-stages and programme status reports at crucial points - ensures well-managed delivery and visible progression up the e-adoption ladder. This also assists in governing the programme delivery with regards to managing commitment of resource to beneficiaries.

Making information available on the website 24 hours and providing advisers that offer one-to-one mentoring at a time and location convenient to the beneficiary means that the project is customer-focused and meets the beneficiaries needs and timeframes. All marketing information and service provision is bilingual (Welsh and English).

And finally….what happened next?

The project is still ongoing, but an extension of the programme has already been rolled-out into Objective 2 areas of Wales, to be delivered alongside this scheme until December 2007. It is intended that in future Structural Funds will be accessed to enable the delivery of an evolution of the scheme to assist further numbers of businesses to progress to full integration of ICT at a business process level.

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Opportunity Wales (OW)

Wales, UK

Background Information

This was an eBusiness project running from 2001-04 which aimed to help SMEs to understand and capitalise on the benefits that eCommerce can bring in terms of efficiencies, growth and turnover. The budget was €21,853,000 of which 49.8% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Wales can be described as a geographically peripheral region with a limited domestic market. Roughly two thirds of the population is eligible for Objective 1 funding. In the late 1990s, Wales lagged behind most of the rest of the UK in terms of eCommerce adoption and take-up. Availability of infrastructure (particularly broadband) was poor, and there was a lack of awareness of the benefits that ICT in general and eCommerce in particular could bring.

The aim of this project was to encourage business growth and increased employment through the increased adoption of eCommerce. The ultimate desired result was an increase in GDP for the region.

How did the project help?

The project provided an initial phase of support to a business to identify their optimum eCommerce strategy and the appropriate implementation recommendations. Subsequently, the business had the option of subsidised eBusiness consultancy services to assist them in managing the implementation phase. Within the project the main areas of activity were:

- Provision of bespoke ICT business reviews
- Support of business to implement to recommendations of the review
- Marketing of the project

The bespoke ICT reviews involved up to 2 days of free advice. This involved pre-meeting research, a 0.5 day visit of a trained impartial adviser to spend time with the firm ascertaining what they do and their potential e-commerce needs. A bespoke review report was then prepared with recommendations on further steps. The report gave advice on the most appropriate e-business strategy and plan. The advisors were well-trained (they had to have a university-based accreditation), and their advice was periodically checked for quality and consistency. The advisors were located throughout Wales.

Business were supported in achieving the recommendations of the review by receiving implementation support advice at a subsidised rate. This was a customised service, whereby the client discussed and agreed with their advisor the most appropriate support package for them. The advisor gave support during this phase ranging from the provision of encouragement, ideas and advice, to drawing up detailed budgets for expenditure or even creating specifications for the client to send out to potential suppliers such as web-designers. Advisors were also experienced at assessing skills gaps, and giving advice on the types of training required.

By undertaking implementation activities, clients were eligible to apply for financial aid. This was effectively a

subsidy for up to 35% of the costs of external hardware, software, web design etc. A client had to pay all costs up front, but could then claim back a proportion, on provision of receipts.

Marketing was wide-ranging. At the start of the project, a mix of offline and online channels were used – primarily because many SMEs were not connected to the Internet. These included newspaper articles, seminars, roadshows etc. One strand featured two cartoon characters (an SME and an advisor) to introduce the ideas and concepts of OW. As time went on, the Internet became the communications channel of choice because it was immediate, had widespread reach, and was cost effective. A range of services was available from the website - the entire site was available in English and Welsh. There was also a dedicated contact centre.

Innovative aspects

There are several areas of innovation in this project:

- Scale – the budget was huge, but so was the number of firms touched by the awareness raising (over 35,000, giving an OW recognition rate of 60% of firms in Wales), and the review process (nearly 6,000 reviews conducted on 5,456 firms).
- This size and scale also gave the project its status as a 'co-ordinating' activity with other eBusiness policies and programmes
- Quality and consistency – given by the rigorous training and monitoring provided to advisors, backed up by a project management/MIS system installed and managed with extensive help from the private sector – i.e. BT and HSBC secondees.
- Mixture and number of partners – both public and private
- This was one of the first projects to receive 'Objective 1' funding in Wales, and consequently it was useful as a 'test' case
- The link between the academic rigour of the approach and the practicality and focused delivery on the ground

What did the project achieve?

The project supported 5,456 SMEs. They experienced a €298m increase in turnover, and created 2,543 new jobs. Wales is now no longer lagging in terms of ICT (compared to other UK regions) and it has proved that it can manage a huge project and extract very good impacts.

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And what did it learn?

The project has demonstrated that it can make partnerships between the public, private and University sector work successfully. This was due to a rounded partnership, with all the leading actors, and also sufficient longevity of personnel and experience, derived from previous projects which leads to trust being built up.

The expertise (market knowledge gained from previous directly relevant projects, policy awareness, and good quality research and training tools) resident in the University partner was vital. When coupled with the detailed expertise of the project management team (private sector), and the wide range of policy and delivery expertise across all the partners, this is very powerful.

The project had to overcome a culture of SMEs 'expecting grants'. Demand was initially weak as it was hard to convince some SMEs that expert advice would be of more value to them than a small grant. This led to long lead time to convert interest raised through awareness campaigns into something more tangible, which proved a bit of a barrier in the early days. However, the programme duration and funding level meant that many different activities, using a variety of media, could be tried out in parallel to stimulate demand and then satisfy it.

And finally….what happened next?

There is a follow on programme - Opportunity Wales Advance (OWA) which encourages businesses to strive towards the greater adoption and implementation of more sophisticated eBusiness strategies.

The success of OW created 'spin-off' programmes. OWA was one, but also Opportunity Wales are now operating the service across the Objective 2 regions of Wales (Opportunity Wales 2).

prométhéeII

Prométhée II – Action 7.5

Wallonia, Belgium

Background Information

The "Prométhée II – Action 7.5: State of the art of eLearning and development of methodological tools for supporting ICT appropriation by the Walloon SMEs and Citizens" is an eLearning project to develop the scientific potential in Wallonia and promote the dissemination of ICT and its advanced applications (eBusiness, eLearning etc) amongst SMEs. The budget is €1,100,000 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

In 2005, there were 12,587 SMEs in Wallonia, 90% of the national total. Between them they employed 190,000 employees. However, ICT usage within SMEs in the region is low – only 14% of them sell their products/services through either EDI or Internet. eLearning is also in its infancy - only 3% of the small enterprises (less than 50 employees) and 6% of those with 50-250 employees have access to learning via Internet. Only 45% have a training strategy.

The region has recognised that there are specific weaknesses with respect to eLearning solutions for SMEs. Commercial providers view them as a small, narrow market. Few SMEs have both the necessary organisational dynamics to absorb eLearning, and fast broadband connections. As a result, availability of the right product for the right target group is scarce.

The aim of the project is to reinforce the competitiveness of SMEs by coaching and encouraging them to use ICT for eLearning.

How did the project help?

The project leader is the regional telecommunications agency. There are 4 main activities:

- Establishment, development and maintenance of partnerships
- Creation of an on-line eLearning guide (self-diagnosis & information tool)
- Improving an existing eBusiness guide for SMEs
- Setting up an on-line eBusiness course which will be available through eLearning

Partnerships were developed by the project leader amongst a range of local interest groups. Some benefit by having access to the tools - eg SMEs, universities, consultants, colleges and training agencies. Others benefit as subcontractors - eg universities and specialist enterprises developing the tools.

An on-line eLearning guide is being created. This is an interactive tool (an online questionnaire) which will help SMEs perform an analysis of its potential ICT use. SMEs do not usually have the capacity to evaluate their own ICT needs despite the fact that this is necessary in order to develop a good strategy for any ICT linked project.

This results in a mini–report which gives suggestions to help the SMEs use ICT more effectively. There is no charge, and the mini-report does not replace the detailed advice that could be received from a consultant. It is, however, a good starting point for an entrepreneur.

The e-business guide for SMEs is a practical guide on how to start integrating eBusiness into an SME. Its aim is to provide SMEs with an illustrated methodology on how to implement their eBusiness projects. Again, the objective is not to take the place of consultants, but to accelerate the dissemination of ICT to SMEs in the region. Its fundamental aims are to save SMEs time when designing and implementing their ICT projects. It does this by preparing the way forward and providing good-practices. The results should be that eBusiness is 'de-mystifed' and businesses become more confident about buying and using ICT.

The project realised very quickly that an eBusiness course was needed to complement the eBusiness guide. It tailored some material which was already available in an eLearning format, to offer examples and help users link the theory of eBusiness with specific practice.

The eBusiness course was designed with the cooperation of the university sector. It will provide a useful template for future projects. The project examined success factors, barriers (educational, psychological, institutional) and general characteristics that an eLearning system should have in order to work. As the eLearning environment is complex, a lot of new issues need to be considered, such as how ICT has changed the way we work. The project found that we now work on a project basis, more independently, so hierarchies need to be more flexible, and absorb information from outside the immediate work environment.

eLearning tools need to be tailored to be effective. They are often most useful when combined with other ways of learning - ie blended learning. Ultimately, people remain social beings and the potentially isolating eLearning environment needs to be supplemented with tools that encourage creativity and motivation in students.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects to the project. The set of on-line, open and easy-to-use tools in the fields of eBusiness and eLearning adoption are not only informative, but they directly support the actors' decision-making process (using dynamic, interactive interfaces for diagnostic and decision making, in open access on the Web). This is a new approach.

The region encouraged the development of a (private) consultancy sector, specifically scaled for the field of e-learning in SMEs which did not exist before.

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What did the project achieve?

SMEs now have access to a range of on-line diagnostic and support tools that was not available before. The eBusiness guide is used by consultants, trainers (mainly) and SMEs. The eLearning course has been transferred to the academic sector and is now being used. Local actors that would not have easily cooperated in the past are now working together with an understanding of common objectives despite differences of philosophy and approach.

And what did it learn?

The lead partner's role as co-ordinator is very important in providing momentum and direction (including funding for specific initiatives). This acts as a motivating force in an emerging field.

Cooperation between different institutional mentalities is a challenge. Each partner came into the project with its own philosophy and understanding of the issues. This difference was particularly striking in the approaches of university and the private sector. The project overcame these problems by introducing two coordinators: one for the administrative / legal aspects, one for the content of the work.

The project encountered some problems in convincing end users (particularly SMEs) to get involved at the beginning of the project.

And finally....what happened next?

The project is on-going. The eBusiness guide and eLearning courses are in use. The lead partner has been officially chosen as the coordination body for the region in the field of e-learning - so the tools, practices and methodologies will be embedded into the Region.

Technology transfer and innovative models for Satakunta Region in Western Finland

Western Finland - Satakunta, Finland

Background Information

This was an eLearning project which aimed to increase knowledge of, and cooperation between, the economic and university sectors, facilitate the greater use of transfer technology, and create new and innovative co-operation models. The budget was €408,000 of which 87.5% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The project belonged to the WFA-INNO programme which in turn formed part of an innovative actions strategy. The aim of WFA-INNO programme was to develop a system to support businesses and the public administration by producing up-to-date reliable information on technological developments and the demands of the innovative environment.

The aims of this particular project were to test out various approaches to technology transfer and wider university/business co-operation in 4 different industry sector networks in order to strengthen economic competitiveness. It was carried out in the area of the West Finland Alliance consisting of five sub-regions. There are four universities and eight local units of universities, seven polytechnics and two local units, and seven technology centres.

How did the project help?

The project promoted and developed knowledge and technology transfer as well as networking and cooperation between different players in the economic and university sectors. Within the project were five main areas of activity:

- Formation of regional networks in the fields of automation; electronics, ICT and wellbeing; metal engineering; and software
- Creation of partnerships to facilitate the networks
- Needs analysis of the participating enterprises
- Management of technology transfer models
- Evaluation of the innovation and technology transfer project

The different networks addressed different issues that were relevant to the participants. In the automation network they looked at applied new technologies like machine vision, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification), thermal imaging and infrared imaging. The aim was to clear up problems and needs of enterprises and form enterprise networks.

In the electronics, ICT and wellbeing network the developmental needs of enterprises were mapped out and the results were fed back to the enterprises. This formed the basis for focused cooperation between enterprises and universities and research centres, resulting in better relationships and stronger international competitiveness. The focus was on electronic production methods, mobile and wireless technology and health telematics.

In the metal engineering network the aim was to test new lines of action between traditional branches (metal, wood) and new technology (automation, electronics, ICT). This led to some business-to-business technology transfer

between sub-regions, and better information provision and networking amongst enterprises. Four partnerships proceeded to co-operate in significant technology transfer.

The aims and objectives of software network were to develop and test methods for identifying regional technology transfer needs; the creation and enhancement of a technology 'anticipation' network; effective competence transfer from the university sector to the local software cluster; and evaluation of alternative information and support systems. The network looked at how software companies prepare for technology modifications; what kinds of methods and information sources are used to anticipate technology, and which of them they think are significant.

Partnerships were established between the university and private sector to facilitate the networks. Different universities and polytechnics in the region were allocated different areas of specialisation. This meant that the approaches and implementation of the project in practice was very different between the networks.

The project clarified the technology transfer and innovation needs of the participating enterprises by issuing questionnaires to enterprises, and interviewing managers. It also organised seminars, and visits to enterprises and research and technology centres.

The project was managed by a steering group and a project group. The steering group consisted of experts of different fields (automation, electronics, ICT and entrepreneurship) and the role of the group was to direct the progress of the project and keep it on track regarding finance. The project group directed the actions of networks, monitored the day to day finance of the project, attended to information and publicity and organised the evaluation.

The project was evaluated by an external consultancy.

Innovative aspects

The project brought together the university and private sectors under a common banner. Prevailing practices and ways of working were questioned and new dialogues were created. New networks and partnerships were formed and new ideas and innovative ways of interacting were developed.

Example of a pilot project:
Unattended wash-in town car wash

What did the project achieve?

The project made it possible for enterprises to get involved in wider networks and develop their knowledge base in different technology fields. The knowledge base of the universities and polytechnics increased because of the cooperation with the private sector. The result is that needs of the enterprises are better-known, knowledge of technology development and transfer has increased, networking between the private and university sectors has strengthened, and knowledge of the importance and challenges of cooperation between different players in the region and between regions has increased.

The project emphasised networking and cooperation and developed new models for knowledge and technology transfer. Successful new networks were formed, thus creating models for networking in the future.

Because of increased knowledge levels for all participants, it is easier to anticipate future development and to prepare for technology changes. The project has opened new aspects and possibilities for both business activities and the research community.

And what did it learn?

Cooperation is extremely important and there have to be effective systems for the transfer of information. Universities, for example, need information about both short-term and long-term training needs of the enterprises in order to prepare students, and up-dated information and technology knowledge produced by universities has to be transferred to enterprises. The project developed the dialogue between academic and economic actors to find effective ways to cooperate. Developing new networks and models for cooperation is positive for the whole region. Specifically, good and innovative network operation models have emerged.

It remains difficult to get the private sector involved. Often they don't have enough information about projects or they find it difficult to carry out projects because of the bureaucracy involved. The ways of doing things are quite different between enterprises and universities. Enterprises find the university approaches too theoretical, and universities find it difficult to match theoretical models to the real world. By increasing co-operation, projects can be larger and bring greater benefits to all involved.

And finally....what happened next?

The project has ended. There is no formal follow-up but many aspects and subjects which were studied in this project will be studied and developed further. This project also brought up new topics for research. Cooperation between universities and polytechnics will continue.

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e-SY.info
South Yorkshire e-Learning Programme

South Yorkshire e-learning programme (e-sy.info)

Yorkshire & Humber, UK

Background Information

This is the largest eLearning project of its kind in Europe. It aims to provide eLearning to 37,000 school age and adult learners. The budget is €75,000,000 all of which (ie 100%) is financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Yorkshire and the Humber is an Objective 1 region which has suffered major industrial decline with the loss of heavy industry over many years. This project is part of major efforts to economically regenerate the region and make business more competitive. e-sy.info is working with all ages – from 10 upwards. It exists:

- For school pupils to enjoy dynamic ways of learning in class
- For teachers wanting to use ICT to make lessons more engaging
- For young people to gain extra help and learning resources at home
- For parents wanting to be more involved in their children's learning
- For job seekers looking to gain skills for employment
- For staff at work to improve their career prospects with new skills
- For businesses wanting to increase staff capabilities and productivity and gain competitive advantage in the digital economy

How did the project help?

The project works with different audience groups. It's about direct engagement and collaboration. It includes training needs analysis and development of joint plans with schools, colleges, community initiatives and businesses. It provides project management and implementation services, training and workshops, as well as ongoing support and collaboration. Specific targets include:

- 149 organisations 'upgraded' (ie using better ICT equipment)
- 370 local businesses engaged
- 30,000 persons helped to access e-learning
- 18,000 persons achieving ICT competency NVQ2 or higher including ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence)
- 1,800 trainers trained to train others – including teachers and trainers in firms. Topics include ICT skills, basic skills, business skills, technical qualifications such as network training, eLearning professional development and authoring web-based learning materials

Upgrading schools and other educational and training institutions includes provision of laptops, tablet PCs and computers, many of which are networked using wireless technology. Additional equipment available includes whiteboards and projectors, digital video recording and video conferencing facilities.

Working with schools – as well as providing equipment, the programme provides a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and ongoing support and training from a Learning Outcomes Co-ordinator. VLEs have been a focus of interest

and debate in UK education for some time, initially in further and higher education and more recently in schools and local education authorities. Some organisations are still at the basic stage of uploading content so that it is available on online. However, schools are using the VLE for other activities These include creating collaborative frameworks to help complete self-evaluation forms (as part of mandatory national school inspections); running fun courses or camps to encourage learning using techniques such as film and video-making; or teaching CISCO courses.

Working with colleges – the project is helping 7 colleges (14-19 age range) by providing fixed and mobile ICT equipment, and professionally developed authoring and e-tutoring materials for both teaching and support staff. The colleges are working on:

- Development of hi-tech centres suited to the needs of learners in business
- Adding ICT industry qualifications to traditional academic courses
- Making specialist multimedia development skills available to a wider audience
- Using eLearning technology and pedagogy to bring traditional courses alive for new groups of learners

Working with the community – **http://www.e-sy.info/syelp/Portal/Public/Community.aspx** This portal provides information on how people can get involved in eLearning through a variety of routes, differences between qualifications, and some information on financial and other support available.

Working with business – After registering their interest, SMEs receive a visit. This can include the provision of free equipment (for firms with between 20 and 250 staff), a training needs analysis and a bespoke follow-up plan. This is backed up by the concept of a **Learning Champion**, where firms can nominate somebody who will 'champion' eLearning within a firm on a variety of topics, not just ICT (eg HR, Health and Safety etc, as well as basic skills). The idea is that this person really encourages eLearning within the firm. They are supported to do this via a mixture of face-to-face training on an individual and a group basis at a local venue, totalling about 1½ days, followed by some additional self study, and informal contacts between learning champions at different firms.

Trainers within the company (or the Learning Champion) **can participate directly** in eLearning. They can learn how to teach ECDL, act as a mentor for the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) qualification, or deliver other business-related (but non-ICT) courses. These are part of a nationally recognised framework of courses and qualifications) such as management skills, workplace skills (eg communication skills), basic skills etc. Other trainers (eg in schools or the community) are being taught a variety of courses, many of which are internationally recognised. Courses were chosen for their quality and wide ranging application.

Employees can participate directly in eLearning. As well as the ECDL and MOS, employees can take the business courses outlined above - either online or by CD-ROM.

Innovative aspects

The scale of the intervention – this is a huge project, which was particularly innovative during its early stages in 1999/2000, when the ideas and concepts were very new. It demonstrates new ways of delivering teaching/qualifications to students. For example, using 'camps' which are out of hours (eg during school holidays), or 'out of the classroom intensive courses' to enable students to experience digital film making, or acquire the ECDL qualification for example.

What did the project achieve?

450 businesses and 39,000 adult and young learners have been through the programme, 19.000 qualifications have been achieved.

And what did it learn?

To make a project of this size work, strong and equable partnership is crucial. The offer of free equipment and intensive support via Learning Champions has helped attract participants (particularly SMEs). To drive this up even further, equipment is now used as an incentive to gain qualifications and as a reward for particularly good participation. The new delivery mechanisms in schools and colleges have been popular. Making learning fun is important – students give up their free time to participate.

And finally….what happened next?

There has already been an extension for the period 2006-2008 - when the current Objective 1 funding/programming period ends. Discussions are ongoing about continuing the programme under any new transition arrangements.

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European Regions UNDER way towards STANDard indicators for benchmarking information society (UNDERSTAND)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This is a project which monitors and benchmarks some domains of the Information Society at a regional level. The budget was €1,370,000 of which 50% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

UNDERSTAND was an Interreg IIIC project, involving 10 regions. It aimed to compare and evaluate regional development of the Information Society by defining and applying a set of common regional eIndicators across 4 specific domains: social infrastructure and citizens; e-business; e-government; and technical infrastructure and broadband. The purpose was to enable policy-makers to understand the impact of Information Society investment more clearly.

The need for this project was identified because whilst at the national level there is significant benchmarking support to ICT related policy-making, at the regional level there is a lack of basic data to understand the regional situations and to evaluate the impact of innovative policies.

How did the project help?

Having conducted a 'state of the art' analysis on existing Information Society indicators, UNDERSTAND was able consolidate the most useful of these into a series of benchmarking toolkits.

Each toolkit contains methodologies to collect the information and glossaries. There are between 10 and 30 indicators per domain. Typically these cover access to, use of and exploitation of, ICT. For example, eGovernment indicators range from measuring access to broadband, progressing to look at citizens' use of the internet to browse tourism information for example, and up to their transactional use of internet – perhaps to purchase transport or leisure tickets. The toolkits have been tested by the partners, each of whom conducted two surveys to collect information and populate a database. Examples of summary versions of toolkits are available from:

http://www.understand-eu.net/index.php?module=subjects&func=viewpage&pageid=49.

They are available in English, French, Italian, Polish and Spanish.

Most partners (Emilia-Romagna, Piemonte, Valencia, Baleares, Wales, Aquitaine, Yorkshire&Humber) are the Information Society observatories in their own regions, so conducting surveys is 'core business'. The surveys are carried out by different methods according to the domain. For example, citizens were interviewed either face to face or over the phone, whilst the eGovernment surveys were conducted by email or online.

The results have been used to identify good practices and as the basis of 3 conferences. The concept of 'benchlearning' has been important throughout the project – using the benchmarking data to inform policy and change behaviour

at the programme and project level. With this in mind, policy makers have been invited to each of the conferences and encouraged to move from discussing indicators *per se*, to discussing how indicators can be used productively.

The database is still available, subject to some restrictions for non-partners.

