

This document provides a summary of requests and recommendations of local governments, NGOs and business, presented at the 14th Conference "Cities on Internet", in June 2010.

Digital Poland of Equal Opportunities

Memorandum on the necessary changes in the management of the information society development in Poland

Only in the last few years the Polish state invested nearly two billion zlotys from EU funds in the digitalization of administration and computerization of public education. Throughout the decade of 2000-2010 expenditures dedicated to this purpose have been several times higher. Subsequent governments informed about deployments of electronic platforms for administration, which aimed to improve its operation and reduce the cost of providing public services for residents. Polish schools were consistently equipped with computer labs and in rural areas public Internet access points were installed. The Polish state incurred expenditure on the "computerization" of the public sector, in per capita terms, comparable to highly developed countries of the European Union.

However, it is felt that, as confirmed by reliable European rankings, these expenditures do not translate into qualitative changes in modernization and civilization, made by facilitating citizens' access to the Internet and providing ICT support to public bodies and institutions, both of government and local authorities. Poles do not see the benefits and facilities resulting from the implementation of information systems. There is a system error in the activities of the public authorities, resulting in low efficiency and effectiveness of such investments.

Despite the high-budget investments in eGovernment systems, for the last 6 years Poland has been ranking low among the EU member states in the classification of the development of public services over the Internet, and the studies clearly show that nearly ninety percent of Poles do not use even simple administrative information services available via the Internet every day. Experts indicate that the implemented projects are characterized by generally low level of innovation and their outcome is to install hardware and software, not very efficiently used by officials and not affecting the growth and quality of e-services. The effects of these deployments are therefore far from the original expectations of modernization and improvement.

Polish school of 2010 is still a place to disclose the fundamental dissonance between considerable digital skills mastered by most children and young people who accept as natural the networked virtualized world that permeates their lives, and the traditional education system, in which "computer science and information technology" is a separate subject created to resemble the traditional Polish school.

Applications of ICT at school are still equated with the retrofitting of the computer labs and using computer software for management purposes. During the last decade, we

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have neither been able to build an effective ICT infrastructure to support a system of compulsory education, nor widely available digital resources to facilitate modern work for teachers and effective learning for students. Polish school is not ready for the widespread use of ICT tools in teaching each subject.

In 2010, over 50 percent of Polish citizens have access to Internet information resources. At the same time, as in other European countries, Polish society is digitally divided. Especially the older generation uses new technologies such as electronic bank accounts, eGovernment services, or common Internet services, to a small extent. Lack of appropriate skills and motivation, and fear of even alleged threats linked to the use of these services are an obstacle. For the oldest, lack of an offer matching the functionality of these devices to the physical fitness of this group is a limitation too. They do not see the benefits of using these new products.

Sociological research has shown that more than 13 million adult Poles are digitally illiterate - people who do not have the ability to use the Internet and communicate electronically. Lack of digital skills is one of the main causes of the low level of innovativeness of Polish economy and a strong factor affecting civilizational backwardness of the public sector and the education system.

This severe competence gap characteristic of the majority of Poles over 45 years of age substantially weakens the dynamics of the Polish economy development and undermines the sense of implementing a series of initiatives called for in the government report *Polska 2030* (Poland 2030), like extending the retirement age of employees. Digital competence of employees in the coming years will be an important factor in increasing productivity, efficiency as well as innovation and competitiveness in the economy. The digitally illiterate will not develop our Polish knowledge economy.

In 2009, the global e-Readiness of States Report acknowledged the lack of the clear, modern vision of ICT applications on the side of Polish authorities as the greatest barrier to Poland's development through investments in ICT. We share this diagnosis. It is not our intention to assign responsibility for this state of affairs to any of the centres of power. We recognize the complexity of the e-development processes and the difficulties which the Polish state faced on its way to transformation.

Today, however, we believe that Poland cannot afford to build on the existing model and range of activities aimed at the information society development. Urgent changes and new initiatives are needed, as we ineffectively use a unique historical opportunity to support with the EU funds the transformation of civilization possible thanks to deployments of ICT in the public sector, and disseminating digital competences.