Innovative aspects

The project as a whole is not wholly innovative. This is by design – one of its guiding principles is that existing methodologies are used wherever possible. However, there is some innovation in looking at IS issues across a number of the domains, and providing comprehensive data to decision makers at the regional level. Confidence (or sometimes concern) at regional progress can provide a very powerful impetus to innovation. This can be seen in some of the benchlearning work as regions have adopted stimulating projects to address particular aspects of IS progress which have been important to them.

What did the project achieve?

The project either met or exceeded all of its targets. Demand for the project has been strong – some regions joined the work at their own expense. Perhaps the ultimate proof of the success of the project is that participating regions were asking for 'more' – more analysis, more linking between domains and a deeper exploration of policy implications. Not only that, several regions carried out additional surveys at their own expense to enrich the lessons they learned about their own activities in one domain to carry that learning into another.

And what did it learn?

Most operational and methodological decisions were arrived at by consensus, usually by involving more than one partner in a particular task. However, the project recognised issues such as the danger of making generalisations based on a relatively small sample of work (small when compared to the totality of EU regions!) and also sometimes it had to juggle with competing demands. Benchmarking is of use and interest to a wide range of policy makers and programme managers, and it was inevitable that not all requests could be met. However, this demonstrates, again, the strength of demand for solid data to underpin funding and strategic decision making.

And finally….what happened next?

At the time of writing, no follow-up project has been identified, although individual regions were incorporating lessons learned into their own regional information society plans.

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Sölvesborg Learning Centre

Blekinge, Sweden

Background Information

This is an eLearning project which aims to raise educational attainment levels by encouraging more people into further or higher education. It is aimed at citizens (particularly adult learners) and businesses in the region. The budget is €434,000 of which 29.5% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Sölvesborg is a small municipality with 16 000 inhabitants. The average level of educational attainment is low. The municipality has no university of its own. The local trade and business community consists nearly exclusively of small businesses with few opportunities to invest time and money in competence development.

The aim of the project was to improve the average level of educational attainment among the adult community in the municipality of Sölvesborg and to enhance competences among existing firms, in order to attract new businesses and new inhabitants.

How did the project help?

The Learning Centre (LC) is co-located within the local library. In Sweden, 65% of the population regularly use the library, so this is a perfect place for people to find out about the LC very easily. Other partners include the local Blekinge Institute of Technology (BIT), the national agency for education and a partnership set up by the project with public authorities, BIT and local commercial organisations. Within the project there were 4 areas of activity:

- Provision of learning techniques, infrastructure and materials
- Supporting the students
- Marketing this learning, preferably distance learning to new groups
- Connecting to local enterprise, higher education and the municipality

The **learning materials** and equipment were supplied by regional Universities and other educational institutions to enable students to undertake distance learning. It was very important to have the maximum freedom to adjust the hardware and applications, so that the systems would still be able to meet demands in the future, from students studying through other providers. It was also important to have the know-how in order to continue and update the activity when the project came to its end. So, the IT department of the municipality and the staff at the library were trained to administer the system. Librarians were also trained in different distance platforms and applications, to provide cost-effective support to the students. Group software licences from universities were also used to keep the costs down.

Students were supported via free access to equipment and ongoing support from library staff, although they did have to pay course fees sometimes. By locating the LC in the library, the project aimed to encourage hard-to-reach groups to participate.

Marketing was extensive. As well as traditional PR, the LC have put on educational fairs with taster sessions on subjects as diverse as massage, digital image handling, and sound engineering. There have been public lectures on

equally diverse topics such as Alzheimer's Disease, Digital Management, Tai-Chi and Antiquities. The local Trade and Industry Department has arranged breakfast briefings for firms, and schools have been invited to the LC.
The messages that the LC wanted to put over to prospective students were:

- It is possible to study part-time
- It is possible to live in Sölvesborg and study at a higher education
- Anyone can study something
- It is fun to study
- It is possible to move a long way by taking small steps
- The LC is there to support you when you need it
- It is profitable for any business to educate staff

Materials have been developed for local enterprises. A survey of their needs showed they wanted help on marketing, finance, and leadership – and now there are three bespoke tailormade courses for SMEs to be given, spring and autumn 2007. SMEs will contribute a small fee for each employee participating and they will be delivered traditionally, by a teacher.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects. The Learning Centre is marketing courses of special interest for local trade and industry, it is integrated in the local library which gives lots of benefits at no extra cost to the municipality, and it provides a smooth and less frightening gateway to university courses. Overall, it is a new approach for the region.

What did the project achieve?

The LC is offering access to a range of courses, despite the fact that there is no local university – in fact 170 students from 13 educational institutions are using the LC as well as other users. Businesses now have a low cost but high quality source of training.

And what did it learn?

The project demonstrated that it could make partnerships work between educational, the public sector and private sector businesses. This was partly due to the willingness to learn new things amongst library staff. Having dedicated staff is essential - they meet the students and can adjust services and routines to meet individual requirements needs. They are a mediator between the user and the provider of eLearning. This is particularly important as the project particularly helped those unfamiliar with advanced learning content, as well as those unfamiliar with distance learning techniques.

There is still some way to go to explain to as many people and businesses as possible about the LC and the advantages it can offer to everybody. There is a cultural gap between education and business, so dialogue needs to be framed so that everybody understands the same thing, and courses need to be pitched at the right level – from basic sessions to overcome digital literacy barriers in firms, right up to more advanced topics.

And finally....what happened next?

The number of students has increased over time, and the project is continuing. It is not dependent on extra public funding as it is within the library. Working with small firms continues to be a priority and in fact that has been a call for proposals to expand work in this area.

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evoice - the challenge of future democracy in Europe

Bremen - Germany

Background Information

This is an eGovernment project aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of citizens' political participation in a number of local projects over a long period of time. The budget is €4,650,000 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds. The remainder of this case study focuses on one of four pilots (called the 'sub-project'), carried out in Bremen.

What was the regional issue?

The stadium swimming pool in Bremen is the most central and most popular open air bath in the town with approx. 75-115,000 visitors per year. It was in need of restoration - the refurbishment was agreed by the Bremen parliament. However, there were different opinions about how the pool should be redesigned. Whereas one intention was to create a natural swimming pool, the other intention was to modernize the pool using chlorine.

In order to find a consensus, the Bremen parliament decided on consultation process. The aim of this pilot was to support the overall consultation process by initiating information and communication procedures that resolve conflict on the one side and that support the policy cycle with creative ideas on the other. Preparation of the consultation process started in 2003, the consultation was conducted from March till July 2004, concluding in Summer 2006.

How did the project help?

The sub-project used the swimming pool as a pilot to improve 'citizen to government' communications by combining different online and offline communications channels. The aim was to improve citizens' participation by addressing political issues in a user-oriented way by the most appropriate means, which will not be the same for all age groups, or those in the country or the city, for example. There are 3 main areas of activity:

- Implementation of the consultation process
- Creation of fora to facilitate citizen participation
- Marketing and communicating its findings

The consultation process set up a round table of 25 stakeholders as a co-ordination and planning instrument. This board is in charge of identifying problems, reviewing ideas from all the consultation methods, preparing and following up consultation processes, and presenting the results to political decision makers.

To facilitate citizen participation several methods were used. A website has been set up to generate and pool ideas. In this way, best practices are documented and methods from other consultation processes are collected. Several online discussion fora have been initiated to follow critical issues of the planning process – opening the discussion to a wider audience.

Advocates have been used to address target groups that can be difficult to get involved in the consultation process such as children, youngsters and elderly people. For young people, access mechanisms include an online forum and newsletter - the "Letterbox to Dr. Wet." Activities have been conducted in cooperation with local schools, in which the youngsters were questioned to bring in their ideas. The results opened out to a moderated discussion and were presented during a party.

In parallel, meetings have been organized for specific target groups e.g. women, elderly people, people with disabilities, sportsmen/women. Other channels include study visits, onsite visits, and 'hearings' on conflict resolution. Results are available on the website.

A mix of communication channels are used to publicise the activities. Events and hearings are published in local newspapers, community brochures and online and print newsletters. There is also a website – which is experimenting with different ways of indexing, searching and presentation.

The project has developed, published and disseminated a tool library to which the sub-project has contributed. It consists of a user manual which describes and evaluates various applications and their combinations (the 'multi media dialogue approach') and a summarising 'handbook' with guidelines based on these experiences. The lessons learned are on the web-site, in a digital newsletter, and will be presented at international congresses and seminars.

Innovative aspects

The innovative aspect is the combination of modern and traditional media to equally involve the diverse target groups. The instruments applied are not new, but the strategy to combine them is innovative. For example, children of kindergarten age, school pupils, elderly people, women and people with disabilities directly participated in creating one of the main instruments of the consultation process - the website.

The sub-project was fully integrated into the local policy making cycle. As the consultation process was located in the responsible district office, it achieved a maximum of political impact. One of the partners monitored the process and provided research based, and target group oriented, participation methods. In this way, a broad consensus could be found which also brought new knowledge to the sub-project. This is an innovative approach.

What did the project achieve?

The sub-project involved a broad cross-section of the public who helped in the process of developing, testing and applying the multi-media dialogue. It succeeded in resolving conflict as consensual decisions were reached between the different interest groups involved. This was achieved by the round table of stakeholders – which enabled the integration and consolidation of differing interest groups.

The concept of a children's advocate proved very effective at including youngsters in the consultation - a target group that usually is difficult to involve in politics.

And what did it learn?

Particular groups such as elderly people were difficult to reach and the target group of single female parents could not to be addressed at all. Instead, the sub-project initiated a systemic approach by asking all partners of the round table to emphasize how they would feel and what their needs would be, if they personally did belong to the missing target group.

Participation in the process itself was not as high as expected. This was possibly due to excellent media coverage which may have led the users to think that their participation was not necessary because their interests were well represented by others.

User satisfaction was high because relevant interest groups were involved and therefore the result was accepted by all of them. By involving the users, new ideas which the professional planners had not considered came to light, contributing to redevelopment cost reductions.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is ongoing until 2008 Experiences and lessons learned have been well circulated within the region. This consultation was unique in the sense that it served to resolve the conflict of interest in renovating a local public swimming pool. More projects to enhance participation are planned in Bremen, and options to continue the overall project idea of developing and testing the multi-media-dialogue in the next funding period will be discussed.

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North Karelia County Network

North Karelia, Finland

Background Information

This was an eInfrastructure project which aimed to create a development network platform for technological innovation together with new online services for the 16 municipalities and 3 joint municipality federations in the region. The budget was €2,850,000 of which 40 % was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Finland is characterised by a large degree of independency at municipal level. Municipalities are the major providers of public services for citizens but rarely co-operate or work together. The aim of the project was to make it possible to achieve efficiencies in using shared services through the creation of a region wide service platform for online services. This would cover public sector education, healthcare, social services, administration services, information deliveries and business services.

The project forms part of a national wide process where the public sector is harmonising connections between different levels of administration through the use of ICT. It also grows out of previous regional activities, including the 1996 North Karelia Information Strategy and an EU-funded Regional Information Society Initiative (RISI) project called NOKIS.

How did the project help?

The project created a joint network infrastructure for the region to enhance the co-operation between different municipalities. The network is called Maakuntaverkko (Regional Network) and it was started in 2003, soon after all the municipalities signed the contract. The project plan was to achieve, maintain and develop the network and to create new content for citizens and the public administration. Within the project were 3 main areas of activity:

- Creation of partnerships and a development of a new way of thinking
- Development and purchase of the service and systems used by the network
- Future planning

The project developed a new way of thinking among municipalities. Until the project began, municipalities were very independent - there had not been much cooperation in IT matters before. A key task in the beginning, therefore, was to establish trust between all of the project partners and engage each municipality in the project. The project had to identify the right people from each municipality, approach them and work hard over a period of time to convince them of the benefits of participation.

This was achieved by providing lots of information, and the right sorts of information (both technical and non-technical) at the start. It was also necessary to make sure that all project partners would benefit from participating in the project. This was done by emphasising that in the long run they would save costs by joining together.

The project developed or purchased a range of services or systems for the network such as:

- The web service environment used by local authorities for internet and intranet purposes. This involved 9 municipalities and 3 joint municipal authorities. The system was implemented in 2003

- Student information and administration management systems for municipalities. This is currently used by 5 municipalities, but the goal is to enlarge it to all local authorities in the region
- Form management system for electronic services for citizens. This is used by 4 municipalities at the moment, but the goal is to enlarge it to all local authorities in the region
- Cisco Call Manager VoIP-system for free phone calls between authorities. The system is in testing and development stages, but is being used by all local authorities
- Joint internet traffic. This is used by all except the two largest municipal authorities. It includes e-mail and spam filtering, joint virus protection and a joint firewall service

The project plan included a plan for the future of the network. It was crucial to consider this at the start as a way of sustaining the project. The way this was to be achieved was by transferring the network and its content to an organisation specifically for the purposes of maintenance and future developments. The project has set up a publicly-owned company to do this.

Innovative aspects

The project has been innovative in a number of ways. IT structures have traditionally been created separately for each organisation. As the municipal administrations are autonomous, there was a wide range of ICT solutions being used. The project has made it possible for the municipalities to integrate their different operations and service processes so as to serve citizens of the region more effectively.

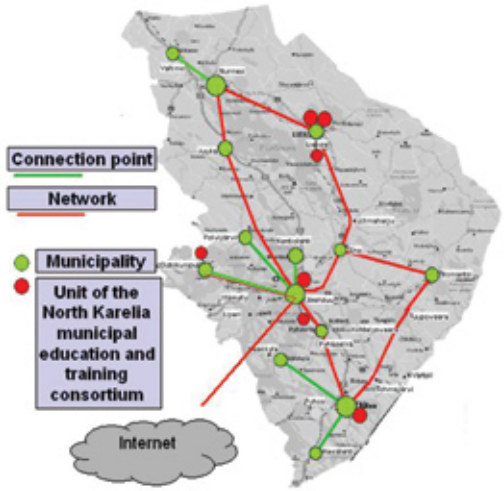
The fact that the municipalities worked together to find an ICT solution that all of them can use represents a new way of working for the region.

What did the project achieve?

The project has established and maintained a network of 150 servers that link 12,000 workstations and 17,000 users in the partner organisations. The network connections are fibre based all the way to the users and the connection speeds vary from 100 Mbit/s - 1 Gbit/s.

The project has serviced a need within the municipalities. By co-operating, the municipalities have saved costs in producing the ICT services that they needed.

The project has served as a catalyst for the joint development of several other e-services by municipal authorities in the region, such as a library system, healthcare systems, economic administration systems, and social services systems. These have been developed voluntarily by the authorities themselves not by the Regional Network.



And what did it learn?

The project has shown that it can make a broad partnership work. Partly, this is due to having a development plan and the use of an agreed common methodology about how to share costs on almost everything. This method must be approved, and adhered to, by all the partners to build and maintain mutual trust. Trust is something which has to be achieved by actions as well as words.

The municipalities now realise that they are in the similar situations and face the same challenges. By joining forces they can produce mutually beneficial solutions that both work and are cost effective.

And finally….what happened next?

A company has been found to continue the maintenance of the network and develop new projects. In the future, it will concentrate more on producing eServices for citizens (until now the focus has been more in back office services and in administration).

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Dynamique Régionale pour un Environnement et un Aménagement Maîtrisés, Strand 2 - Information Society (DREAM2)

Nord-Pas de Calais, France

Background Information

This was an eGovernment project aimed at increasing the exchange of information between citizens, and also between citizens and elected officials through the use of ICT. In turn, this should make government more accessible and improve citizen participation in public life. The budget was €567,000 of which 60% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Since 1996 the Department of "e-Direction" of the Regional Council of Nord Pas de Calais has been responsible for issues dealing with the Information Society, developing content, services and applications. It was within this context that the department encouraged local authorities to use new opportunities afforded by ICT to offer citizens services and applications that would serve them best.

The region decided to engage in a 24 month exploration phase in the emerging topic of eDemocracy. The aim of the project was to test and explore the concept of eDemocracy to find out if it was capable of affecting democratic practices by making government more open and accessible, and to investigate the scope for regional intervention in this area.

How did the project help?

The project created an environment that encouraged citizens to ask questions, explore and test the concept of eDemocracy. Within the project were 3 main activities:

- The organisation of five public seminars - in Communauté Urbaine de Dunkerque, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Cambrai, Béthune and Lille
- Support for five local authorities chosen as pilots
- The creation of a website as a source of information on eDemocracy in general and examples of local initiatives from all over France

The five seminars each had different interrelated themes regarding e-democracy. They were conducted in the five pilot authority locations around the region:

- *Local Democracy, citizen participation and the role of ICT and Internet.* The Communauté Urbaine de Dunkerque organised this seminar as the start-off point for the project. The intention was to allow citizens, cyber-centres and people involved in ICT projects to come together and exchange experiences. The day was organized in four thematic workshops looking at the kinds of information available for citizens; the public debate on ICT; e-voting and e-consultations; and citizens use of ICT and access to local authorities
- *Public information on the Internet and its treatment including legal considerations regarding content and access.* This session was held in Villeneuve d'Ascq. It became apparent that only a few local authorities were active enough to have experiences to present and so the seminar focused on general information rather than a detailed exchange of experiences
- *The role of ICTs in bringing citizens and elected officials together, hosted in Cambrai.* This event concluded that although there is a rising interest in ICT, it is still a difficult area for a local authority to be active or lead in, particularly in changing perceptions of the internet and changing organisational cultures to match this new view

- *Does ICT contribute to the public debate and the citizens' expression point of view?* In this seminar, in Béthune, the debate focused on the barriers that local authorities face regarding the use of ICTs. The statement was made in the concluding remarks that it is more peoples' attitudes that represent barriers than the ICT tools themselves. These new tools need to be introduced gradually in order to allow for an environment of cooperation
- The final event was held in Lille, and it presented the conclusions of the project. Lessons learned included the discovery that external support was needed by the pilot sub-regions to help them, that the range of pilots was diverse, problems were often cultural or organisational, not technology related and lastly, innovative ideas do not just 'happen'; they need to be stimulated

The project offered support to five local authorities that were ready to experiment with a real-life e-democracy situation which could benefit from ICT intervention. This consisted of funding (€10,000 each) and 10 days of an expert to offer technical guidance.

Examples of the sorts of pilot projects which took place are:

- The community of Oignies set up a website with a forum facility to encourage citizens to participate in political debate
- Fourmies used ICT as a means for school children to put questions to elected officials
- Atrébatie created a website which played a significant role in engaging people in a debate regarding wide energy in the municipality

The website **www.e-democratielocale.info** contains 350 pages of information and has an average of 3,500 – 4,000 hits per month.

Innovative aspects

The project has been innovative in several areas. The approach encouraged a spirit of collective learning and a 'bottom-up' ethos where the project activities emanated from local participants. The involvement of an expert to guide the local pilot authorities and animate the seminars was also innovative. The expert provided the 'comfort' and guidance necessary. The project also recognised that people have to be allowed to adopt ICT at their own pace – it cannot be hurried. Finally, the project brought people together who were not likely to have contact otherwise - for example school children and elected officials.

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What did the project achieve?

The project attracted 70 local authorities and with every successive seminar participants' questions became more pertinent. So the whole debate advanced to a higher level as awareness of ICT issues increased. There are now increasing numbers of local ICT initiatives. People's attitudes to democracy have altered. They now expect to be given more access to information, and to participate in public debates through the use of ICT.

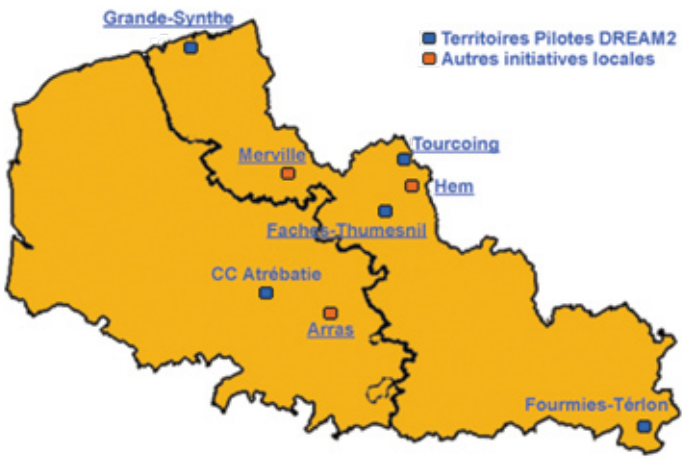
And what did it learn?

Barriers to accessing and using new technologies are not always simply technical or financial but have more to do with behavioural patterns. People had to face their own inhibitions, fears and reservations and, interestingly, this was as relevant to elected officials as the general public. New technologies attract interest. Many people were genuinely curious and excited to explore new tools and consider what it meant for their lives and their role in society.

However, there is still some way to go as the seminars attracted people that were already either interested in or convinced of the potential benefits of ICT. A much larger audience is needed particularly the local actors who are involved in decision-making. Presenting success stories and results is one way to reach and encourage people. But funding also plays a crucial role as it helps to manage the risks involved in coming up with innovative ideas and trying to implement them.

And finally….what happened next?

The region will continue supporting the adoption and use of ICT through the DREAM+ programme (2006 – 2009). It aims to focus on local authorities as the main actors in e-democracy, adopting an approach where all citizens learn at their own pace.



Gemeinschaftsinitiative
URBAN II
Mannheim
Ludwigshafen

Café Klick

Reinland-Pfalz, Germany

Background Information

This in an eLearning project aimed at increasing the participation of elderly people in the information society by providing them with ICT training and support. The budget is €20,000 of which, 40 % is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The local area of Mannheim-Luwigshafen in Rheinland-Pfalz flanks both sides of the River Rhine and has a population of 40,000 inhabitants. The area is characterised by urban degeneration; high unemployment (in particular amongst women and younger people); low skill levels; an aging population; and difficulties in retaining young families.

These problems are being address by a broad URBAN II project promoting economic activities, urban redevelopment initiatives and social integration. The latter is being achieved by offering services and various activities to a number of population groups in the district.

In this context, the current project aims at increasing the use by older people of ICT and to provide an impetus to further integrate elderly people in the social life of the region.

How did the project help?

The project established an internet café providing ICT training and support to older people. It had identified that elderly people were not making use of ICT partly because they had lost confidence in their abilities to handle modern media. In turn, this effectively denied them access to everyday online services such as banking and shopping, even though older people could potentially be important users of these services – particularly when they had limited mobility.
Within the project there were the following areas of activity:

- Provision of taster-sessions
- Provision of courses
- Training of staff
- Promotion of the project

The project began by offering free two-day taster courses for senior citizens. This attracted a lot of interest with 180 people visiting the new internet café between September 2002 and February 2003. After this initial "taster period" was over, the team made it possible for senior citizens to surf the internet three afternoons a week either alone, or with support as needed. The café is small (20 square meters) and now attracts 20-25 visitors per week.

The project provides courses tailor-made for the particular needs of senior citizens. This means that they are kept short and practical - avoiding complicated theoretical introductions. The content of the courses are designed to be relevant to the elderly and include:

- Word processing writing letters
- Emailing and creating and sending cards on the internet

- Excel – for example 'how to create diabetes and blood-pressure tables'
- Creating a Homepage in two days
- Burning CDs
- Organising your PC

The project does not receive support from software producers or other providers of products and is self-financed. In the event of problems the project has to solve them itself. To help with the maintenance of hardware and software problems the project has joined an association – the subscription is €60 per year.

The staff have received special training to acquire the basic knowledge for the development of courses. In the café, users are supported by nine volunteers as tutors including 6 senior citizens - over 60 years old. Further help is given by staff from the local authority department for services to older people.

The project was promoted by traditional media at the start due to the characteristics of the target users - although now it has its own website.

Innovative aspects

The project has focused on making it significantly easier for senior citizens (to use and access PCs and the internet). All the courses are very practical using small building blocks to build up confidence, which are presented in simple language. This enables absolute beginners to become very quickly acquainted with the basic functions of the PC and Internet.

What did the project achieve?

The project has become more than an internet café. It is also an important meeting point for senior citizens. Courses beyond ICT are now being offered. These include healthcare, history, leisure pursuits and keep fit classes. In total, over 1,200 people have used the project. Senior citizens in the region are now less fearful of ICT and are becoming independent users of ICT.

And what did it learn?

Costs have been kept to a minimum by using voluntary tutors who are either older people themselves or unemployed – this project is a way of 're-engaging' them with the world of work. But getting hold of good volunteers can be difficult and it is important to be clear of the benefits and commitments involved.

By keeping the courses short and practical the project has made them relevant to and focused on the users, charging a small fee for the courses helps to cover costs. The fact that the café is now a busy meeting place for all sorts of activities points to its success and importance locally.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is continuing with expansion of the course provision offered.

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Mobile Automatic Information Support System (mAIS)

Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

Background Information

This was an eInclusion project aimed at improving access to electronic information for the physically disabled and elderly by presenting it in a form that they can access and make sense of. The project was aimed at people with mobility restrictions including blind and visually impaired people, deaf and hearing impaired people, those using wheelchairs and senior citizens. The budget was €531,466 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds

What was the regional issue?

Information is presented via electronic displays in a very wide variety of locations, such as bus stops, railway stations, airports, and shopping centres. This can be difficult for the elderly and disabled to see, read or understand. In Germany, about 20% (16 million) of the population are either disabled or elderly. The aim of the project is to make electronic information available to all, thus providing equal access to information and involving the elderly and disabled in the information society. The region is a pilot project for state-wide implementation.

How did the project help?

The project designed and developed a system using the internet and state of the art communication technology. It was important to make the technology easy to use and cheap for the user. So the information was made available via an ordinary mobile phone fitted with software. The software allows it to receive data from a time schedule and translates this into a format that can be understood by the receiver - such as in large print or by voice.
Within the project there were 4 areas of activity:

- Specification and development of the necessary software
- Specification and development of the server
- Testing and validation of the product
- Publicising the project

The software allowed a mobile phone to receive information from a location beacon, built in or attached to the bus stop or other display which holds the relevant data - the times and frequency of buses for example. A bluetooth-interface allowed communication between the mobile phone and the location beacon. The software could be downloaded from the internet and installed on the mobile phone. Operating the software was kept simple using button and cursors or a touch screen. The system was flexible, allowing a large number of different profiles to be set up which then presented the data in the individually desired format.

The mAIS server formed the connection between the mobile phone and the information-providers' networks – for this project they are the local bus company's timetabling system and the local traffic control system. Communication was established via the internet in both directions. The main component of the mAIS-Servers was an intelligent databank, which stored all the data the mobile phone needs to be able to locate. Using the stored data, the server is then able to provide dynamic data from the traffic control. When combined, these give up to date information about the expected arrival of the buses at the bus stop.

In addition, the server provided information to the user whilst they were on the bus – informing them when they reach their stop, and giving directions to prominent places.

The product design, development and testing involved real people with age or disability-related transport problems. The field tests also involved the researchers, and lasted several weeks. This approach enabled the project to reflect accurately the needs of the target groups.

The project was publicised by a series of presentations to associations and advisory councils for disabled and/or elderly people as well as via newspaper and magazine articles.

Innovative aspects

The project has broken new ground in supporting people with restricted mobility to get about more easily with the help of ICT. It has brought together and involved mobile phone companies, the public transport sector, the disabled and elderly and regional and national government. The system can be tailored to the needs of individual users, and it can be scaled into other regions or countries.

What did the project achieve?

By developing a system that is customisable by the user the project has enabled disadvantaged groups participate in the Information Society in very practical ways which really make a difference to daily life. Users are able to get up to date and accurate information about bus services either at the bus stop or before they embark on their journey.

And what did it learn?

The project, by engaging the beneficiaries and the organisations providing the raw data, enabled the system to develop under real conditions which made the system robust. The project partners acquired an in depth knowledge and expertise in the field. This, alongside the level of cooperation of all involved, contributed to the project's success.

The project experienced difficulties in recruiting the disabled and elderly to participate in the field tests – because there was no previous experience for the beneficiaries to compare it to. This was overcome by providing detailed information to help them to understand the very tangible benefits that would accrue to them from participating in the trials.

And finally....what happened next?

There are plans to continue to develop the project with the present project partners and to prepare the product for production and market introduction - for which external financial support is needed. As soon as it is technically possible (i.e. when mobile phones carry GPS/GALILEO) and the financial support is available, the system will consider using GPS/GALILEO technology to improve the service.

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New Model for the development of Telecentres for the strategic promotion of the Information Society in Europe (Ciberstrategy)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project aimed at providing Telecentres with the strategic tools that will enable them to be reference centres for the Information Society in their regions. The budget is €1,100,000 of which 57% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Since their inception in the 1980s, Telecentres have been used as a basic tool to facilitate universal access to (ICT). Many have been partially financed by initiatives based on EU Structural Funds. During this period technology has advanced, and society has changed. Many Telecentres have already moved on from their initial start-up approach – basically acting as ICT resource or teleworking centres. Now, they need to develop a range of services appropriate to their location (urban or rural), the region's social requirements, and the promoter's direction or style of management.

This is compounded by the fact that numerous Telecentres have ceased operations, and many others have found it difficult to survive. Telecentres need to redefine their objectives in order to transform themselves into centres of creativity and strategic development within their community.

The project aims to define a strategy that is appropriate to the region by engaging with local 'agents' (ie 'people and/or organisations that should be consulted while developing a strategic plan for a Telecentre'), in order to identify agents' needs, and focus on critical outcomes.

How did the project help?

In each partner region, there were regular meetings between the project partners and the participating Telecentres to ensure that everyone was following the same process. The project partners held seven face to face meetings over the project.

Between meetings, a project intranet was a vital tool that facilitated the collaborative environment necessary for the successful completion of the project. This intranet was established and managed by the project leader. As well as management and dissemination activities, there were 4 other main areas of action:

- Diagnosis of the Telecentres' status and models of good practice
- Implementation of the new model on a pilot basis in selected regions and review the experiences
- Establish and implement a European Telecentres Net

Telecentres were surveyed and their customers needs analysed. The survey provided a picture of the experiences of existing Telecentres and other initiatives in the participating regions. This information then acted as a baseline for the development of a 'Self Diagnosis Guide'. This provides Telecentre managers with the tools and guidelines to carry out a self analysis on their current activities, and helps them to develop a strategy for the development of new services, in response to client needs. The Needs Analysis

was carried out with Telecentre clients to determine the need for new services. This contributed to later stages of the project.

A new model for sustainable Telecentres (Strategic Guide for Telecentres in the Information Society) was developed. This guide was presented in four inter-connected stages to achieve sustainable development and allow some strategic positioning of the Telecentre within its community and region. This requires the systematic application of strategic planning and constant evaluation, revision and improvements.

The new model was implemented as a pilot programme in the partner regions. Each participating Telecentre used the tools and guides to develop and implement a set of new services. These were monitored every two months during the pilot phase (12 months – July 05 to June 06) using a defined set of templates and questionnaires for the Telecentre manager, technical staff and service users. This monitoring process enabled the Telecentres to make continuous improvements to the new services.

A European Telecentres Network (CIBERA) was developed. This is a portal to facilitate the Telecentres Network, enabling interaction between members. It was launched towards the end of the project; the partners have undertaken to maintain and support the network.

Innovative aspects

The initial rationale of this project was that Telecentres had become 'stale', and that many Telecentre managers needed usable tools to help them to bring their offer up to date, and to make it relevant to the local community. The project was innovative in the way that it addressed these needs and developed new tools to help Telecentres to develop new services and strategies for the future.

What did the project achieve?

The project has developed a set of quality tools and a guide for use by Telecentre managers. It has set up and run the European Telecentres Network that will exist beyond the end of the project. Eight Telecentres in four regions are the direct beneficiaries of the project; indirectly, all their clients will also benefit.

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And what did it learn?

The project has shown that it can foster trans-national co-operation. Largely, this was due to a strong project partnership/consortium with all six partners working together to achieve success in the project. This was underpinned by strong project leadership, both in terms of basic administration and the practical methodology applied to all aspects of the project. There was a real team spirit among the partners, and every one of them was available and willing to advise and assist every other partner in all phases of the project, regardless of who was actually responsible for the delivery of a particular piece of work.

All of the tools and guides that were developed by the project were contributed to by all partners, and therefore the results are stronger and more consistent than otherwise might have been the case. The project intranet was vital in facilitating extensive collaboration between all of the partners throughout the project. It was very comprehensive, and performed well as a file storage area, task guide, and forum.

And finally….what happened next?

The tools and guides developed by the project are and will remain available to any Telecentres that wish to access and use them. They are already in use within two participating Telecentres in the Gaeltacht region. Three other early stage regional centres are aware of, and can use, them. This is replicated across all six partner regions.

The network of Telecentres will continue at least until the end of 2007. If it considered useful and viable, then other Telecentres will be invited to become members, and a management structure will be established. There is no external funding available, or being sought, for this.

AGORA
HUMAN TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Human-Centred Design of Game-Based Learning Environments (HCGLE)

Western Finland - Finland

Background Information

The aim of the project is to develop good learning practices and tools for use in different educational levels by developing a quality process for the design of game-based learning environments. The project is aimed at schoolchildren, students and teachers. The budget is €488,000 of which 30% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The project aims to strengthen the field and business in the area of educational games in the region to demonstrate positive ways to use digital games for children and young people.

How did the project help?

The project design process is multidisciplinary combining educational and other sciences, game design, software engineering and computer sciences. The principles of user-centred and participatory design are applied in the project and the design processes of game-based learning environments are realised in close collaboration with children and teachers at kindergarten and different school levels.

The project has several sub-projects dealing with the development of prototypes of different game-based learning environments. The design processes of the game prototypes serve as case studies or fields for the development of the game design process. Within the project there are 3 areas of activity:

- Establishing a research and development group
- Managing the design process
- Involving schoolchildren and teachers in the testing process

The main research and development group is the Agora Game Lab, in the Agora Centre. This consists of researchers and/or research assistants from different disciplines. Each researcher is responsible for 1 or 2 game prototypes, and for bringing his/her own perspective (e.g. game design, participatory design) into the overall design process for each game.

Each prototype includes several design phases. For each phase of prototype development, a specific project group is formed from the students of the Faculty of Information Technology, University of Jyväskylä. At the moment the main sub-projects / game design prototypes are:

- **Talarius**, a game-design environment for children. It can be used, for instance, as a tool for the children to revise and test their knowledge at the end of a teaching period
- **GameWorld**, a simulation game for modelling scientific phenomena related to, for example, ecology, physics, etc
- **Virtual Swamp**, a game-based learning environment for issues and information relating to peatland in general, and to the Leivonmäki National Park in Finland in particular

Each design process serves as a case study. These cases provide, as the end result, a model for a quality, interdisciplinary design process of game-based learning

environments. They show how to achieve prototypes by involving a range of people – educationalists, scientists, game designers and software engineers.

All of the sub-projects are carried out in collaboration with end users (i.e. the children and teachers of different schools and/or kindergartens), throughout the project. With the aid of user-centred design methods, the users take part in the idea generation for the requirements of the applications, as well as in the evaluation of the prototypes. There are field try-outs of the prototypes and workshops addressing various design issues at different stages of the sub-projects.

Innovative aspects

The project is innovative on a number of levels. The development of quality and multi-disciplinary design processes for game-based learning environments, and the design of innovative learning tools/learning game prototypes, are innovative.

The project is also innovative in the application of work methodologies involving a multidisciplinary project group. This is an eLearning project, with an unusual combination of funding from the University sector, the National Technology Agency in Finland, Structural Funds, the regional Centre of Expertise, the private sector, public organisations, and local authorities.

The project is active in seeking ways of involving children and teachers in mutual partnership in different phases of game design. Finally, the students from different faculties, especially from the Faculty of Information Technology, play a significant role in the project.

What did the project achieve?

The project has increased interdisciplinarity and encouraged a diversified range of partnerships involving, for example, researchers from education, technology, arts and culture, children and game designers, company representatives and people from schools all working together.

The project has brought together methods, tools and concepts for the multi-disciplinary design of game-based learning environments for use at different educational levels school levels. Currently, there are approximately ten pilot schools or kindergartens involved in the project. In the future, children and teachers in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools will be engaged on a broader scale.

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And what did it learn?

The design of game-based learning environments is a complex issue and requires the commitment of multiple parties. This has been realised in the project by recruiting project members from different fields and by building active means for multidisciplinary collaboration. Managing the different partners is demanding but is ultimately very fruitful.

By involving future users of game-based learning environments (i.e. children and teachers) they are actively involved in the design and use of game-based learning environments. This ensures the suitability of the learning environments to actual school contexts. These may be further developed as final products in collaboration with private sector partners.

Having different sources of funding meant that the funding bodies' expectations on how to use the funds and their financial reporting protocols were different. This has increased the burden of bureaucracy. The project leader has excellent and experienced staff for project administration which has minimised the involvement of researchers and designers in the administrative process and allowed them to concentrate on the content of the project.

Attracting funding, and convincing the funding bodies of the need to focus not only on the technological aspects of the project, but also on the educational value of the content, is an on-going challenge.

And finally….what happened next?

The project methodology is going to be developed further and utilised in future game-design projects. The learning games are intended for use in schools and may also be developed as final products in collaboration with private sector partners.

Emergency Service Zeeland

Zeeland, The Netherlands

Background Information

This is an eHealth project aimed at developing a system for the uniform registration of patient information in an electronic patient file (EDP) to improve the supply of information for the emergency services and other stakeholders. The budget is €809,367 of which 57.6% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Zeeland is a region in the Netherlands with a population of 380,000. Citizens in the region make around 16,000 ambulance trips a year to 3 hospitals. It is difficult to exchange digital information about patients because the software of the programmes of the various healthcare institutions is not compatible. This has led to concerns amongst hospitals, medical specialists, family doctors and pharmacists about internal and external communications systems within the healthcare sector in the region.

The project aims to implement a mobile data processing and transmission application for the use of the Emergency Services in the region providing information on medication (possible allergies, use of medicines etc).

How did the project help?

The project developed a mobile eInfrastructure for use in ambulances which allows the exchange of patient data between different stakeholders (ambulances, ambulance station, hospitals) and improves the patient registration process by making it quicker and uniform. There are 4 main project activities:

- The development of an ICT application for data entry and data transmission in the ambulances (e-rides forms).
- The development of a secure system at the hospitals
- Development of the Electronic Medication File (EMD) and the open care information system (OZIS) which connects pharmacies
- Dissemination and communication activities

The ICT application was developed and tested to enable the paramedic to complete the eRides form, whilst still in the ambulance. The completed form is sent to the hospital to which the patient was being transported, and possibly also to other medical specialists or pharmacies etc. In this way the doctors and nurses would have the necessary information about the patient (medical records and associated information) on arrival in the hospital. This reduces the number of times data had to be asked for or copied by first aid staff and secretaries. In turn, this reduces the possibility of mistakes and provides better and more efficient patient care.

The system at the hospital had to be able to receive the data from the ambulances and also meet current data protection legislation. The implementation of the application was accompanied by a constant monitoring / evaluation in order to be able to identify and solve bottlenecks in the procedures and the workflow. To achieve this, evaluation forms were developed to be completed by the first aid station personnel and the medical doctors. This would result in clearly interpretable data.

The development of the Electronic Medication File (EMD) and the open care information system (OZIS) meant that information relating to the medication

the patient has received in the past or is receiving at the moment was easily accessible to the healthcare workers. For example when an unconscious patient is being transported to the hospital it is vital to know which medication they are already using. This is done through the EMD. Communication between hospitals, pharmacies and general practitioners concerning the correct prescription of medicines is done through OZIS. The project focused on the process of prescribing and providing the medicines and consulting the medication record, rather than on consulting the patient. This reduces the burden on the patient, and mistakes arising through the duplication of tasks.

The pharmacies, hospitals and general practitioners who accessed the EMD use different software applications which needed to be able to communicate. For example, general practitioners use 6 different software systems to prescribe medicines. (e.g. Promedico, Labelsoft MicroHIS, PharmaPartners, Medicom). To achieve this, open standards were used as well as a protected network infrastructure (Epacity SD|LS 256/256 1:20).

The dissemination and communication of the project comprised regular workshops and a brochure. The project also engaged various newspapers and magazines. A start has been made to embed the knowledge with the help of training and education programs involving university and private sector partners.

Innovative aspects

The main innovative aspects of the project were in the way that information was gathered and transmitted by the emergency services. By using mobile data communications in the ambulance, information about the patients can be gathered faster and transmitted more reliably to the hospital. This is innovative. The project has fostered cooperation between the various healthcare stakeholders in the region - regional ambulance service, hospitals, municipal medical services, trauma centre, central ambulance service, Dutch Red Cross, psycho-social care, and general practitioners. It is likely that this has benefits beyond the project.

What did the project achieve?

The project created a safe and mobile web application used by various organisations and by different people. Regional hospitals, medical specialists and the regional ambulance service as well as the patients themselves have all benefited from the project. Training on the use of the application has been given to 60 healthcare professionals in the region.

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And what did it learn?

Whilst the project focused on ICT, the project is much more about changing the way that people work and managing those changes within a technological environment. The project has faced making political changes. These are always difficult and require political sensitivity and good communicational skills. Stakeholders are sometimes reluctant to let go of existing structures and so the messages need to be made that technology is a mean of helping them to develop new ways of working.

The people on the 'front line' (doctors and nurses) played a very important role in the project because of their wish to contribute to a reliable and efficient development of the emergency services. The involvement of all the users of the application helped the project to achieve its goals.

However, there were technological challenges as well. These were both anticipated (eg the inter-operability between applications) and unexpected – such as to the need to physically 'lock-down' the laptops in the ambulances, and provide Electro Magnetic Compatibility (EMC) testing.

And finally….what happened next?

The objectives of this project have been achieved. A further roll-out and extension of the project is expected - depending on funding. The possibilities of a follow-up are being discussed with representatives of the ministries of VWS (National Health, Wellbeing and Sport) and BZK (Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relationships). The project is also exploring possibilities with the University sector to set up a management course for the Emergency Services.

Advanced Multi-functional Centre for Simulation and Technological Innovation (CMAT)

Andalucia, Spain

Background Information

This is an eHealth project which aims is to provide professional development and be a point of reference in research, development and innovation for new training methodologies in the health sector. The project is aimed at health care professionals in the region. The budget is €11,000,000, of which 29% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The Andalusian public health system (APHS) employs nearly 92,000 healthcare professionals and provides 17,000 beds in public hospitals. It has a budget of more than 7 billion € and serves more than 7 million citizens. It is the largest regional enterprise, employing almost 5% of the active population. Public and private healthcare represents 7.5% of regional GDP.

Since the end of the 90s, the region has been developing an Andalusian eHealth Strategy, which consists of integrating all the health information on each citizen and making this information available at any time or any place in which the citizen requires health assistance. In this way, it has improved information accessibility, continuity in the healthcare process and service quality.

The project aims to build on this to integrate research, development and lifelong professional training with intensive use of new technologies for healthcare professionals. It is both a demonstrator of sophisticated ICT equipment and infrastructure, and a knowledge generator.

How did the project help?

CMAT is a cutting edge innovative centre for the development and training of health professionals in Andalusia. The Centre is situated in the Health Sciences Campus Technology Park of Granada. The building contains different simulation areas for teaching and has a total of more than 2,000 square metres dedicated exclusively to training activities; these areas include operating theatres, virtual simulation classrooms, a trauma tunnel, casualty and specialisation consultation rooms, a critical room, a rehabilitation room, etc. There are also classrooms for in-person training and e-training. All training rooms have audio and video recording systems, which can codify and send information to any point in the building, the regional government or to the Internet. The building is equipped with a high-speed data network with both wire and wireless connections.
The main areas of project activity are:

- Development and provision of training methodologies in specialised training areas
- Development and provision of leading edge ICT infrastructures and tools
- Development of specialised environments
- The continuous development of professional competences at the centre of "Process Management" in the APHS

Specialised training methodologies are carried out in different settings, which simulate real-life healthcare environments at various points of the health care process. In addition to classrooms equipped with state-of-the-art technologies, the project provides diverse training scenarios in accordance with the different environmental settings in which the "patient" is located at each stage of the health care process and in which the professional is to be trained. Therefore, professionals can train in urban and domestic settings, programmed or emergency consultations, operating theatres and casualty areas, etc.

Development of specialised ICT infrastructures and tools. The highly versatile classrooms are equipped with state-of-the-art technology in order to facilitate the knowledge transfer process. Touch-sensitive screens have

been installed in each classroom to allow teachers to project their presentations, consult the Internet, connect with students in other geographical areas by video conference and keep digital copies of the notes from each session. All classrooms are also fitted with audio, video, videoconference and camera equipment that enable sessions to be recorded and broadcast to other locations. Students have tele-workstations from where they can access e-training tools, do exercises, consult tutors and access chats related to training events etc.

Development of specialised environments. The complex has a simulated urban area. A reproduction of a small-sized home environment has been constructed where access difficulties and limitations of space are similar to those encountered by accident and emergency teams in their daily activity outside a hospital or health centre.

The hospital area is **designed exactly as any real hospital:** a double circuit corridor with consultation rooms on both sides where patients receive assistance in different consultation rooms according to their pathologies. In this area, rooms are multi-purpose and can be quickly transformed from orthopaedics to a gynaecological or ophthalmologic consultation room. In addition, there are permanent rooms for admissions, triage, plastering etc.

Nine multi-purpose operating theatres have been installed. The methodologies most frequently used are robotic and virtual simulation to train students to deal with diagnosis and surgical techniques.

The number of students per session can be increased via direct observation of the manoeuvres and techniques carried out on training events (from the **observation gallery** in the out-of-hospital area) and via **transmission of the activity on the Internet.** Thanks to a complex video and audio system, consultation or operating theatre activities can be observed from this same gallery. Sometimes, trained actors simulate the symptoms of the pathologies to be studied.

Continuous Professional Development. In the APHS the activity of professionals and health centres is organised through "Process-based management". Each phase of the process (primary care, consultation, diagnosis, treatment, etc) requires different professionals, scenery, techniques and technology. The APHS professionals are the protagonists of this change of management style. It is essential that they continually update their knowledge, competences and skills in order to provide the best quality healthcare.

Innovative aspects

Innovation is at the core of the project due to the intensive use of ICT, the continuous training of professionals and the creation of new knowledge. In particular the project developed the 'Simulated patient' a digital system that behaves like a real patient and substitutes actors that play the role of patients in health professional training.

The project also contributes to organisational innovation. The Innovative Practices Bank (BPI) **(http://www.saludinnova.com/)** is an Information and Knowledge Management System that identifies and promotes innovative initiatives and good health practices in healthcare.

What did the project achieve?

At the time of reporting:

- 15,000 trainees have been trained by the partners using advanced methodologies, virtual and robotic simulation and intensive use of ICT
- Four innovative training methodologies have been demonstrated and used in training: virtual, scenic and robotic simulation and e-Training.
- Seven virtual simulators have been demonstrated and used in training including: Gastroscopy, Bronchoscopy, Urology, Intra abdominal Ecography and Laparoscopy
- Four advanced robotic simulators have been demonstrated and used in training
- The Innovative Practices Bank has been developed and is in use
- The project is also developing other tools and all of them are available as "Free Software" and can be of immediate use in the virtual FLOSS (Free – Libre – Open Source Software) Community

And what did it learn?

CMAT is not an isolated project. It is fully integrated into Regional Strategies on Innovation, Information Society, and Health Innovation. In this way it has a high political support and ensures continuity of funding. There is a strong belief that it would have been difficult to achieve some of the wide ranging outputs and impacts without EU funding – the added value and leverage is great.

In general it has been really difficult to find technological partners with an open attitude to "understand" the objectives to achieve and to contribute to the project. In terms of its objectives and technology there are no centres similar to CMAT. This has meant that the project has been forced to be really innovative with very few reference site or examples, and has had to bear the risks itself.

Whilst funding has been tight, the problem has been minimised by using very low cost technology that is sufficient for the real needs of the project. This has been augmented by using Free Open Source Software, University assistance, creating sponsoring agreements with electro-medical hardware and equipment firms, and the in-house design and development of most of the ICT tools.

And finally....what happened next?

The project is ongoing and operational funding is ensured until 2008. Several CMAT projects are already pre-selected for integration in the Regional Operational Programme for structural funding in the period 2007-2013.

The experience of CMAT is going to be transferred to the Health Calgary Region in Canada through a Strategic Agreement.

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La Red pública de Telecentros del Principado de Asturias (The region of Asturias public network of Telecentres)

Asturias, Spain

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure project which aims to contribute to citizens' digital literacy and to the reduction of the digital divide, especially in remote rural areas, and for disadvantaged groups. The budget was €3,100,000 of which 75% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The Asturias region has a population of 1.1m spread over 10,604 km^2. It is a mixed region with industrial zones but also with rural mountain areas, which are very remote from large urban areas or cities. The region faces challenges in providing the same good-quality service for all citizens of the region. The region sees the implementation of ICT as a solution to enable and enhance communication between citizens and public authorities.

The aim of the project is to provide access to the internet to disadvantaged groups in every single small village within the region. It seeks to increase digital literacy, to enable people to communicate, and to improve the communication between public authorities and citizens.

How did the project help?

The project provided 85 telecentres through the region. These consist of 1,000 PCs with broadband connections and 92 high-qualified staff providing a wide range of services to users in urban and rural areas of the territory. Within the project are 5 main areas of activity:

- Provision of connectivity solutions to the telecentres
- Supply of internet access to the target user groups
- ICT training to address users needs
- Training of staff
- Marketing activities

The project served as a driving force for the improvement of the regional communication infrastructure, providing technological solutions to overcome difficulties regarding connectivity. The project has implemented satellite internet connections to provide broadband to centres located in remote areas of the territory. Previously, broadband was unavailable in these areas.

The project is aimed specficially at the following target groups:

- Young people
- Women
- The elderly
- People with disabilities
- People living in rural areas
- The unemployed
- People in risk of social exclusion
- Immigrants

The project provides users with specially-designed courses on the basis of their ICT needs. These include courses on how to use emails; office applications; internet communication tools and digital cameras etc. All these services are free.

The project leader trains the staff to teach and share their knowledge with the users. This 'personal touch' is

necessary to extract the maximum value from the courses. The staff are mostly young people who are educated in ICT literacy. They are employees of the municipalities. In every telecentre, there are approximately 3 people working there. The lead partner also has a couple of co-ordinators who visit the centres on a regular basis and are on hand to resolve any potential problems and give feedback to the project management quickly.

The project is marketed and publicised by the region, municipalities and information centres within Asturias. However, as the telecentres are mostly located in the small municipalities, they don't need a huge amount of promotion - the traditional means of 'word of mouth' is most effective.

Innovative aspects

The very idea of this project is innovative, as it makes the internet available to citizens in their communities for free. In some locations, the physical barriers of topography would make this extremely difficult to achieve, let alone the eSkills and ICT awareness issues. The provision of a physical space with staff on-hand to train and educate citizens on how to use ICT in every village in the region is also an innovative approach.

What did the project achieve?

The project has created 85 telecentres with 105,000 members, so that every small village across the region has one. The project has been very popular with the users, especially the elderly. In some rural areas, over 80% of the population have become users! Over 8,100 training sessions have been held.

The project has made ICT 'social' – the telecentres have become meeting points for people with different backgrounds and ages. The project has also provided jobs for young people in remote rural areas and has made citizens more aware of and skilled in the use of ICT and public eServices.

And what did it learn?

The funding came from the regional government, but the municipality was responsible for the actual purchase of equipment etc. It was necessary to create a way of streamlining the procurement process so that small municipalities with no expertise in IT could get favourable deals. The region and project leader provided the description of the equipment which was needed, and gave this to the municipalities to use within their purchase procedures.

It was necessary to get satellite links to get broadband access in remote areas. This worked very well, and created such demand, that within months, the incumbent operator saw the business opportunity and advanced xDSL deployment plans by several years.

Having a very well organised staff, good ICT tools, and taking the time to have personal meetings to help to coordinate the network, have all contributed greatly to the success of the project.

And finally….what happened next?

The network of telecentres are established, and are continuing.

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METAFORESIGHT
knowledge integration

Meta-Foresight: Integrating Foresight, Benchmarking, R&D, Technology Watch and Technological Skills (META-FORESIGHT)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This can loosely be described as an eIndicators or eMonitoring project. Its aim was to produce an integrated IT platform to enhance regional intelligence in terms of foresight, R&D, benchmarking, technology watch and technological skills. It was aimed at policy makers, experts from the European Commission, the academic community, entrepreneurs, project managers and all those involved in integrating regional intelligence. The budget was €403,516 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Regional information systems looking at 'technology watch' type activities (eg foresight, scenario planning, benchmarking etc) are extremely valuable in supporting the efforts of regional companies and to guide and influence regional authorities in the formulation of appropriate regional policies to promote the knowledge based economy. However, these systems are often independent and are not linked to each other. In addition, each one is mainly addressed to a restricted number of end users and provides information in a specific field of interest.

The aim of this project was to design and develop an integrated regional information system looking at this type of technology-related intelligence gathering. The concept of integration is two-fold: at the regional level, the system should involve all components of a regional ICT-related 'foresight' system: businesses, researchers and the academic community, skills, marketing trends etc. At the EU level, the system should foster knowledge transferability between regions.

How did the project help?

The project developed an integrated regional information system, which links data included in different applications and information systems and provides extended search capabilities. Within the project there were 3 main areas of activity:

- Designing the Meta-foresight platform
- Developing the Meta-foresight platform
- Marketing the Meta-foresight platform

The design of the platform was carried out after a survey was conducted to codify conceptual approaches and the technical aspects of information systems for foresight, R&D benchmarking, technology watch and technological skills.

Further exploration of 5 good practice case studies deepened the projects understanding of the selected range of the information systems it sought to integrate. It was important to understand both the methodological approaches to creating intelligence, and the key results obtained, as well as the technical aspects of these other information systems, particularly the potential for data transferability.

Chosen good practice cases:

Field of interest	Application
Foresight	Permanent Conference for Territorial Development (CPDT) **http://cpdt.wallonie.be** Walloon Institute for evaluation, forecasting and statistics (IWEPS) **http://statistiques.wallonie.be**
Benchmarking	European Innovation Scoreboard **www.cordis.lu**
R&D	Madri+d portal, R&D section **www.madrimasd.org**

Technology/ Market watch	Madri+d portal, technology watch service **www.madrimasd.org**
Technological skills	Change2IT (e-Content programme) **www.change2it.com**

After this preliminary work, the project was able to design an integrated Meta-Foresight **model**. This was really the heart of the project. The model design is a conceptual representation of the information structure required by the system. The structure includes the variables and indicators, the associations between them, and the rules governing the operations on the objects. The information model focuses on what kind of data is required and how it should be organized.

The development of the platform translated the design of the platform into an operational Internet application. It is available at **(http://www.urenio.org/metaforesight/platform.html)** to both regional authorities and to enterprises. It performs three main functions and has two basic services:

1. Data collection: defines appropriate information sources, collects the targeted information, and stores it in the database of the application
2. Data analysis: integrates the different pieces of information that have been stored in the database. It is based on human intelligence, as the selection of data at the previous stage
3. Dissemination: diffuses the information of the database to the public. It supports the demonstration of business and sectoral facts on a web portal, the elaboration of the Meta-Foresight confidential reports to companies, and the automated creation and posting of electronic newsletters to companies, agents and regional authorities
4. Open information services, through a portal: **http://www.vrc.gr/metaforesight/portal/par_kain.aspx?sect=goun&catid=82&page=0**
5. Customised services and confidential report to companies, through a toolbox (**http://www.vrc.gr/metaforesight/Default.asp?LangID=2&AppID=ToolBox**)

The platform was marketed via web pages within the web site of each partner organisation, 5 promotional brochures (one per partner), publication and dissemination of the 77 page Meta-Foresight software guide, and a conference entitled "Integrating Regional Intelligence".

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects – in fact regional intelligence is itself a new concept for many regional stakeholders. More specifically, the platform is a territorial intelligence system, which could be applied to industries, clusters, or other aspects of regional development. It is a new methodological approach for knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and learning. The development and application of the system itself led to cooperation both within and between the partner regions.

What did the project achieve?

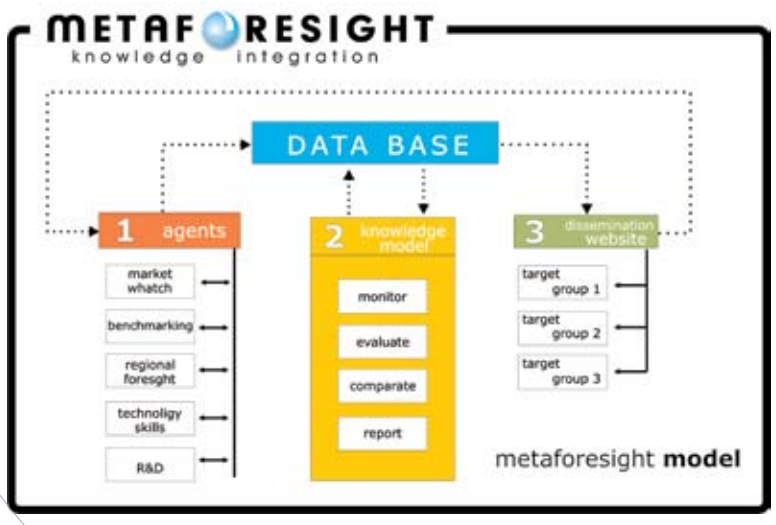
An actual model and tool exists, backed up by 'state of the art' knowledge. The project is sustainable, providing the platform for more work in this new and emerging area.

And what did it learn?

The project has demonstrated that it can make partnerships work both within and between the different regions involved. This is partly due to the fact that the organisation of the project work was clearly defined at the very beginning of the project. Investment at this early stage helped to keep the project on track. By fully engaging those who were going to use the service, the project was able to ensure it reflected their needs, although it was not always easy to translate conceptual ideas into practical usable tools.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is complete and the platform is working. Partners are already engaged in new projects on foresight - which will be of maximum importance during the new programming period.



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http://www.urenio.org/metaforesight/

Benchmarking regional strategies for technological literacy (BENTLI)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This is a monitoring and evaluation project to provide a methodology for the assessment of regional and local ICT strategies, and a permanent place for benchmarking and collaboration. The budget is €188,244 of which 80% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

A study realised by the European project FP5-funded project Strategic Indicators for Benchmarking the Information Society (SIBIS) showed that there are huge differences in the general level of digital literacy between the EU states. For example, the number of persons who are very confident in their digital skills is 3-5 times higher in the highest ranking country than the lowest one. Although the level of digital literacy is increasing remarkably, especially among the young, and the differences between the national average levels of digital literacy are diminishing, there is still have a long way to go.

The BENTLI project supports European regions as they seek to provide access to digital literacy and digital skills for all, thereby reducing the digital divide. It does this by analysing the impact of the regional strategies which are already in place, extracting good practices from them, and setting up a methodology which allows for continuous benchmarking and learning.

How did the project help?

The first objective of the BENTLI project has been to identify a set of common indicators to measure the impact of the Digital Literacy Strategies in the participating regions. This has been done through a benchmarking and impact evaluation exercise. The common indicators allow for on-going benchmarking and comparison between regions - providing a solid basis for continuous collaboration.

Following this, good practices have been identified. They will help those regions that already have a digital literacy strategy to analyse it and identify possible areas for improvement. For those regions without a strategy in place, the good practice guide will provide them with a basis for the definition, planning and execution of their own strategy.
Within the project there are 5 main areas of activity:

- Identification and contact of target groups for the project
- Creation of a common methodology for impact assessment
- Research and analysis activities
- Dissemination activities
- Creation of an observatory for digital literacy

The project identified the following target groups: political decision-makers and administrative staff (at regional and local level), education authorities and training providers. These people were identified and embedded in the project right from the start, so they could be as active and committed as possible. They were contacted by an e-mail (which contained a short presentation linking the aims of the project to the activity that the person was developing) and invited to an informal meeting (1 or 2 hours) where the activities developed by the participating organisation could be explored further. This built up strong relationships.

The project used a combination of desk research, field research and focus groups to identify a common methodology for impact assessment based on common indicators (guidelines created). This provides a tool not only to assess the impact of a specific regional strategy on groups that are at high risk of digital exclusion, but also the basis for a benchmarking analysis - as it is able to identify regions that have faced, or are facing, similar problems. The methodology is complemented by guide for good practice, which has identified, based on the impact assessment, the different strategies and activities which have a proven success record.

Research and analysis activities related to the regional reports and case studies, including:

- Establishing the conceptual framework of the regional Digital Literacy Strategies
- Realising the regional reports and providing a qualitative analysis of them
- Application of the common indicators for quantitative impact assessment
- Conducting complementary interviews

Dissemination activities were widespread, including a website, publication of regional reports, meetings etc.

An on-line European Observatory for Digital Literacy and supporting network has been set up. It integrates the common indicators and the good practice and also provides a platform for ongoing collaboration as a way of sustaining the work in the project.

Innovative aspects

Analyses of digital literacy have tended to focus at a national level, although the majority of digital literacy initiatives have been conducted at a regional and local level. As a result, analysing the differences in digital literacy between different regions, even within the same country has been difficult to achieve. The project provides the tools and methodology to examine the impact of regional digital literacy strategies – which can be taken up by a large number of regions, after this project.

The project was innovative in using focus groups to identify indicators to measure digital literacy. This ensures that the indicators are capable of measuring the real impact of policies and strategies for digital literacy in European regions.

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What did the project achieve?

The project established a conceptual framework for regional strategies for digital literacy which enabled the creation of common indicators to measure impact, thereby allowing digital literacy strategies to be benchmarked at a regional level.

A methodology for assessing and analysing the impact of regional digital literacy strategies, which allows the evaluation of the results of their strategies and identifies areas for attention, is now available to regional, local authorities and other stakeholders.

The participating regions piloted the benefits of cross-regional learning. The project afforded them the opportunity to adopt the lessons learned from other regions, thus putting them in a better position to address the specific needs of groups with a high risk of digital exclusion.

And what did it learn?

The project has shown that it can be effective in bringing together and managing partnerships between disparate European regions. The project had to overcome divergent levels of ICT penetration; different strategies for promoting digital literacy and levels of ICT maturity. However, if managed successfully, such differences can enrich a project. Different points of view and social and cultural practices can be shared and produce benefits to all concerned.

And finally....what happened next?

The project continues through the different dissemination activities. The methodology is available to anyone who is interested. The methodology and guidelines are being adopted by the ICT Observatory in Extremadura, which is currently being established.

JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

INTRANET: The Corporate Network of Extremadura

Extremadura, Spain

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure project aimed at unifying all communications services of the Regional Administration system thereby reducing costs and improving telecommunications services through the use of ICT. The budget is €40,000,000 of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Extremadura is a rural region characterised by low population density. As a consequence, the offices of the regional administration as well as public education and healthcare centres are both numerous and spread out over a large area which can cause communication difficulties.

The aim of the project was to provide an intranet to link all 1,478 buildings used by the regional administration, and to improve regional administration and citizens' access to it. In addition, 87,000 PCs in schools and 400 healthcare centres (representing 12,800 healthcare professionals) would also be linked.

The underlying aims are to provide high-speed access (2 M/bps), allowing high rates of concurrent use (up to 5000 users), and a developing a system to manage voice traffic.

Most importantly, the intranet forms the backbone to the regional programme aimed at exploiting ICT, creating content and minimising the digital divide, which is called 'eExtremadura'.

How did the project help?

Within the project there are 4 main areas of activity:

- Design and Provision of an e-infrastructure
- Creation of partnerships with the private sector
- Provision of training
- Supporting the e-infrastructure

The eInfrastructure consists of data services supported by latest generation equipment. This allows the connection of existing Local Area Networks and the possibility of supporting Virtual Networks between the different buildings and organisations. Independent security policies are allowed in different networks. Internet connections include the links and equipment needed to channel all traffic to and from the Internet, as well as simultaneous access to the intranet of up to 5,000 users from outside the network. Fixed telephony services provide a new infrastructure able to integrate existing voice services. The latest generation of digital switchboards allow point-to-point digital connections within the intranet. A single contract for mobile telephony service for all ministries and organisations of regional government is also integrated in the project.

Partnerships were forged with the private sector which meant that goals and costs were shared. The project collaborated with several telecom operators and IT providers, such as RETEVISION, Marconi, Ericsson and Siemens,

through public procurement procedures, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Commission. As a public-private partnership, it has attracted additional private investment of €70,000,000 from the Telecom Operators.

All users have received specific training and upgrading of digital awareness and skills.

The project provides support to maintain up to 100,000 computers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

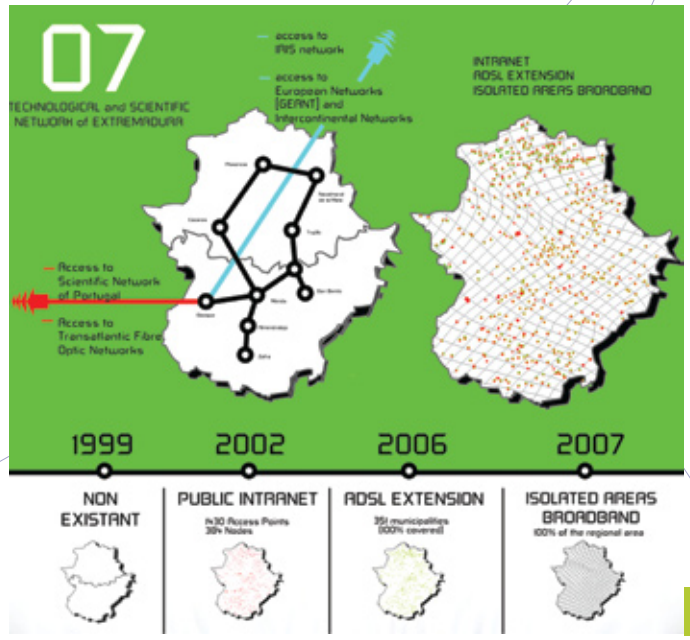
Innovative aspects

The project has been innovative in three areas: product; process and organisation.

In terms of product innovation, the project has provided a unified regional telecommunications network, providing high standard services, supported by last generation equipment and Open Source Software.

In terms of process innovation, the project has provided a new ICT foundation for regional strategic planning. This can now lead the way for the implementation of other thematic policies in which public authorities have a clear leadership and can introduce ICT. The project was innovative in its use of public procurement rules, particularly to attract private sector match funding.

From an organisational perspective, the project was conceived and delivered by two new regional Directorate-Generals (covering the Information Society and Telecommunications and Networks). This has enabled the coordination of public demand and presented a uniform vision to Telecom Operators, IT vendors and service providers.



What did the project achieve?

The project has achieved its goals. Using the template of public-private cooperation, Extremadura has been the first region in Spain to have a 100% broadband coverage in its territory. The project has formed the base and inspiration for other regional ICT projects in the education, healthcare and scientific and technical sectors.

A snapshot of the changes in the education system include the provision of one computer for every 2 secondary school pupil, 15,000 email accounts are now available for teachers, and secondary schools all have an IT technician. In terms of healthcare, the intranet has made possible another flagship project called JARA which seeks to improve the services available on it such as creating appointments, dispensing prescriptions and consulting patient data.

And what did it learn?

The Regional Government aggregated all its tele-communications demands into a single contract. By doing this they were able to increase the size of the contract which meant that cost efficiencies could be achieved. As the project was very ambitious and had a short lead-time, a large part of the intranet was built with wireless systems.

Key success factors include the use of last generation telecommunications equipment, and Free-Open Source Software at all network levels which means that the project has sustainability in the long term.

And finally….what happened next?

A continuation of the project will provide quality access to the internet to practically all regional citizens including very small and rural communities. It aims to reach around 330 municipalities that, because of their low demand and lack of incentive for telecom operators, were not covered with a broadband service and were not considered to have commercial possibilities of having it in the near future.

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Empowering, Learning and Assisting for Gaeltachta SMEs (EOLAS)

Gaeltachta, Ireland

Background Information

This was an eBusiness project which aimed to raise the levels of competitiveness of rural businesses in the region of Gaeltachta (Ireland). It was aimed at SMEs. The budget was €565,000, of which 57.5% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Gaeltachta is a rural region in the South and East of Ireland. SMEs located there suffer a disadvantage when compared to larger and urban based companies. They do not have the labour or financial resources to engage external experts to assist them with development planning or training to improve their competitiveness.

The project was designed to overcome this disadvantage by providing a framework for the provision of supported services to a selected group of companies at no cost to them.

How did the project help?

The project provided general business training and detailed ICT and business support to SME's in the region. The lead partner is a development agency, other partners in the project included those from the University and private sector.
There were 4 main areas of activity:

- Provision of a Training and Education Needs (TENS) Assessment to selected companies
- Provision of training and support to address the weaknesses identified by TENS
- Provision of detailed ICT and business implementation plans to a selected group of SMEs
- Supporting the changes recommended in the implementation plans

The TENS Assessment was managed and delivered by the University-sector partner. Costs were minimised by using a bought-in software assessment tool which was used to identify weaknesses in the skills and managerial capabilities of small owner-managed firms (which are typically related to people, money, premises and processes).

The follow-up training and support provision was based on the results of the TENS Assessments. It was important to focus on the topics that would have the widest appeal to companies such as: sales and marketing; HR; systems and structures; finance; vision and strategy; product development and innovation; and female entrepreneurship. This made the training both relevant and cost effective.

ICT 'audits' were offered to firms on the basis of their geography, possible suitability (ie ability to absorb ICT) and general knowledge of the firm. From an initial potential pool of 50 firms, eventually 12 participated. They were not selected based on sector, and participants included engineering firms, electronics firms, potters and food processing firms.

From this set of 12 firms, 8 were identified as having the potential to absorb or exploit ICT. They were independently judged and scored on the basis of how much they were likely to benefit from external support, their commitment

to the process and their likely ability to implement any suggested actions.

For this group, detailed ICT and business implementation plans were provided. The plans were free, bespoke, and consisted of two main elements - a detailed ICT implementation plan (prepared by an ICT specialist), and a business plan (prepared by a business analyst) which advised how to effect the proposed ICT activities.

The final stage was to identify 5 SMEs who could go forward to make changes and purchases based on the implementation plan; which would be eligible for grant aid where conditions were met. It was necessary to choose 5 firms as the budget was not unlimited. Firms could claim 75% back up to a maximum of €6,000 per firm. There were no problems spending the money despite the fact the firms had to make their own investment first.

Innovative aspects

The main innovative aspects of the project were the approach to individual mentoring (through the ICT and business implementation plan) and the provision of focused training to enterprises which did not previously have the resources or access to such services. In addition, the project was innovative in blending ICT planning, business planning and training opportunities.

What did the project achieve?

The project encouraged, developed and supported the use of an ICT plan that was integrated with a business model. Businesses have benefited from the free access to business and ICT expertise that would otherwise have been beyond them. The project offered a range of training courses in response to the needs of business that had been identified by talking to the relevant stakeholders.

And what did it learn?

The project has demonstrated that it could make partnerships between the public, private and university sector work. This is partly due to the fact that some of the partners had worked together before and therefore had developed working relationships. The project had to show a degree of tenacity to attract the interest of the target market. Providing services to businesses free of charge helped overcome the poor initial response to initial attempts to attract participants.

There is not a ready fit between the life cycle of a project and the timeframes to which SMEs operate. Timescales need to be carefully worked out to help everyone to get the maximum from their involvement. Finally, the project learned that it is very important to agree a set of project management principles to ensure that all the partners are working in the same way.

And finally….what happened next?

There was a direct follow-up project to this one – TESIS. This is the subject of a further case study in this publication.

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Údarás na Gaeltachta

Gaoth Dobhair Broadband Community (GBC)

Gaeltachta, Ireland

Background Information

This was an eInfrastructure project which aimed to study the potential and develop a strategy for businesses in the region to integrate the use of the broadband networks into their day-to-day activities. It was aimed at SMEs, citizens, local authorities and public bodies (particularly health and educational services) in the region. The budget was €95,000 of which 60% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Gaeltachta is a rural region in the South and East of Ireland. There was almost zero broadband coverage in the sub-region of Gaoth Dobhair. A major industrial estate which was the main focus for business activity in the region had seen the number of employees housed dwindle from about 1500 employees to 400. It was recognised that providing good eInfrastructure might attract new employers to the area as well as benefiting the local community in general.

The aim of the project was to survey employers to find out what their ICT/broadband needs were – to assess the strength of current ICT/internet use and whether there was a demand for broadband. The data was then used to form the basis of a strategy to implement the survey's findings and to complement other ICT/broadband work ongoing by the regional development agency Údarás na Gaeltachta, various telecommunications service providers and other public authorities.

How did the project help?

The main project activities were in 3 areas:

- Carry out a survey of all companies to establish the current status regarding the integration of technology and telecommunications networking
- Identify the different technical options for providing broadband services in the region
- Identify a strategic plan for the integration of broadband to the SMEs on the industrial estate

The companies surveyed were within a 10km radius of the industrial estate as it was anticipated any broadband provision would have to be wireless. After an initially poor response, awareness raising events were arranged in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce and public sector employers to tell them about the benefits of broadband. It was important to present these in straightforward non-technical language.

The response was much better after the events. The results showed that there was already a strong demand for the internet, which at the time had to be satisfied by dial-up. Generally firms were not that aware of broadband (this was in 2003), but there was interest in its capabilities – once these had been explained.

The technical options were identified by a technical specialist who was commissioned to examine different technical options for providing broadband services in the area. These included WiFi, WiMax and Satellite. It was apparent (for geographic, cost and effectiveness reasons) that wireless satellite was the only realistic option.

The strategic plan was developed based on the results of the survey. The lead partner issued a 'Call for Expressions of Interest'. This was highly unusual in that it set out the needs of the area, but it did not offer any money to pay for the infrastructure installation or services. Instead, it

offered support and recommendations from both the public sector (the lead partner) and from the community in any bid the provider chose to put forward for funding (perhaps nationally for example). Proposals were invited from 9 bidders, and 3 outline proposals were received. The chosen supplier proposed a satellite backhaul (ie a way of getting data to a point from which it can be distributed over a network) with WiFi for customer distribution. The company had a track record supplying the type of required technical solution to company networks. They had also implemented a trial community network similar to the one proposed – so the lead partner felt that risks were minimised.

Very shortly after the plan was finished (and as a coincidence), the central Government in Ireland announced a national scheme (the Group Broadband Scheme) to encourage the upgrading of telephone exchanges. The Government would pay up to 55% of capital costs for a provider to install broadband, providing there was sufficient demand and support from the local community. The remaining 45% of the costs would have to be collected in installation/subscription fees by the provider.

The GBC strategic plan formed the basis for a successful proposal from the telecoms supplier. The premises of the lead partner on the industrial estate provided a perfect place for the installation of the satellite dish. Aerials were erected on suitable buildings (in private ownership) to provide line of sight to potential customers. Subscribers were charged €200 as an installation charge (which was quite high in Ireland, but really subscribers had little choice) and then €30 a month (which is quite standard) for use.

Innovative aspects

The project established and raised awareness of the need for a broadband network in the region which now provides benefits to the business, as well as the wider community. The strategic plan was innovative as it offered to assist and support rather than fund the solution. It shows that even where funding is not available directly partners can exert their influence in discrete but nonetheless powerful ways.

What did the project achieve?

The project established the clear need and demand for broadband services in the region - and facilitated specific discussions with telecommunications service providers to establish services in the area. The project secured a telecommunications service provider to create a broadband service in the region. This has given tangible benefits to users in their daily and business lives and also has helped to accelerate and extend the programme of digital exchange enablement.

And what did it learn?

The project has shown that partners sometimes have to be tenacious and think 'outside the box' to encourage participation and raise awareness of the benefits of broadband as well as to develop interesting strategies when funding is not available.

And finally....what happened next?

The activities and structure of the project have been repeated in all other Gaeltachta regions to establish the broadband need and demand in each.

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Technology Supported Innovation and eBusiness in the Information Society (TESIS)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project which aimed to develop and implement bespoke ICT and innovation strategies to complement and support existing business plans. It based on the EOLAS project, also highlighted in this publication. The beneficiaries are SMEs in 4 partner regions – Gaeltachta (Ireland), Carmarthenshire (Wales), Waasland (Belgium) and Gelderland (The Netherlands). The budget was €1,353,000, of which 65% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

There was a lack of ICT expertise in SMEs based in the 4 partner regions which led to a lack of participation in the Information Society. The aim of the project was to identify companies to receive in-depth and tailored guidance, advice and consultancy support to help them to consider the integration of ICT and innovation planning and then to implement the suggestions in their administration, management, production and marketing activities.

How did the project help?

The project programme provided the services of ICT, Innovation and Business Analysts who work jointly to establish an integrated ICT and Innovation strategy that was tailor-made to meet the needs of each company involved. Participating SMEs had to be at least 2 years old, with a maximum of 50 employees. The targets of the project were:

- To select 160 companies (40 in each region) to implement a 3 stage model, which involves ICT, business, innovation and training
- To carry out first level ICT, business and innovation analysis and planning for 160 SMEs
- To carry out in depth ICT, innovation and business action planning for 80 of those SMEs (20 in each region)
- To develop and implement individual ICT / Innovation Plans for 48 of those SMEs (12 in each region)

A pool of 160 companies across the regions were visited by an ICT/innovation expert who conducted a 'technology and capability' audit lasting half day. A report was prepared for the firm highlighting its strengths and weaknesses in this area. Using the information gathered, the project then selected 80 companies for further assistance, using four criteria:

- The level of innovation demonstrated
- The potential benefits that could accrue
- The likelihood of achieving a change
- The degree of fit with TESIS objectives – effectively the extent to which the SME was keen and enthusiastic and likely to participate in the project through to the end

The 80 companies received a more detailed visit and from this an individual bespoke implementation plan was prepared. Three specialists were involved - an ICT specialist and an innovation specialist would each prepare a detailed implementation plan. A business analyst would look at existing business/marketing/financial plans and advise how these would need to be altered to meet the proposed ICT and innovation activities. There was no charge for the plans or visits – each of which lasted up to one day.

The 48 companies were identified by broadly the same criteria as was used before. They received grant aid to enable them to make the recommended changes and purchases. The firms had to make the investment themselves, but could

claim up to 50% or 75% of eligible costs back, assuming certain conditions were met. It was necessary to choose 48 firms as the budget was not unlimited (96,000 euro per region or an average of 8,000 euro per SME). The funding was invested to carry out the implementation plan - the majority of it was spent on ICT equipment, with some on software, training and consultancy. The companies received on-going support and advice from the experts with regard to this.
During the project various dissemination activities were held such as an Innovation Workshop for 13 companies in Ireland, delivered by the University of Galway in April 2005 (21 participants) which was then replicated in the other regions having been adapted linguistically.

The project also used an 'Innovation Channel Network' for participating companies (effectively a website which had been developed by the University of Galway for another project), to help them communicate and work together if required, although the project never set out to support this sort of collaborative working; which needs a lot of time to be effective. It included a survey form online, and various tools and self-learning materials which SMEs could use.

Innovative aspects

The project offered an integrated approach to ICT, business and innovation – something which had not previously been offered. The project has provided and proved a relatively simple model – which can be built on and improved for the future.

What did the project achieve?

The project is encouraging, developing and supporting innovation and the use of ICT in the 4 target regions. The project has provided 160 basic technology and capability audits and 80 bespoke ICT, innovation and business implementation plans. 48 companies have benefited from detailed and on-going support and advice as well as access to funds to help them implement the project recommendations. There are high levels of satisfaction amongst participants.

And what did it learn?

The project has demonstrated that it could make partnerships work. This is largely due to the development and maintenance of strong relationships with partners which started at the proposal writing stage, where time was invested in making face to face contact to explain objectives. This was followed up by effective management throughout the project (the project manager is very experienced at leading trans-national work) based on 'tried and tested' systems and processes.

The SMEs liked the project because they received personal attention and free expertise, tailored to their individual business needs. It was important to ensure advice was impartial – no partners gained from their implementation recommendations.

The project overcame objections that businesses were too busy to participate, not interested or not aware of the benefits by framing responses to specific objections in 'their' language. The selection process ended up working very well, but it took quite a lot of time and effort to arrive at this solution. Overall, the timeframe for the project was too long for many SME's as they plan and are active over a much shorter timeframe – future projects should be shorter.

And finally….what happened next?

At the time of writing, funding was being sought for a follow-on project. This would focus on more integration between the 3 strands of expertise (ICT, Business and Innovation) with a view to producing completely integrated plans for participating SMEs. Innovation is likely to be more important, and ideally, clustering (actual or virtual), would be a more central element as well. The timescale will be shorter - groups of 10 firms will engage with the whole process in 12 months.

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Building a regional positioning system in Malopolska Region

Malopolska, Poland

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure project which aims to create a modern, coherent and regional system of physical measurement and location positioning via GPS using ICT tools. It is intended to be used by public institutions, rescue services and to be made available for the citizens in general. The budget is €373,700 of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Malopolska is a region that experiences difficulties in mapping, surveying and general measurement of spatial co-ordinates or characteristics. For example, the land is divided into specific parcel structures which are usually very narrow but long. The terrain is diversified with plains and barely-accessible mountain areas. This means that the costs of measuring and surveying using traditional methods are very high, and results can be imprecise. A uniform, accurate and continuous frame of reference is essential to those sectors that rely on using spatial co-ordinates in their work for example cartography, agriculture, forestry, tourism, scientific research, irrigation, geology, transportation, civil engineering, mining, radiocommunications, environmental protection, railways, traffic management, emergency services and crisis management. All these sectors experience differing problems that result directly from the lack of precise positioning in the collection of spatial data.

The aim of the project was to build a network of GPS reference stations in the region along with a network management centre. The latter is equipped with software generating Real Time Kinematic (RTK) / Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) corrections which enable a real time and precise determining of the receivers' location in every part of the region, together with a mobile object tracing system.

How did the project help?

The project had 2 aims initially. To build a coherent GPS network in the region, largely by increasing the number of GPS reference stations, and to build a system to help the rescue services. This sector had a clearly identifiable need for such a service. Gradually this has been enlarged to other sectors, such as environment protection, tourism, agriculture, etc. Within the project are 3 main areas of activity:

- Project management and coordination
- Building, testing and evaluating the infrastructure
- Provision of Information and publicity

The project was managed by the regional Marshal's Office who has extensive experience of realising projects part-financed by the European Commission. They formed a partnership with the Tetra Mountain Rescue Service who piloted the project on the ground.

The infrastructure consists of a management centre, reference stations and data transfer system to connect all the elements into one coherent network. The project purchased, installed and set up 3 reference stations. Each reference station comprises a GPS module, power supply module for GPS module, lightning arrester, control module, communication module and a power supply module. The reference stations network is remotely controlled and managed via the internet with 8 dual-frequency receivers.

The system enables RTK/DGPS corrections via the following channels: GSM, GPRS, Internet, and optionally, FM. The regional reference stations, management centre and computing module for accurate positioning, are available to users via GSM and the internet.

The publicity and communication process made all the potentially interested parties aware of the possibility of taking part in this project. New ideas arose from that dialogue which would not otherwise have been considered.

Innovative aspects

The project, by building a network of reference stations in the region will allow real time coordinates to be calculated regardless of weather conditions, or time, in all places where a satellite signal can be received. Previously there were not enough GPS reference stations to allow this to happen. The measurements that can be taken are very accurate - between 1m and 2cm accuracy. In addition, the network provides real time positioning by displaying coordinates instantly which enables users to track a moving object. The use of ICT in this way is a new approach for the region which brings benefits to a wide range of users.

What did the project achieve?

The traditional method of surveying requires 2 to 3 times more time and work, and are much less accurate, than surveys conducted with the use of accurate GPS readings.

In mountainous regions, the systems improve the security of users providing both tourists and the rescue services with accurate and up to date data. The pilot project carried out by the Tatra Volunteer Mountain Rescue Service was successful. The implementation of modern GPS solutions greatly helped the work of rescuers and lives were saved. The positive impact of the project will grow when GPS receivers become more popular amongst tourists.

The region now has a low cost, accurate and reliable system with which to map, survey and navigate the region. The project makes a huge difference to citizens in the region and improves the quality of both professional and private life. The true number of project beneficiaries is difficult to estimate – but their number is certainly thousands, if not hundreds of thousands.

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And what did it learn?

The project had to deal with rapid technical advances which meant that the technical specifications were changed part way through the project. Being flexible when specifying technologically sophisticated projects means that one is able to get the most up to date technology and ensures that the solutions are not out of date when they are launched. Not having fixed ideas about the number of reference stations and carrying out detailed research to reach an optimum solution led the project to balance costs with functionality.

There is still a way to go to get the full benefit from the project as users have to buy GPS receivers. But with the prices of such technology falling and satisfied users encouraging new ones the project will reach a wider audience.

Finally, having a robust process of public procurement is vital in avoiding delays and keeping the project on track.

And finally....what happened next?

The project infrastructure is being used now, and because it is largely automated, it will be useful for at least the next five years. Within the region it is planned to provide ambulances with the same equipment as the Tatra Volunteer Mountain Rescue Service. The Main Institute of Geodesy and Cartography plans to enlarge the scope of this project into the whole of Poland. Thus, the Malopolska project can be considered to be a pilot for this.

Electronic communication system for Public Administration in Slaskie Voivodeship (SEKAP)

Silesia, Poland

Background Information

This is an eGovernment project which aims to create the organisational and technical conditions for providing public services via the internet as well as increasing the effectiveness of public services administration. It is aimed at three groups of e-services users:

- Officials interested in A2A (administration to administration)
- Citizens interested in C2A (citizen to administration)
- Entrepreneurs interested in B2A (business to administration)

The budget is about €5,838,972 of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Silesia is a region in new accession state that has a very limited range of public services that are available electronically. As well as a weak ICT infrastructure there are also problems in terms of weak analyses of administrative processes to enable organisational change, few possibilities of using electronic signatures for administrative documents and few chances of using electronic payment for public services. Consequently, the ability of citizens to engage with e-government is at a very low level.

The aim of the project is to increase the range of public services provided via the internet, to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of public services and increase the usage of ICT by citizens in the region.

How did the project help?

The project comprises the creation of an ICT environment for providing electronic public services, coupled with some analyses of administrative processes and organisational aspects which might need to be adapted. The latter included preparing partners to operate in this new ICT-enabled environment. Within the project are 5 areas of activity:

- Identification of the administration processes of the public services that would benefit from ICT
- Support of project beneficiaries throughout the project
- Development of software
- Provision of hardware for public services
- Marketing the eServices to citizens

The administrative processes of the public services that will be digitised during the project include business and personal registration (for example, births/marriages/deaths), cases involving the registration or change of addresses, the granting of legal permissions, the administration of local taxes and the support of non – governmental organizations. The details of the digitisation procedure were devised by a working group coordinated by the project and supported by the technical advisors. It was important in terms of cost to find solutions which were universal but allowed minor variations to allow for the individual needs of the partners.

Project beneficiaries were supported by the technical partners at all stages of the project realisation. In the initial stages, the technical partners assisted the beneficiaries to select, develop and commission the right software and hardware solutions.

Software was developed by the project partners to meet high security standards required by public services. This included security software, ePayment systems, verification systems etc. A technical advisor is responsible for the selection of the above mentioned solutions. The software

solution will offer some back-office functions (for example, dataflow and workflow systems) as well as some front-office ones (for example, electronic forms, a system for automatic verification of electronic signatures etc).

Hardware was provided to create the right technical conditions for using the software developed during the project, such as powerful computers, smart card readers, scanners and network devices. The hardware was selected by the technical advisor after taking under the consideration current hardware resources of the stakeholders and their estimated future needs. The project foresees a training programme for the employees who will use the system in their work.

Marketing involved catching the citizens' attention regarding the project and raising their awareness of the benefits coming from ICT usage in everyday life

Innovative aspects

There are two broad areas where the project has demonstrated innovation. At the technological level, the project has built a system using 3 level architecture based on a web browser and has made extensive use of open source solutions. The project partners have set up an electronic dataflow system designed for both public employees and citizens and provided one coherent regional web portal for the administration customers. This is enabling citizens to realise public services via electronic tools, allowing them to make electronic payments and creating the possibility of signing administrative forms electronically.

At the organizational level this is a complex project of regional scope involving 54 local government bodies, and several sub-projects.

What did the project achieve?

This is a large project with a high degree of technical and organisational complexity and getting the commitment of the representatives of all the 54 entities participating with the private sector in the project is an achievement in itself. According to the initial plans the project will touch about 8,200 public employees and 3,200,000 citizens in the region. The total number of official contacts is moreover 1.831.000,00.

And what did it learn?

The project has benefited from strong political support at all levels of local and regional administration. This was augmented by a significant growth of interest in the use of eServices among the local population. However, the national legislative framework relating to procurement and the definition of eServices has proved to be difficult to negotiate. These issues were only resolved by looking outside of the project and engaging expert advice.

Managing such a large project is not without its difficulties but the engagement of the principals in common objectives helps to overcome them. The division of the project into sections each with their own areas of responsibility makes the whole project more manageable.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is due to complete in December 2007. There are plans to widen the scope of the project to include other partners and to enlarge the scope of the e-services provided.

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Indicator System for the Business Info-Barometer of the Community of Valencia

Valencia, Spain

Background Information

This is an eIndicators project aiming to help local and regional authorities, other public bodies and SMEs. Its budget is €2,440,109, 100% co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

This project tried to measure the impact of new technologies in enterprises, especially in SMEs, in the Community of Valencia. It set about this by building an Indicator System, base of the Enterprise InfoBarometer, to help measure the influence of ICT on the daily life of enterprises. This objective was already present within the Second Plan for the Modernisation of the Autonomous Community of Valencia, "moderniza.com". This has been the catalyst for many strategic projects aimed at facilitating the process of transformation of the Public Administrations within the context of the Information Society.

How did the project help?

The process of building an Indicator System involved three phases:

1. Designing a framework to determine those aspects or dimensions which are linked to the daily life of enterprises, and to determine the final selection of relevant indicators
2. Pilot testing the selected indicators
3. Assessing the Indicator System. Based on the results of the pilot test, those indicators with most capacity to asses the validity and feasibility of the concepts or dimensions proposed were finally selected

Several groups of experts (sociologists, psychologists, computing experts, etc.) were assembled to discuss the project and the best way to address the survey. This resulted in a breakdown of the operational areas of an enterprise eg (Management, Organisation, Production, Communication, Training, Marketing and Delivery) plus a breakdown of the characteristics of indicators which could be of interest. The results gave a framework – which then needed to be populated by indicators. The framework looked like this:

Operational areas of the enterprise	Nature of the indicators			
	Subjective Information			Objective Information
	Perception	Assessment	Expectation	Attitude
Organisation/management				
Production				
Communication/promotion				
Training				
Marketing/sales				
Delivery				

From these proposed dimensions, the indicators which were most suitable for meeting the objectives were selected from a mixture of existing work (secondary sources) and primary information obtained through consensus techniques, involving experts in business areas, as well as on technology.

The resulting indicators were then tested, via a peer critique (experts not involved in the project) plus a real field-test (ie face to face questionnaires).The field testing used a technique of 'test-retest'. Basically this means conducting the survey once, and then using the same questions again at a later date to see if there have been changes. Overall,

test-retest is a way of checking the reliability of outputs. Combing peer review and test-retest means that the questioning and the indicators have been both subjectively, and objectively, reviewed.

Lastly, the evidence from the pilots was reviewed, as a way of making a final selection about which indicators were most relevant and useful, and which could be used over a long period of time. This is particularly necessary in the fast-moving area of ICT where some metrics become outdated very quickly. A final data-gathering methodology for the Business InfoBarometer was produced, and 68 indicators selected. 70% of these were comparable with other sources, whilst 30% were new.

Innovative aspects

The research methodology was strict and the inclusion of human components of the Information Society (ie expectations, perceptions and attitudes of the enterprises with respect to new technologies) was new. Previous projects on indicators had focused more on performing an "inventory" of technologies available in companies and the use that was made of them, rather than an analysis of the underlying human factors, which largely determine the availability and usage or non-usage of new technologies by individuals and companies.

What did the project achieve?

The project achieved 100% of its targets and now has a reliable picture of Valencian companies within this context of technological change. In turn, this will help the public administration to design and develop of policies relating to the Information Society.

And what did it learn?

In common with many others, this project has identified both strategic and operational lessons. On the positive side, it managed to involve relevant expertise across a wide range of domains, together with appropriate levels of public support. The project managers made sure they were involved in all work tasks – to provide a strong leadership and overview of the project.

Perhaps the largest problem was getting the co-operation and involvement of firms, particularly micro firms. Explaining the rationale of the project, and how it could ultimately benefit the SME was very time consuming, and led to delays in the fieldwork. Sometimes, incentives had to be used, although many companies responded to the idea that the work would be useful as public authorities might design more publicly funded programmes to encourage ICT adoption and exploitation.

And finally....what happened next?

There is follow-up work. The regional government has adopted the indicator system and methodology to measure ICT impact on the companies of the Community of Valencia. The data is considered as the official position regarding enterprise use of ICT in the region. Every year new data is collected and analysed and the indicator system is updated and improved in order to incorporate or eliminate indicators and concepts according to the dynamic nature of Information Society. The data can be used and consulted by the regional government, businesses, partners or any other entity or person who could be interested on it.

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Participation in Rural Communities by Young Broadband Users (PICYBU)

Västernorrland, Sweden

Background Information

This is an eGovernment project aimed at finding out how different media and ICT-applications can contribute to the social participation of people in small communities. The budget is €839,000 of which, 60% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

A common problem in northern rural areas in Sweden is the high level of youth migration. Often it is active and educated youth that leave to pursue careers. In Västernorrland, the public administration is the dominant employer – but it has problems in attracting young people. It needs to adopt modern working tools and methods (ie ICT) as a way of doing this.

Concurrently, general public interest in the local decision-making process and local politics is declining. There is a need to re-engage citizens in this. The project aims to use ICT to involve people in local issues by making these processes more transparent.

How did the project help?

The municipalities' in the region of Västernorrland are partners in the project focusing on two work packages; case and document management systems and schools portals. This case study looks at how citizens' cases are handled as a way of energising people to participate more in local e-government. In particular it is one way of updating an organisation's working practices by using ICT - which might attract young people to work for the public sector. There are 4 main areas of activity:

- Specification, development and testing of the new handling system
- Staff training on the case and document handling system
- Risk management
- Marketing of the project

The system was specified after a survey to determine the demand specifications for a web-based case and document handling system. The project used benchmarking techniques to find best practice in other parts of Sweden.

During spring 2005, work concentrated on preparing for public access to the administration of cases and incoming mail, via the case and document handling system. A test version of the web-based search-function was in use for some months on the local intranet.

During the second half of 2005 administrative staff received special training in the new web-based diary. This shows where people are and what stage various enquiries, debates and citizen's problems have reached. The registrars and secretaries of the different boards tried to get themselves better acquainted with the legislation concerning publishing on the internet to be prepared for the new task. Some of the secretaries have been attending seminars to learn more about these issues to be able to function as "pilots" to the rest of the group.

Back-office processes needed to be changed to adjust to

the new ICT-tools. The political decision-making process will become transparent as it published on the web. Technicians have been preparing to convert existing information into web-ready formats, and to publish information from the case management system on the internet. New techniques (eg scanning) need to be established and new working routines developed.

The project is managing two main types of risk - technical and organisational. Technical risks include integrating a non-standardised IT-environment and an ICT infrastructure that was still being developed. Organisational risks include:

- Lack of routines and templates
- Varied computer knowledge within the organisation
- Lack of management knowledge/ support
- Lack of communication routines

The web-diary at www.ange.se has been marketed in local newspapers and in different information aimed at citizens.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects to this project. An electronic web diary has been developed, enabling local residents and businesses to see how the municipality is handling their enquiries. They can follow the decision-making process without needing to be in contact with a particular administrator or fitting in with office hours. The day's post can be shown in the web diary on the same day, providing journalists with direct access to the municipal committees' schedules etc.

As everyone has direct access to most things via the case- and document-handling system, it is easy to find full and up-to-date information on any matter. Shared information facilitates cooperation between municipal departments and reduces the risk of errors.

What did the project achieve?

The project implementation has resulted in more efficient case - and document-handling. This also facilitates preparation for, and convening of, committee meetings and the drawing up of minutes, as well as making it possible to publish official memos. As a consequence of the project, accessibility to information and documents has increased and there are better and more efficient, decision-making processes including delegation of responsibilities, and faster communications. These equate to a modern working place for the civil servants, which may be more attractive to new, younger, staff.

The project has also enabled citizens to access eGovernment more easily. They can now follow their planning applications, monitor the waiting list for childcare places or keep up with local political debates. Journalists have rapid access to up-to-date information and can monitor democracy in practice. Businesses too have benefited. They can submit applications – such as environmental permits or licences to serve alcohol – and track their applications through the decision-making process.

And what did it learn?

The project has succeeded because of strong partnerships. These were between the leadership in the municipality, civil servants, a software contractor that was keenly alive to the local adjustments the software required, and a broad project group in different offices and departments. They were able to inform and influence future users (including colleagues) helping them to understand the benefits the system would bring, and to start to use it.

The implementation of change involving new processes and work routines is always difficult especially when the work force is nearing retirement age. So change has to be a gradual process not a sudden one. It takes time both to introduce a new system and a new way of working. The system that was utilised was rather new on the market when it was purchased, which meant that it required some additional development to adjust it to the needs of the organisation. The process to introduce the system took far longer than anyone anticipated.

And finally….what happened next?

Changing processes in the region is an ongoing task.

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Broadband in Rural Areas (BIRRA)

Inter-regional Project

Background Information

This was an eInfrastructure project. It was about exploiting existing networks, rather than building new ones. It was aimed at researchers, local authorities and businesses. The budget was €767,000 of which 53% was financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

All Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) regions (ie some regions in northern Sweden, Finland, Norway, Scotland, Russia and also Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands), face similar challenges going into the information society. These can be divided in two main categories as problems with e-Infrastructure and a lack of services to run over the networks. Gathering experiences from regions that have similar problems and finding solutions to these common problems could transform these rural areas and add to their strengths.

The purpose of the project was to analyze and compare the provision of broadband and associated services across the different regions. The results were used to develop a model similar to the EU eAdoption ladder, but focused on regions as opposed to individual SMEs. The eLadder tool showed the position of that region in comparison to others, and proposed a framework to allow the progression of each region to the next step.

How did the project help?

Essentially, the project used the following processes to achieve its goals

- Data collection and analysis
- Identification of good practices
- Action planning

Collection and Analysis, Action Planning

Based on its experiences, the project has developed a handbook which guides the user to collect information on various aspects of a region relating to ICT infrastructure and programmes. For example, there are questions on

- Regional aspects – provides a comparable overview of a region including GDP, population statistics etc
- Foundations – shows what ICT infrastructure is available in a region, and the demand for it, including the existence and usage of broadband for example
- Strategy – identifies the objectives and performance indicators of ICT strategies for 5 domains (ie eWork, eGovernment, eBusiness, eLearning and eHealth)
- eReadiness – examines the extent to which certain functions or competences are available to implement the eStrategies. It covers leadership, management, customer focus etc
- eService Maturity – this gives a self-evaluation of the e-programmes available in the region, focusing on their sophistication and use

This is the bench-learning approach adopted by the project. Essentially this is like benchmarking, but there is much more emphasis on change, based on better self-knowledge and direct exchange with others.

Identification of good practices

Based on the data collection stage, some good practices emerged. The project developed "orientation sessions," so participating members could get a better understanding of the context in which these performance levels were achieved, as well as understanding the details of the good practices. The main objective of this work package was to facilitate activities that would encourage a fruitful sharing of knowledge among the NPP countries.

Action planning

The development or improvement plan allowed partner organisations to consider how to capitalize on access to, and use of, broadband technology and services in their areas. The development package also provided a way for these partner organisations to measure their progress in maximizing this access to and use of broadband technology and services.

Innovative aspects

The use of an eAdoption ladder in a regional context, to measure eAdoption at its widest, is novel.

What did the project achieve?

95% of the expected outputs were achieved – it was hard to find enough good practices. However, knowledge levels about various aspects of ICT in the partner regions are much higher, and the e-adoption tool exists.

And what did it learn?

The project has highlighted that to get the best results it is best to make sure only people who are 'open' to the idea of improving their current performance are involved in the bench-learning process. Third party facilitators can often gain consensus more easily than people who are directly involved. It is also necessary to disseminate the results widely and well otherwise the impact of the process is lost.

And finally….what happened next?

A proposal for a follow-on project, using the e-adoption ladder has been submitted. It is called DARRA - Digital Age in Rural and Remote Areas.

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The South West Wales eTraining Network (SWWETN)

Wales, UK

Background Information

This is an eLearning project aiming to help SMEs and their employees. Its budget is €500,00 of which 45% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The project developed online training solutions to address the scientific, technology and innovation needs of SMEs, at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Levels 3 - 51. It also aimed to build capacity among the partners (Further Education and Higher Education Institutions) in delivery of those eTraining solutions.

The need for such a project arose out of a skills surveys showed that small business performance in Wales was held back as a result of skills needs not being met. Provision of skills training was a problem for SMEs because of the difficulty in releasing employees to attend campus-based courses. On-line training courses had the potential to solve this problem by delivering the training directly to the workplace. eTraining could also be designed and offered in flexible formats that allowed companies to fit learning activities around work commitments.

How did the project help?

The project targeted a wide number of SMEs across Wales through commercial tele-marketing. Selling the benefits to small firms in order to get an interview with the company and enrol them turned out to be quite difficult although, eventually, enough SMEs were interested in the potential of flexible training to participate in the project.

In the first phase of the project, SMEs were provided with introductory and intermediate level ICT training on-line (NVQ levels 2 & 3) and received nationally-validated qualifications as a result. These programmes are now being delivered as part of the mainstream educational portfolio of the delivery partners, and are eligible for public funding.

The second phase of development concerns vocational work-based learning at NVQ level 4 which typically leads to a Foundation Degree qualification. The project is one of three regional eTraining Networks in Wales which are collaborating in the creation of an all-Wales on-line Foundation Degree in eCommerce.

The Foundation Degree modules have been individually piloted with groups of beneficiaries from SMEs across Wales, and the evaluation of their experience is being used to refine and improve the effectiveness of the on-line learning materials and processes.

The completed Foundation Degree should be validated as a nationally recognised qualification and delivered collaboratively by the provider institutions during 2007.

Innovative aspects

The project has developed a model for flexible, accessible, work-based learning on a regional scale. This has meant working across the British approach of dividing individual institutions into Further Education (for those aged 16-18) and Higher Education (for those aged 18+) sectors. The project has also had to deal with different academic years and a variety of funding methodologies and academic quality assurance processes. The project has established a region-wide collaboration involving all HE and FE institutions in Wales and is currently evaluating whether such an arrangement works effectively and is sustainable.

The pedagogic model is very different to conventional campus-based teaching. It is aimed at the lifelong learner which means that the target market is diverse, and no single route through the learning process will satisfy everyone's needs.

The project also re-examines the role of the academic in eLearning development and delivery processes.

What did the project achieve?

The project either met or exceeded all of its targets. In the final analysis, it expects to have developed 1,000 hours of eLearning content, delivered 1,500 hours of on-line training and run 7 capacity-building events.

And what did it learn?

The project has developed trust between previously-competing institutions and a culture of sharing and joint-development for mutual benefit has been established. This has been achieved largely by the lead partner's practice of always distributing funding and management/operational responsibility equitably across the partner network. Every opportunity has been taken for collaborative working and for demonstration that the project came first, not individual provider institutions.

Another important success factor included early stage agreement of common approaches to learning design, development procedures and quality assurance. This led to a coherent and consistent portfolio of modules and confidence in their success. Such an approach was supported by a continuous programme of capacity-building events and opportunities. All participants learned about effective eLearning practice through these structured development events.

The project faced few operational difficulties. The major barrier was political – breaking down resistance to work-based Foundation degrees (which are a quite new development in Wales). The work is ongoing but, by demonstrating success in one field, the project hopes to make the principles of the approach more widely accepted.

And finally….what happened next?

A follow-up project has already begun in which 12 validated units of the Foundation Degree programme will be delivered to 100 beneficiaries in 50 SMEs. These will be jointly validated by partner institutions (thus improving joint working) under the auspices of the National Qualifications Framework (which 'quality assures' qualifications to ensure they are of a consistent standard across disciplines); and independently evaluated by a leading academic authority.

Discussions are also being held about central government funding from 2008. It is hoped that a funding package could be negotiated for a further 2-3 years of roll-out as government and the education sector assess the success of the programme and take decisions about longer term strategy and policy.

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eGovernment services based on digital channel of the Abruzzo Region (e-GoV DT-RA)

Abruzzo, Italy

Background Information

This is an eHealth project aimed at the development and improvement of public services through new information and communication channels. It is aimed at all citizens in the region and, in particular, those with disabilities. The budget is €1,200,000, of which 45% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The region of Abruzzo has a population of 1.2 million. 70% of the region's population lives in mountainous areas or small- or medium-sized urban centres which lack infrastructure and have low levels of ICT skills. These areas are suffering from depopulation as economically active people move away and, as a consequence, the remaining population is increasingly aged.

The aim of this project is to reduce the digital divide for certain groups by developing a platform for the diffusion of informative and interactive services by Terrestrial Digital TV.

How did the project help?

The overall objective of the project is to establish a "building site" for the use of Digital Terrestrial TV in the region, as well as to supply public services. This will involve technological development; creating high quality applications to integrate the resources already available from the existing regional portal; defining the rules and procedures for the correct use of the services; creating and authorising access to the eGovernment services provided by the digital channel; supplying of the digital receivers to selected users and training them; monitoring customer satisfaction through questionnaires and interviews and planning dissemination actions.

Five types of services will be available - Service Selection; T-Health, T-participation, T-Tourism and Mobility Services. For T-health services, the purpose of the project is to reduce the bureaucracy associated with providing healthcare assistance; supply prompt medical information for self-monitoring and ways to improve the quality of life (for people suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes) and give information about work safety – particularly for people who are not inclined to read booklets, but who may watch a broadcast.

There are 4 main areas of activity:

- Realisation of the technical aspects of the project
- Consumer identification and product testing
- Publicising the project
- Project management

By using Digital TV, the user is able to access services through the use of hyper-text, images and 3D graphics. The functional model is based on a Java platform which includes Java 2 micro edition profile multimedia home platform for the decoder or set top box for the end-user, and Java 2 enterprise edition for the infrastructure of the service centre. The architecture of the service production will be the supply of interactive services via a "citizens portal" which gives access to a broadcaster who tells the user about

the service content. The process has been divided into four modules: content providers, content syndication, multi-channel content delivery and consumer environment. The functional model proposes four macro-level functionalities: broadcasting services, editorial adcast services for the digital content, interactive services and the set top boxes. The production environment of the services has been set up to include IP and broadcasting service channels.

The project identified a sample population with a high rate of social and economic exclusion to take part in testing the TV channel. These were families that had a disabled family member, people with high blood pressure, diabetics, the workforce with particular work risks and long term patients.

The project is publicising the services provided and their uses to the target audience by organising and promoting two workshops (the first one planned for the primary part of the project to address some general themes as 'Get to Know Terrestrial Digital TV', with demonstrations. There is a quarterly newsletter, website and other PR in national and local papers and magazines. There are also 2 press conferences - at the beginning and at the end of the project.

The project has a wide team which involves all the project partners. Particular roles were identified as important, and people were then allocated to them. As well as traditional project management tasks, the team have developed quality, management and contingency plans. Every three months all staff are involved in the development of a report about the work progress, the results reached, the problems identified, any deviations from the project plan and the resources used during the period as well as financial information.

Innovative aspects

The project has been innovative in a number of areas. The use of a terrestrial TV channel for the provision of eServices is an innovative approach to narrowing the digital divide. The project has worked with partners including the private and public sector, including broadcasters, small and large enterprises and local and national authorities. Funding has come from a blend of diffuse sources – both local and trans-national as well as public and private sectors. These are innovative approaches.

What did the project achieve?

The project will target some 400 people who will have access to medical information via a platform which provides high quality applications. In addition, these applications will be able to integrate resources already available on the existing regional portal. The overall result will be a range of T-services, available in an easy to use format (via the TV remote control), by a category of people who have a high rate of social and economical exclusion, some of whom are confined to their homes.

And what did it learn?

As this is a highly innovative project, the bureaucratic procedure was lengthy. By having a good primary planning procedure which took account of the likely problems the project is able to adapt its objectives, timeframes and other main project components. The strong project management means that the project has a model to follow for every stage – and one which can easily be replicated for other projects.

The target group for the project includes end-users with low ICT skills and so a specific training plan to enable them to make use of the services available had to be developed. This was done effectively by involving end-users at the start of the project through to the experimentation phase - during which they were able to provide feedback about the quality and the effectiveness of the services.

The project aims to provide T-services from the development of the infrastructure through to the supply of services to the end-user. However, the 9 months timeframe allowed is probably insufficient. So the partnership has drawn-up a list of results and milestones to reach, and linked these to a management, monitoring and rectification process together with a financial and operative deadline report.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is on-going. There is a plan to follow-up this experience, but at the time of writing, the outcome is not yet known.

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Building an eStrategy: Technological audits for SMEs in Toledo Province

Castilla-La Mancha, Spain

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project aiming to help SMEs and their employees. Its budget is €100,000 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

SMEs in the region are not always aware of the role that eBusiness can play to help their development and sustainability in a global marketplace. Thus their interest on participating in 'eManagement' initiatives designed or promoted by the regional administration has not always resulted in a noticeable impact nor in widespread participation.

This project seeks to help SMEs develop their own 'eStrategy', by means of a technological audit (particularly in very small firms) to encourage SMEs to develop the right perceptions and conditions which are likely to lead to successful adoption of ICT. The project tackles general business and management culture, as well as specifically dealing with the introduction and exploitation of ICT. In addition, the project takes the opportunity to introduce a number of strategies in order to solve some structural problems in taking up ICT (eg training of staff, software investment etc).

How did the project help?

This is a classic consultancy-delivered eBusiness assessment and assistance project. In essence, SMEs receive 0.5 day of expertise where they are asked questions about their eStrategy, use of technology, training, and skills of employees. A formal report is then prepared and delivered to the SME with recommendations about next steps.

This might include bespoke training for staff and managers, which can range from raising awareness about the strategic potential of ICT through to specific applications or areas of technology. Where appropriate - if the SME is able to absorb this level of technology - then clients are referred to previously designed 'eSolutions' - including a b2b eMarket place called **www.ecomercia.com**. Depending on the topic, training can be delivered by the Project Manager (CEEI Talavera de la Reina-Toledo – a not for profit organisation which promotes innovation management in enterprises) or by an external body. The latter is often chargeable.

The assessment part of the process was trialled and modified before being rolled out to 25 SMEs, who receive a refresher session after 12 months to see how they have progressed and if further help is required. Owing to the well-known problem of trying to raise awareness amongst potential beneficiaries, the project primarily used intermediary bodies (eg local enterprise federations, chambers of commerce, and local authorities) to disseminate information. This stage was critical because many SMEs say that they do not have the time to participate because dealing with ICT is not seen as a priority, or it is not considered something which has to be dealt with 'today'. In fact, the most effective method of engagement turned out to be personal – via telephone or a visit.

Innovative aspects

The innovation in this project is that it is demand driven. Although the assessment visit uses a common methodology, the consultants are trained to be aware of individual SME needs and to tailor the help specifically to meet the needs of that particular SME.

What did the project achieve?

At the time of writing, the project was in its early stages, and did not have too many outputs on which to report. However, everything was on track to progress as planned.

And what did it learn?

This project has identified several operational good practice aspects, and it has also identified some things to avoid. Firstly, it is necessary to involve the 'top team'. As senior executives (and particularly the owner/manager) make all the decisions in small firms, particularly those involving financial investment, it is essential to involve them right from the beginning. Although, time-consuming, a personal approach has worked most effectively. This is because many beneficiaries need time to understand the ideas which are being put forward; in particular how they can benefit the firm. The sales 'hook' to encourage a firm to participate often changes from SME to SME, and consultants need to be able to demonstrate strong 'business benefits' in exchange for a small firm giving up time to participate in a project.

To maximise the chances of a positive experience, and a strong impact, the consultant really needs to understand the business and its operating context – the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which might help or hinder the success of the business. It helps if the consultant represents an impartial organisation, not a commercial supplier.

Nevertheless, it is very hard to persuade people to change their behaviour. So, the report is as polite and encouraging as possible, and this is backed up by many conversations with the SMEs – particularly discussing what other companies have achieved. Often, the reluctance to implement suggestions in the report is not a question of money, rather it is attitude and understanding. This is particularly true of training – SMEs often say that they cannot spare the time to do this.

Despite the difficulties outlined above, it is necessary to repeat the exercise on a regular basis – say once every 12 months. In effect, the audit is like benchmarking – there is always room for improvement. If a business does not continue to change and develop then competitors will catch up and overtake it; particularly with regard to ICT which is very fast moving – hardware upgrade and software updates are numerous and new applications are always being developed.

And finally….what happened next?

CEEI Talavera de la Reina-Toledo is planning to continue the performance of the audits on the fee-basis to enterprises. Thus, the activity is economically self sustaining. It is also planned to roll the idea out to other CEEI in the region.

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Football Information Technology (FIT)

East Midlands, UK

Background Information

This is an eLearning project which aimed to encourage SMEs to take up training in ICT by associating the learning with the local football club – Nottingham Forest FC (NFFC). The budget for this project was €93,600 of which 50% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds (ERDF).

What was the regional issue?

FIT was a pilot, designed to help SME owner managers develop their ICT skills from an intermediate to a higher level. Other work conducted by the lead partner (a training and business support organisation) showed that there was a demand for ICT training from SMEs, but that they were reluctant to pay for it, or to spend much time away from the business. The project was effectively the result of a combination of demand pull (eg from SMEs) and supply push (meeting regional strategic objectives to upskill people and firms in the region).

How did the project help?

To raise awareness of the project various marketing activities were carried out including website postings, advertisements in NFFC's match day programmes, and mailings to clients of Nottinghamshire Enterprise (NE) - the programme manager. The training took place in NFFC's Study Support Centre (which is used to educate footballers as well as hosting school study visits and other courses). By using a locally famous site, related to football, FIT hoped to raise awareness amongst a wide range of people.

In fact, there was an over-subscription to the available number of places. So, a training needs analysis (TNA) was carried out to ascertain potential beneficiaries training needs and their existing capabilities. This gave a picture of the extent to which different companies could usefully absorb and then use this higher-level training. 25 TNAs were carried out, and 19 companies identified to go forward onto the programme. 50% of participants were women.

The training took place on one day a month, over a period of 8 months. This was because there was too much to cover in an intensive session, and also because SMEs did not want to be away from their businesses for long periods. The training covered 8 common office software applications and tools:

- Email & the internet
- Excel
- Word
- PowerPoint
- Access
- Front Page
- Program Integration
- Recap

The idea was that these applications are used by a wide range of businesses, and when used at optimum levels then they can really help improve efficiency and productivity, on a daily basis. There was no charge to participants.

The programme was not qualification based because it is commonly recognised that many SMEs in the UK are not interested in this (believing courses are too long and/or they don't need qualifications), although much publicly funded training in the UK has traditionally been qualification based.

However, ECDL materials were provided as part of the course to help participants do work at their own pace and practice what they had learnt. This was particularly useful for those who could not attend a session for some reason – enabling them to catch up. A couple of participants went on to take the ECDL test.

Sharepoint – a piece of software to enable collaborative working – was used to help create a community of practice. Participants were encouraged to upload coursework/ documents and to use the space to exchange ideas and work through materials - thus enabling remote learning. In addition, NE used it to run a piece of bought-in software which allows users to run a virtual football team. This provided a fun element strongly related to the theme of the programme, but more importantly it prompted participants to practise their ICT skills. For example, participants were asked to analyse various results and player statistics using Excel, from this they would choose a football team to play, and upload the selection onto Sharepoint. This information was then managed by NE using the software, and results of the games given to the participants on an ongoing basis.

Another football-related aspect was that guest speakers from Nottingham Forest Football Club explained how ICT is used in the day to day running of the club; this included a variety of functions including marketing (eg the website) and accounts. The participants then received training on each topic. The idea was to show that NFFC is actually an SME even though it is a very famous football club, and to reinforce the message that the skills and ideas from the course should be transferred into the everyday running of participant's own businesses. At the end of the course participants were given various NFFC related items, free tickets to the last match of the season and a pre-match meal.

Innovative aspects

Using a football theme is a very innovative approach to engaging SMEs in ICT training. In the UK there is a traditional reluctance to engage in much training on any topic.

What did the project achieve?

16 businesses received 40 hours of support, and another 3 received some support. The project won an award from the European Commission as one of Top 40 best innovative actions projects for the most recent programming period, and the only one from the UK.

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And what did it learn?

The project learned that using an unusual and popular venue and theme is an incentive to participation – for both men and women. Attendance of one day per month was achievable for most, but the provision of shared workspace and ECDL materials meant that people could catch up anything they missed. Spreading the project over 8 months led to a good level of peer to peer networking amongst participants – they were able to help and support each other.

And finally….what happened next?

It is not clear that there will be a follow-up project although there is interest, and plenty of ideas for transferring the project (eg using other sports or into other geographic areas) but no funding sources have been identified at the time of writing.

OppiNet

Kouvola, Finland

Background Information

OppiNet was a part of a project called NETS for Nets (Network for European Telematic-counter Services of Local Authorities) which took place in Finland, Germany, Italy and Spain. It was an eGovernment project which aimed to raise awareness of ICT, particularly amongst older people and the unemployed. The NETS budget was €235,500, of which OppiNet had about €105,700. 47.6% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

OppiNet's objective was to bring the opportunities offered by the Information Society to the knowledge of all citizens - based on the British CyberSkills concept – ie people first, technology second. Essentially this meant the creation of a NetCafe, as well as training and awareness raising about the Information Society – the project thus encompassed both skills and facilities.

The NetCafe in Kouvola was amongst the first in the whole of Finland. The target groups were individual citizens, SME's, organisations and associations; with special attention paid to the elderly and the unemployed. For the former, banks were used as the intermediary as they already had a number of Senior Clubs for older customers which provided cultural and social activities as well as banking advice. By choosing a real-life application (showing members how to pay bills online, for example), the bank benefited, the customer benefited and the aims of the project were realised.

Services tailored to the needs of unemployed people included, for example, several courses about using the internet to look for jobs, with the fees paid by the government agency responsible using ESF monies.

How did the project help?

Marketing and awareness raising were obviously the first, and incredibly important, steps. Newspapers were the best vehicle, because many people of all ages and backgrounds, read them. The message was 'you don't have to own a computer, there is another way to access ICT at very low cost'.

To begin with people didn't know what training or help they required, because they hadn't even touched a computer before. So, the introductory sessions were workshops organised to give users a glimpse of the possibilities of the internet and computers. After this, the trainers were able to ask the users 'what are you looking for?' which helped the project provide courses and skills to meet real needs or interests.

The training was provided using customised but inexpensive, training packages and workshops to reach different target groups. The customisation was needed to tailor off the shelf packages to meet the needs of novice users. Typical topics covered by these sessions were usually quite basic and entry-level on how to use the Internet, e-mail, multimedia, picture telephones, word processing, spreadsheets, etc. Courses could be 2-4 hours, or a whole day. All courses were open to everybody - citizens, the employed or unemployed.

The training took place at a venue which was paid for by the project; and in fact its store room became the NetCafe. Equipment was provided free of charge by locally companies,

and users paid 1 or 2 euros an hour to use the machines – often for personal things such as paying bills, creating invitations etc.

Then later, as users became more confident and expert, bespoke training was available to meet more specialised needs. An example of this was a group of local councillors who had been given laptops - but they were unclear how to use one of the applications (Lotus Notes) – so training was provided.

The training was provided by 3 people, recruited and paid for by the project. One of these was a language teacher, recruited as a non-technical teaching professional – somebody who was able to identify with the users and learners.

Innovative aspects

This project took place several years ago, and principles which are common now, where quite new then. They include putting people's needs before technological solutions, enabling access to eLearning regardless of age or occupation and trying to harmonise top down funding with bottom up needs.

However, a more particular innovative activity was that throughout the OppiNet Citizens' Awareness Campaign, work was done to reinforce and disseminate the Municipal Telematic Counter (MTC). This is a portal for citizens and councillors to communicate, posting meeting minutes, asking questions or sending messages etc. The skills acquired in OppiNet-programme enabled the citizens to start acting as active participants in local democracy, via the MTC.

What did the project achieve?

99% of project targets were reached, concerning raising awareness and encouraging participation. Of particular note is the fact that local people became more involved in local decision making processes, and also that the region was much better prepared to take on the challenges and opportunities offered by the Information Society, through its improved ICT skills base.

And what did it learn?

The project showed that it is possible to put people at the heart of a technology development project. By including some groups who are sometimes excluded from ICT projects, OppiNet was able to really make some impact and add value.

However, this was not easy to achieve, as in some respects the project was ahead of its time and found it difficult to recruit enough users into the NetCafe as the whole topic of the Information Society was not very well understood. There was also some resistance from professional ICT experts and teachers, who realised a bit late that it would be necessary to adapt their teaching and support skills to meet the needs of inexperienced users.

And finally….what happened next?

OppiNet continued its activities in the Kouvola Adult Further Education Centre as the lead teacher from the project moved there. She has since developed similar services, implementing the Information Society Strategy of the Finnish Ministry of Education. OppiNet has disseminated its concept (and the MTC) as it became the internationally licensed Centre for training the staff of new OppiNet Centres in Finland. A CyberSkills Facilitator exchange has started with Belgium and the MTC, and the results of Net for nets project were introduced to Belgium as good practices.

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Digital platform of integrated communication and management for police stations in Malopolska Region

Malopolska, Poland

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure project aimed at improving the work efficiency of police stations in the region by using ICT. The budget is €1,517,750, of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

In the region, every policeman is obliged to document activities undertaken while on duty and to make these documents available for both internal and external use. The efficiency of the police force depends on circulating these documents quickly. Over half of the total crimes in the region are committed in Krakow, which attracts large numbers of tourists, and its surrounding areas. Within the region, there are disparities in the availability of ICT and in related working practices between the metropolitan and rural police.

The aim of the project is to minimize the time spent by the police behind desks and so increase the amount of time spent on visible street patrols, by using ICT to improve communication channels and information handling processes. In addition, the project seeks to reduce ICT disparities between rural and urban areas.

How did the project help?

The project has 4 main areas of activity:

- Creation of an e-infrastructure for the police
- Development of internal communication structures
- Development of external communication structures
- Training of police and administration staff

An eInfrastructure is being created for the police in rural and urban areas. The main objectives are to:

- Allow the eInfrastructure to be managed centrally
- Store data on highly reliable, secure and scalable central servers with dynamic memory allocation for different systems
- Enable easy access to, and exchange of documents, data and information among police employees by providing printer and file sharing
- Enabling secure communication with the 'outside world'
- Protect data in case of workstation breakdown and minimize downtime
- Support system administrators work by constantly monitoring the system and reporting any defect or failure
- Provide 24 hour a day helpdesk assistance

Internal communications between police will be improved by digitizing the existing communication processes. This will involve the transfer of traditional documents into the new communication system and the integration of existing networks, back-up and security systems.

External communications will be facilitated by the development of an electronic platform (ie website) allowing the local community to contact the police. This will be available for every police station in the region. The ePlatform will offer the potential to provide information to

citizens and local communities and conduct research via the Internet. It will also allow equality of access for those who are housebound or otherwise unwilling to contact the police in person.

Training on how to operate the new system will be provided for 1,134 police officers and non-uniform employees.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects. This is the first project of this kind for police forces and is in itself innovative. Developing an ICT based communication channel and management system in police units to promote equality of access to modern technologies between urban and rural districts is innovative for the region. The project puts a strong accent on training and will train a large percentage of the total police staff in the region.

The provision of a website provides citizens with information about public security and a forum for communicating with police officers. This will reduce the digital divide between rural and urban areas and is a new approach for the region.

What did the project achieve?

The project enables local citizens to communicate with the police more easily and offers an easy to use source of information about legal issues. In turn, police can use the website to communicate with the local population. This two-way dialogue is important.

In addition, the police are now able to carry out the administration tasks more rapidly and the organisation of their data is more consistent – leading to greater efficiencies. This will have benefits for both police officers and citizens.

The project represents a technological and organizational breakthrough in work of the police in the region. It improves the circulation of internal information, changes the organisation of work and is improving the computer skills of public employees.

Hits on the police's website have increased from 4555 hits in June 2003 (when the site was launched) to 17,847 in November 2004. From a low base, the server now processes over 79,000 e-mails every month.

And what did it learn?

The project has shown that it can make partnerships between the public and private sector work. One reason for this is the level of participation of the main beneficiaries of the project – police officers.

The project has had to overcome a number of changes in legislation and has been forced to accommodate things that were beyond its control or the scope of its initial vision. This has led to some delay and unexpected costs and has presented challenges that can only be overcome by the continued co-operation of the different project partners.

And finally….what happened next?

There is no official plan to extend the project but the fact that not all police stations from the region were included in the project means that sooner or later a project enhancing the digital platform on whole region maybe carried out. Police structures are similar in all the regions of the country, so it would be possible to franchise the project into other regions and other institutions.

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ICT Investment Fund

North West, UK

Background Information

This is an eBusiness project which gives eligible SMEs grants to invest in ICT. It is aimed at businesses with growth potential. The budget for this project is €1,114,000 of which 100% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds (ERDF).

What was the regional issue?

The project is one of a number of regional initiatives to improve SME's competitiveness and efficiency. It is well known that ICT is a good way of doing this. These aspirations were set out in the regional SPD.

How did the project help?

The ICT Investment Fund has £1 million (1.5 million euro) to help SMEs in the Merseyside area of the North West of England, make the most of business technologies. The Fund is offering up to 40% of the cost for hardware / software upgrades. SMEs must show how the technology will revolutionise the competitiveness of their business, and there are various other rules which apply (funding is not available for straight equipment replacement, for example, unless it is part of a step-change in the business). Awards of between £10,000 and £25,000 are available. There is a two-stage application process, online, which is designed to be simple and not bureaucratic. The Fund will support anything from innovations in business systems to new infrastructure improvements.

The objectives are:

- To assist up to 60 high growth businesses to purchase eBusiness solutions such as hardware and software
- To help SMEs to make better use of ICT, resulting in increased flexibility, reduced risk aversion and better information use, enabling them to compete nationally and globally
- To provide 40% of the total project value with investments of between £10k and £25k. The remaining funding has to be provided by the bidding company (ie matched) from private, not public, sources. In kind match is not permissible

Firms have been made aware of the scheme via articles in the local press, word of mouth and the website **http://ict-invest.info/cms/home/**. This publicity effort continues as various case studies are posted to show what local firms have achieved with the extra financing.

Applying for monies is straightforward. Firstly firms have to complete a preliminary application form, which is used to check eligibility and what the business wants to do with the funding. Eligibility criteria include:

- Being an SME
- lLocation (the business must have been in the Merseyside area for at least 12 months, AND they must guarantee to stay there for another 3 years)
- Sector - businesses in the retail sector, shops etc, agricultural businesses can't apply
- Lifestage – pre-starts and start-up businesses cannot apply
- Purpose of grant - telecoms upgrades, bar code stocktaking projects, leasing equipment, outsourcing services, software development, research, recruitment or training are not eligible

Applicants do not have to specify that they wish to buy equipment or services from local or regional suppliers, although this is encouraged. Depending on the value of purchases, successful applicants will have to follow procurement guidelines and obtain a certain number of quotations for supply.

These firms then receive a diagnostic visit from a business advisor attached to a national business support organisation. This is free of charge and helps to establish whether or not the firm could benefit from further funding assistance to implement ICT. Even if they are not considered suitable, this is a very good opportunity for the SME to receive further non-monetary help and guidance.

Those applicants who are considered to meet the criteria for being able to exploit the funding (including demonstrating the potential impact of the investment, additionality and fit with ICT strategy) are invited to complete a full application. These are considered by an Appraisal Panel using the following assessment criteria:

- Does the project bring about a transformation or step-change?
- Is the project innovative?
- Applicant presentations (face to face) to the Appraisal Panel must enable the Panel to understand how it will change the applicant's competitiveness

Applicants must present for 10 minutes, then there are 10 minutes of Q&A, and 10 minutes of appraiser discussion. Grants are then allocated quickly, although overall, the entire process takes about 12 weeks. For successful applicants, grants are paid monthly in arrears against invoices, providing Service Level Agreement (SLA) milestones have been met. Successful applicants include both service sector companies (eg accountants) and manufacturing firms. Examples of grant use include a new payroll system, upgrading a back office system to an SQL based database providing better information flows and installation of VOIP.

Innovative aspects

Although disbursing grants directly to beneficiaries is not new in business support, it remains relatively unusual in UK projects. This one is even more unusual in that it is designed to help high-growth potential firms - it is much more common to find publicly funded schemes aimed at helping all firms access ICT, particularly disadvantaged or hard-to-reach ones. The ICT Investment Fund seeks to make fewer, larger awards rather than numerous small ones, and is clearly aimed at making a difference to strongly performing firms, thereby strengthening productivity and economic performance.

What did the project achieve?

It has achieved very good levels of match funding (ie leverage). So far, 42 awards have been made, accounting for £847,000 (1,270,500 euro) of the Fund. With match funding, the total new investment into ICT is £3.67m or 5.5m euros. The application process is thorough, yet light. The project is helping to 'join up' different business support agencies and programmes. It provides SMEs with a rounded package of support – both financial and advisory.

And what did it learn?

There have been very few issues in this project and the results are very good so far. Having short presentations from applicants makes it much easier to judge their appropriateness for the funding. It is a much stronger approach than relying on paper applications. The only slight issue is the slowness with which beneficiaries are claiming money. It is possible this is because they have to get 3 quotes for all eligible expenditure, and sometimes proof of purchase.

And finally….what happened next?

It is too soon to say whether there will be a follow-up project, although it is possible that this current one may be extended to disburse any underspends.

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Talea, A Network for Small Local Trade

Piedmont, Italy

Background Information

This case describes two projects which are closely interlinked. They are both part of Piedmont's well-established programme called DIADI 2000 "Dissemination of Innovation in Industrially Declining Areas."

One project is called Talea. The other is a pilot action of Talea, called 'A Network for Small Local Trade'

The overall budget for various projects in this sub-action of DIADI 2000 was €1,500,00, of which 70% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The DIADI 2000 project aims to introduce innovation into SMES which are located within areas in industrial decline, by directly involving research centres. In this sub-action, the aim is to introduce ICT into firms to stimulate new ways of doing things, and a move from the production economy into the knowledge economy.

Specifically in the Talea project there were 2 specific objectives – to push companies to move forward in using ICT (ie stimulating demand) and also to favour local supply of ICT to meet this demand. Work on the demand side centred around eCooperation – encouraging firms to work together, and e-business. For the suppliers, the project has developed Talea. This is a software-based model (using Open Source Software) and is available at **http://talea.csp.it**. It is customisable, and represents a first building block to help suppliers experiment with knowledge-intensive services to increase the efficiency in customer-supplier interactions.

Beyond this, and to demonstrate how Talea could be used in 'real life' the programme funded 8 pilot projects involving SMEs. These were aimed at experimenting with ICT-based collaborative services to bring together enterprises from different parts of the production chain. The desired outcomes were an optimisation of processes, introduction of economies of scale and increases in efficiency.

One of these projects was the Network for Small Local Trade, which took place in Mirafiori Sud, a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Turin. The idea was to create an eCommerce portal and a new sustainable and ecological way to distribute goods to final buyers, particularly older people, those without transport or people with care responsibilities and little time. The key target was to offer a high quality alternative to large-scale retail trade, which could support both local sustainable enterprises, and neighbourliness.

How did the project help?

An eCommerce web site was developed using the Talea platform to provide an on-line shop window and a catalogue. The customer can buy different products in several virtual shops and the goods are home delivered. The shopkeepers directly update the catalogue of their goods via mobile phone or PC/laptop (adding photographs, descriptions, prices etc) and can also decide to highlight a special offer etc. During the updating process merchants are asked to provide only basic information so it is quick and easy.

Thanks to the same system, the shopkeepers receive the orders from the customers and prepare the goods to be home delivered. At the end of each order, the system is able to optimize the route and to indicate to the delivery company the best route (in terms of environmental impact

and delivery expense) for the collection and the delivery of the goods.

The project required collaborative working between merchants (most of them already belonged to a trade association) and the younger business owners were targeted first as a way of encouraging older shopkeepers to follow. In addition, the retailers had to work with delivery firms (this was a new co-operation) and here the project managers played an important role as independent people. They provided training for everybody in the new e-commerce techniques, including thinking about web marketing and visual merchandising. Some training was also offered to customers – via public information points and local events – to help them 'learn by doing' and encourage them to participate.

Innovative aspects

Both the local trading pilot and Talea were extremely innovative. Talea demonstrated technical innovation. It can be described as a generic ontology-based brokerage system for eBusiness, based on Semantic Web standards coupled with an Object-Oriented architecture. However, the innovation is in its high degree of flexibility which requires the customization of the framework to specific domains. So, its architecture has been designed in order to facilitate easy customization and multi-device access. The result of this is an application that can be exploited to both provide and to 'consume' resources (ie products or services). Talea users can be both providers and consumers. Providers are small/medium enterprises, while consumers can be individuals, agencies or enterprises.

The way that this has been achieved is by releasing Talea (in compliance with the general principles of open source and its licences), with the specific aim of actively encouraging its use and customisation – as evidenced by the 8 pilot projects. In the local trade pilot, for example, Talea was integrated within an eCommerce portal that could be updated with mobile phones - and, in a second phase, with digital terrestrial television. In addition, a GIS module (in particular a geographic interface and a route optimisation system) were developed to be integrated into the Talea framework.

The local trade pilot had other strong innovative aspects. It offered new market channels to existing small businesses, encouraged new co-operative alliances across the value chain, thus making the local business 'ecosystem' stronger and it found ways to be sustainable and minimise damage on the environment.

What did the project achieve?

At the time of writing, the projects were not finished, but both were well on track to meet all their objectives. Talea had been tested, released and used successfully. Many participants were attracted to the pilot projects and 8 different ones were running, in a variety of sectors and locations. The Local Trade project had managed to involve a significant part of value chain in its pilot, including the end customers who reported significant interest. A lot of people had been trained or gained new knowledge, and a neighbourhood of 40,000 people had access to an ecologically and economically sustainable local business model.

And what did it learn?

The lessons from both these projects are a blend of the strategic and operational. Talea suffered from only being applied in Objective 2 areas – it was hard to find good quality developers and much time was spent stimulating the demand for such an innovative project amongst potential users as well. The Local Trade project also faced weak demand, combined with low levels of ICT familiarity – which it solved by using mobile phones more than PCs. Both projects are unsure about how they will be sustainable without further EU funding.

And finally....what happened next?

As the projects have only just finished, it is not yet clear if they will be continued. The Local Trade approach has been adopted by other sub-regional agencies in their development plans and the Talea experience is being strongly disseminated by the project managers, CSP.

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The eLearning line of Piedmont's RIAP "From Industrial Districts to Digital Districts"

Piedmont, Italy

Background Information

This case describes one project to prepare candidates for the ECDL exam within the eLearning line of Piedmont's Regional Innovative Actions Programme "From Industrial Districts to Digital Districts".

As well as the ECDL project, the e-learning action line also conducted some sector-specific work to deliver eLearning to certain sub-sectors – such as spinning and weaving. The ECDL project was designed to help employees, students and citizens. The overall eLearning budget was €1,350,00 of which 39% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The general objective of the Piedmont RIAP is to support the regional system in hooking up to the strongest European economies. A major part of this is assessing the use of ICT, and how its positive impact on local socio-economic development can be increased. Although Piedmont is well placed in terms of ICT access and uptake, there is a distinct digital divide between the Turin metropolitan area, and the rest of the region, particularly the mountainous areas which suffer from poor ICT infrastructure, rural de-population and an aging population, and low rates of economic activity.

Consequently, the project developed a blend of training to help increase the ICT capabilities of the local population. It aimed to support the concept of lifelong learning by helping people of all ages gain experience of very common ICT applications such as word-processing, spreadsheets and presentations. In this way everybody is better equipped to contribute to both the economic and social well-being of the region by becoming more eLiterate.

It was implemented in three regions - Alba (known for its growing tourism and food & wine sector), Biella (traditionally known for its textile sector which is now sharply contracting) and Novara (which has several companies and research centres in the fields of new materials, chemistry and pharmaceuticals).

How did the project help?

The project was widely advertised through newspapers, workshops, the project website and direct mailing to businesses, schools, trade unions, retired peoples' associations and public administrations. Requests to participate in the courses exceeded the number of places available – but overall 1500 people benefited from some training. Participation was free and the learning was delivered in different ways.

In some sub-regions distance learning was used, in others there was a mixture of direct face to face teaching and some distance learning. This approach, known as blended learning, is most suitable for people without easy access to ICT (which was a feature of the audience group in this project) and for certain groups who appreciate a little extra personal support. Typically this included hard to reach or digitally excluded groups who were not used to ICT – older people for example, or those confined to the home.

During the project, the tutors themselves learned about pedagogical techniques for delivering material remotely and how to lead classes of distance learners.

Innovative aspects

This was a large scale eLearning project, the most significant of its type in the region. Experience showed that to successfully introduce something new it was necessary to locally foster the development of networks, and to build up strong local organisations, to drive the project forward. To do this, competence centres were created in each area. Known as the CST (Centri Servizi Territoriali) they supported and coordinated local actions both operationally and technically. CSTs had a pivotal role and as such developed a high degree of competence over the course of the entire implementation of the RIAP, potentially becoming centres of local innovation.

On a slightly different note, the experience acquired by the tutors in the context of the problems associated with the creation of educational modules for distance training, along with the experience gained in the course of the project, will serve as the basis for developing future distance training projects.

What did the project achieve?

The project either met or exceeded all of its targets. Customer satisfaction was high - 90% of the 1500 users said they would be happy to repeat their experiences. Just 16% of them achieved the ECDL (this was not a target) but their learning was greatly accelerated. Most importantly, those on the 'wrong side' of the digital divide have been given an opportunity to share in the benefits offered by ICT.

And what did it learn?

The lessons from this project are highly operational. The project confirmed the partners' belief that blended learning was the best approach. Many users who are starting their journey with the use of unfamiliar technologies need a great deal of 'hand-holding' and confidence building. In addition, many people just do not have ICT equipment at home or even in the workplace, so offering a central place for people to visit and use the equipment was vital.

Taking this a stage further, the partners now realise that ideally they should have had more PCs available to users, and also more physical facilities and locations which could be used to deliver the training. Sometimes this lack of equipment was a constraint to the numbers of people who could go onto the courses.

More positively, if the project was to be run again, then the partners would like to run it for longer – not just to help more people, but also to help those who did achieve an ECDL qualification progress onto more advanced courses.

And finally….what happened next?

No follow-up project has started as new/extra funds were required. However, discussions have been ongoing – particularly amongst organisations which were not involved in this project – including consideration of asking users to contribute to the cost.

In addition, the three Provinces and the ASL of Biella (ASL is the public local health agency, managing hospitals and medical care provision services to citizens) have declared their interest in keeping on the trial.

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EduNet: System Wspomagania Zarządzania Edukacją w Tarnowie (System of Supporting Management of Education in Tarnów)

Tarnow, Poland

Background Information

This is an eInfrastructure and eGovernment project. It aims to increase public access to the Internet by developing the use of ICT to manage the education system and information related to it. It is aimed at teachers and other school employees, schoolchildren and their parents as well as public officers from the city hall. The budget is €557,000, of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

The city of Tarnow commits over 50% of its annual budget to education. There are various legislative documents which commit municipalities to collect data relating to education electronically and also to administer education systems efficiently and effectively. However, Tarnow did not have a single integrated management system or a consistent method for gathering data relating to the education system, and the level of ICT used in these processes was very low. In addition, general access to the Internet by teachers and citizens was very limited - with little home usage and no Public Access Internet Points (PIAPs) in the area.

The aim of the project was to use ICT to achieve efficiencies in the collection and exchange of information about the education system by stakeholders and to improve public access to the internet.

How did the project help?

The project is a pilot programme which will form part of a larger System of City Management Support divided into several thematic components (security, transport, social assistance, etc). The project is a partnership between schools, libraries, the civic authorities and the private sector. Within the project are 5 main areas of activity:

- Development of a System for Planning and Analysing the Education System
- Creation of an Education Portal
- Provision of PIAPs
- Marketing of the project
- Training of staff in the use of the systems

The system for planning and analysing the education system will be developed so that tasks such as reporting between schools and the city hall (which previously involved time consuming face to face visits), and the methods of gathering data for periodical reviews, are automated, securely. The software that is being developed will mean that this data, including statistical information, will be consistent and comparable.

The education portal will allow teachers and parents to communicate and share information on school activities. For example, parents will be able to access information about the progress and attendance of their children, there will be a database listing vacant jobs for teachers, and general information will be available about schools.

PIAPs are to be provided in all 12 of Tarnow's libraries. It is important to provide the public with access to the information society and locating the PIAPs in the library supports this. The PIAPs will also be much cheaper for the user than an internet café.

Administrators and users of the system will be trained to ensure an appropriate and relevant use of the software tools being developed. Other beneficiaries of the project such as teachers and parents will be trained in due course.

Marketing has been extensive in the local media such as newspapers, radio, television, and information has been made available on the City Hall website etc.

Innovative aspects

There are several innovative aspects. The project is the first of its kind in Poland. It is not a typical eEducation project, nor is it a purely e-government initiative. It aims at integrating both these dimensions in one integrated system. The project offers eSolutions for schoolchildren, teachers, parents, municipality officers and citizens in general. The project provides a coherent source of information, constantly updated, that will help to monitor the education system, and facilitate future decision making. This is a new approach for this region.

What did the project achieve?

The project is progressing in all activities – but it is not envisaged that it will be totally complete until 2017. PIAPs are being installed, software is being developed and hardware procurement is ongoing. One of the important benefits of the project will be improved financial transparency in terms of expenditure on the education system.

And what did it learn?

The public authorities are persuaded of the project's usefulness therefore it is expected that City Hall employees will actively participate. Teachers and parents also seem pleased to have this new possibility of communication and data access. However, it will be a major challenge to ensure that all users are trained and able to take advantage of this new system, and the PIAPs.

It was quite difficult to get the tendering procedures right, because the project is so large and will be conducted over a lengthy time period.

And finally….what happened next?

The project is on-going. It is planned to pursue the realisation of EduNet beyond the termination date, at least until 2017. Since the EU funding comes to the end in June 2007, afterwards the project will be financed from the City Council funds. It is planned that the system will be extended to kindergartens and other municipal educational establishments (cultural centers, centers for youth in difficulties, etc.)

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The networking of health services in the Valle del Chiese

Province of Trento, Italy

Background Information

This is an eHealth project aimed at creating an integrated and interactive system covering the full range of health services and social and welfare services. It was aimed primarily at the elderly. The budget is €557,426 of which 50% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

This project is part of the Regional Programme of Innovative Actions called "Services to improve living conditions in small outlying communities". This set out to trial new organisational and technological solutions to encourage integration between those living in disadvantaged areas or situations, and/or those excluded from the world of employment, and the rest of the territory.

The project created an integrated and interactive system covering the full range of health services and social and welfare services linked to them. The primary beneficiaries were individual citizens – particularly elderly people. The project had the objective of improving nursing and hospital services, by making information on the clinical conditions of the patient available immediately at the time of admission, through linking with the clinical data from the general practitioner and with area services.

It was also intended to reduce paperwork, improving the supplying of services such as certification, authorisations, visits, vaccinations, and so on.

How did the project help?

The project offered a series of differentiated and integrated services throughout the region, to allow the best possible quality of life for the elderly and assist them in maintaining a balanced relationship between family and other environments. There were 4 main areas of activity:

- Provision of a communications network linking hospitals with General Practitioners
- Project trials in terms of sharing information (medical records) between the area and the hospital
- Implementation of telecommunications infrastructures and development of applications
- Extension and implementation of other services in the programme

The communications network was provided after the project had analysed the existing computer services and telecommunications networks in the region. Particular attention had to be given to issues relating to the security of sensitive data. The project linked computer networks with the hospitals of Trento and Rovereto which meant that they were able to share a central archive for the collection of computerised images (PACS). The network was then extended to general practitioners, paediatricians and social and welfare institutions (RSAs) in the region.

For the pilot project, a telecommunications link was created between users and services through a TeleCentre with 20 provincial teledesks. This was linked together in a network to supply teleservices for the population resident in the specific pilot areas.

After the trials, the ICT solution was implemented. One issue that had to be overcome related to the interoperability of the software as family doctors had very different types of software, and there were difficulties in communicating between them and the systems used by the Provincial Health Service. The final software solution was validated and verified in real life conditions.

The project has created advantages for residents when purchasing prescribed medicines. This can now be done directly through the doctor – prescriptions are made available at the nearest chemist. For chemist's shops, there is a reduction of bureaucratic procedures. The time necessary to supply medicines is reduced as prescriptions are sent directly to them via e-mail. Family doctors have a better knowledge of the clinical conditions and the services supplied to the patient by other health service departments.

Innovative aspects

In using ICT to encourage and support closer interaction between various healthcare and social and welfare services, the project has developed an innovative solution for a problem which is very real in isolated areas.

Every effort was made to avoid the dispersion of resources in numerous small initiatives. The project attempted to identify co-ordinated initiatives at local level, to provide a coherent response to a regional issue.

What did the project achieve?

Those involved in the project have benefited from better access to health services. Bureaucratic procedures have been streamlined - the time to access patient's medical records has been reduced due to an electronic health card given to doctors, and the storage of clinical data in digital format.

The dispatch by mail of the clinical reports' results used to take around 10-12 days, today, the patient can phone to his doctor to find out, on the same day, test results and the doctor's opinion. Family doctors, therefore, now have full access to the clinical data regarding their patients so that they can proceed quickly in the most appropriate way.

Every surgery and every doctor has received the necessary tools in order to realize a specific network between them and the Provincial Health Service. They have also received training and 'digital education'. Now, doctors in neighbouring districts are asking for the implementation of the project in their areas.

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And what did it learn?

The inter-operability of software is a central question – at the regional level as well as at the national one. All the solutions developed locally, could therefore contribute to the solution of the problem also at the national level. The solutions to these issues need to be reached with the involvement of other regions so that the solution can be integrated. The current project sought advice from another Italian region, Emilia-Romagna, in order to share knowledge and local experiences.

Largely because of the interoperability issues, the software used by the Provincial Health Service had a very long lead time. The timeframe imposed on the project by its funders did not fully account for the time needed to realise the project.

And finally….what happened next?

After the results gained in Valle del Chiese, it was decided to transfer the solution to another disadvantaged area of the region. There are plans to extend the use of the software to all of the provincial territory. As the developed systems are owned by the Provincial Health Service, they can be easily extended in the future to the entire region.

IKT-Smil - ICT as a strategic means to business development

Viborg, Denmark

Background Information

IKT-Smil or ICT–Smile was an eBusiness project aimed at enhancing companies' knowledge about, and use of, ICT, to lead to a better trained workforce in the region. It was aimed at SMEs. The budget was €857,000 of which 44% was co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

Several municipalities in the northern part of the county of Viborg were facing an increase in the number of jobs being outsourced, particularly within the refrigeration, furniture, and metal industries - coinciding with a decline in the fishing industry. In general, salaries and other costs are relatively high in Denmark, which may force some companies to consider outsourcing production to countries with lower costs. The result of this could be a decline in jobs and an increase in migration from the region, leading to a further economic decline due to a lower tax base and increasing social costs.

The project aimed at averting these negative trends by strengthening the remaining businesses in the municipalities. The use of ICT in daily work and to build competitive advantage is one of the important preconditions for survival in the long term. To prepare for this, companies need to gain an understanding of the strategic possibilities and challenges with regard to the use of ICT as a way of sustaining and growing their businesses.

How did the project help?

The project was aimed at manufacturing SMEs. The idea was to map their ICT needs, and offer suggestions for how to draw up an ICT implementation plan, together with general advice about ICT could be used as a transformational tool in the business. There were 4 main areas of activity:

- Interviewing companies
- Provision of consultancy to selected companies
- Partnership building
- Dissemination activities

The project carried out in-depth interviews with companies to ascertain their use of ICT and the potential for developing this. The results were put into a database for benchmarking and to enable the project to understand more about ICT use in businesses. The company received a short report, based on the interview and a visit, at which the benchmarked performance was discussed. Recommendations were made for future developments.

Those companies with a development potential were given further assistance – provided by a consultancy company of their own choice. This involved creating a realistic development plan for the future ICT in the company. The business had to contribute 50% of the costs for this.

The project was a partnership that involved the relevant actors such as the Technological Information Centre (TIC), municipal business advice managers and 25 external consultants. The project drew on the experiences and the knowledge from existing projects in the county as well as in the neighbouring areas.

The project disseminated its information and experience on how ICT is introduced and integrated into the organisation of the companies, in several ways. Participants were invited to take part in seminars, thematic days, networking activities etc, related to the common issues dealing with the use of ICT. There was also a website, with good practice examples. A set of models for advancing the further use of ICT in private companies was also developed.

Innovative aspects

The project developed a concept of an eBusiness staircase. This illustrated the steps a company goes through from no use/basic use right through to transformational use. The companies have to go through four stages and the size of each step depends on the industry, the culture and the technological potential of each company.

As each company has its own individual location on the staircase, the strategy and action plans need to identify this location and show how the individual company can achieve the remaining steps. This is an innovative approach for the region.

What did the project achieve?

By participating in the project, SMEs have had the opportunity to quantify what they need to embrace ICT usage, and have been assisted in setting clear goals to achieve their aims. In addition, they have benefited from the networking opportunities that the project afforded them.

The project contacted 456 companies over its lifetime. Out of these, 117 were screened for ICT and eBusiness competences. 101 companies were included in the electronic eBusiness benchmarking analysis. Direct beneficiaries included the 115 SMEs analysed, the 25 independent consultancies that conducted the analyses, and the 9 communities whose SME sectors have benefited from the activity.

And what did it learn?

The project experienced difficulties in engaging and managing the SMEs as they were unsure of whether there would be a return on their investment. Solutions such as offering them extended hours of assistance, outside of peak production times, were found to be useful.

The development of ICT and e-business requires hard work and targeted resources. The project shows that future ICT and eBusiness developments cannot be built on random activities, passive eMarketing and sporadic actions. Firms need to have a professional ICT and eBusiness approach in order to truly exploit ICT for competitive advantage. Participants in this project show up well against EU and Danish averages for ICT adoption and use, but it is clear that there is still room to improve the use of ICT in strategy, marketing and HR.

There is great potential for companies to create new jobs if they focus on ICT and eBusiness. However, this will require an appropriately qualified workforce. It is important to recognise that traditional qualifications and competences from the "old economy" cannot easily be transferred as the conditions and tools of the e-market are different. Change needs to be incremental, as too swift a change can be difficult for the management, the employees and the customers of the company. The elements in eBusiness must be implemented gradually in order for all to be able to adjust to new methods and work procedures.

And finally….what happened next?

The project has ended. There are no plans to continue the project as the whole public structure in Denmark has been reorganised. Since 2006, Viborg County no longer exists.

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Blended Learning Academy for Network Specialists

Vysočina, Czech Republic

Background Information

This is an eLearning project which aims to develop lifelong ICT learning for public sector technical specialists within a blended learning environment. It is aimed at lecturers, teachers, consultants, and specialists from labour offices, state administration and regional and local governments. The budget is €178,577 of which 75% is co-financed by Regional Structural Funds.

What was the regional issue?

There is a huge demand from public sector bodies to train their specialists to be on a par with their colleagues in the private sector. Specialist ICT training adds value to public sector employees. In particular, training for network specialists from the CISCO academy puts them in a really good position as market-certificated specialists. However, this education is very expensive - there is a strong desire to provide a similar service for public sector experts but at reduced costs.

The project aims to solve this problem by providing a free of charge blended learning course for selected people. The project will increase the knowledge base of the organisations involved, and exert a positive influence over regional development generally, and ICT development in particular.

How did the project help?

The project provides training - using the CISCO modules and knowledge – but at lower costs than would be the usual if the course was delivered commercially. Within the project there are 5 main activities:

- Partnership building
- Training of teachers
- Selection of trainees
- Delivery of the training
- Creation of a consulting centre

The project attracted participation from Cisco. From their viewpoint, having better 'educated' clients means that they are more aware of the possibilities of ICT and more willing to run publicly funded projects involving ICT. It is also good PR for the company, and a good reference project.
Teachers were involved in the project. They were trained by Cisco to teach the trainees in the project as well as students from the schools - to make them more practically educated. As the teachers are not CISCO employees, and because school premises are used to deliver the course, project costs have been kept down.

Trainees were identified by the municipalities in which they worked. As the trainees were already working, usually as ICT administrators, they all had basic ICT knowledge. The project was marketed to the municipalities via meetings, general PR, newsletter articles and so on.

The training course lasts 4 semesters over 2 years and ranges from the basic issues right through to advanced technologies. It is delivered by face to face meetings once a month, plus on-line activities which cover the background theory – thus providing a blended approach to learning.
The course topics are:

- PC networks - basic course
- Routing

- Switching
- WAN Technology

A consulting centre for network technologies is being established. This has two main aims. Firstly, it is envisaged that an internal working community of practice will arise from the course. The course graduates will be able to use an intranet to discuss and transfer knowledge and ideas. There will be a web portal with FAQs, dictionaries etc. Secondly, the consulting centre will also be a resource that organisations planning public projects can use. They will be able to use the public sector experts associated with the centre, without the need to engage costly external people.

Innovative aspects

The project is innovative in a number of ways. The project provides a new way of training technical specialists; creating virtual and real communities of people who deal with the special issues of network administration. Specialists from the public sector are trained by the public sector, and receive an widely recognised industrial certification.

The project also involves delivering knowledge from a large international company to local specialists by training teachers to deliver the courses. This is an innovative way of transferring industry knowledge which has benefits for student and teacher alike.

What did the project achieve?

The project has trained 160 students very cost effectively. Typically it would cost €6,500 to put someone through the course, but this project has managed to deliver its outputs for approximately €1,110 per student.

The region now has a training course that it can re-use. The students have better skills and knowledge, particularly of technical English. The public authority now has a section of its workforce with an increased skills levels - it is therefore better equipped to implement ICT projects in the future.

The project team has gained useful experience of how to develop and implement a new methodology which could be transferred to other regions.

And what did it learn?

The potential risk of overspending and delay on the project has been dealt with by having a project manager with experience of managing EU projects. In fact, the experience of creating and running such a new project, involving new collaborative partners (particularly public and private sector), should be useful going forwards – the team hope to be able to transfer their experiences and lessons learned to help other regions; possibly via consultancy. This would have the extra bonus of bringing in some revenue which could help to sustain this project after its formal end point.

The project experienced difficulties as most of the training material was in English. This was solved through the cooperation of the people who already passed similar courses - they made partial translations into Czech to support the students.

And finally....what happened next?

The project is ongoing and funds for a continuation are being sought.

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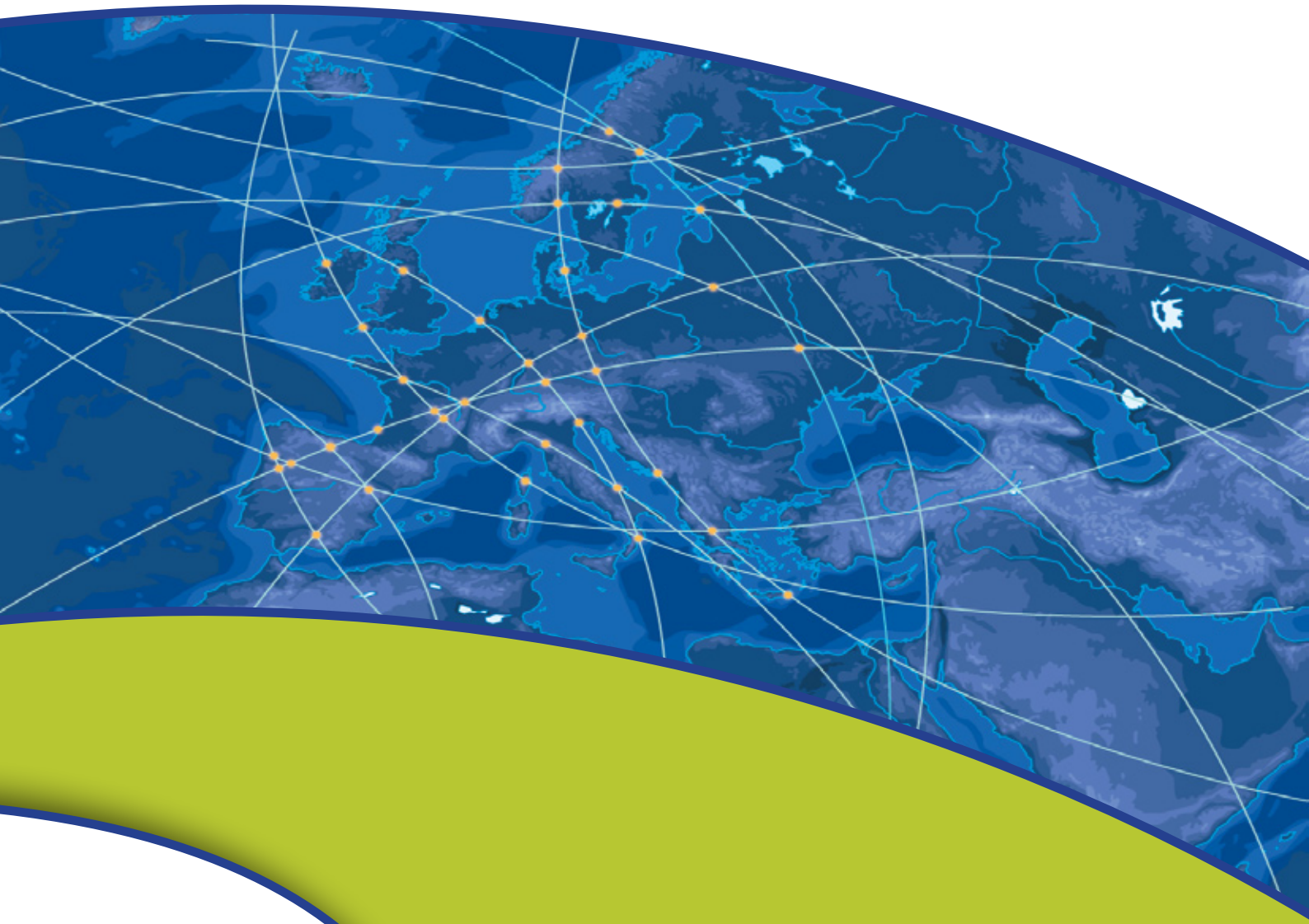

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