The current priorities of Poland's e-development included in the operational programmes of the National Cohesion Strategy (NCS) set out five years ago are imprecise and inadequate to the real needs and challenges of the 21st century. Their acceptance does not create the conditions for the full realization of the objectives and priorities of the *Information Society Development Strategy to 2013*.

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The tasks of public authorities are overfocused on the infrastructure investments, whereas recommendations to implement actions are neglected: digital inclusion, providing in the public domain Polish-language digital content (including education), as well as providing universal digital education to adult Poles to meet the needs of the knowledge economy and challenges of an aging society, and a modernizing country.

Effective mechanisms to coordinate activities of key investors of public funds: the Government - the authorities of voivodships and local governments, have not been implemented. The process of spending five billion zlotys on the construction of broadband communication networks, allocated to the operational programmes of the NCS, progressing too slowly and with great difficulties, has to do without such coordination. In this context, the construction of a backbone network for Eastern Poland is particularly at risk. Information about the possible abandonment of the project of the systemic measure 8.3 of the OP "Innovative Economy" is worrying.

Instruments of coordinating activities within the government, which are currently at the disposal of Prime Minister of Poland, are not effective tools for operational management, allowing at most a consensus in the debate on the demands concerning the implementation of projects by departments independent in their decisions. Meanwhile, the civilization and modernization investment programme for the information society development included in the implementation of the "European Digital Agenda", for which nearly 15 billion zlotys have been allocated until 2015, cannot do without an operational management centre and a competence centre, serving all activities under the new strategy.

Year 2010 is the fourth year of implementation of the objectives of the EU budgetary perspective, which is the primary source of financing projects of civilization and economic transformation of Poland. So far, we have spent a little over 1 percent of funds on development-oriented ICT projects, among those allocated in the operational programmes of the NCS. Until the end of the EU perspective, there still remain almost 5 years. We therefore believe that significant changes in the objectives and the governance model for the development of information society in Poland are still possible and necessary to make.

These changes should create the conditions for the implementation of four key activities needed for the effective use of ICT as a leverage to promote the development of Poland - for modernizing and improving the administration and for improving the quality of healthcare services, as well as for providing modern education appropriate for the twenty-first century knowledge society.

These activities include:

- 1. Urgent modification of the provisions of the operational programmes of the National Cohesion Strategy which will enable them to ensure effectiveness and compliance with the needs of Poles in the early twenty-first century.** These changes should address in particular the following Operational Programmes: "Human Capital", "Innovative Economy" and the Eastern Poland Development Programme, and should take account of recommendations of experts and

government environments, indicated in debates in 2009/2010. The necessary adjustments relate to streamline spending - on the one hand - to the provision of public e-services responding to needs of citizens and entrepreneurs diagnosed in social research, and on the other hand - to the provision of quality tools and expert and consultative support necessary to implement innovative and targeted projects in the future to local governments in the years 2010-2015.

2. **Development and implementation in the years 2011-2014 of the general digital education programme for adult Poles, following the slogan DIGITAL POLAND OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.** Its implementation should unite the efforts of the government, regional and local governments, as well as specialized businesses and NGOs. It is necessary to create a central hub coordinating the preparation of the content and methodology of training and dissemination of knowledge among adults about the possibilities of effective use of ICT for work and everyday life.

The main target groups of the adult life-long learning programme should be the digitally divided groups, whose needs were identified in the social studies: on the one hand - those over 45 years of age, residents of villages and small towns, the disabled, women and entrepreneurs, and on the other hand - public sector employees, including decision-makers.

The programme should use the already existing infrastructure of public access to the Internet - community-based centres, libraries, schools and TSO, whose call for several years has been financing the common training campaign promoting the use of services and content of the global network.

3. **Establishment of a central, operational and know-how centre to manage public investments in ICT projects and programmes to raise the level of digital competence among Poles.** Such a centre - modelled on the experience of leading EU countries, managed by a plenipotentiary of Polish Prime Minister, would be essentially the coordinator of the implementation of the *Strategy for the Development of Information Society in Poland until 2013* and would provide consistency of action at the central level with regional programmes.
4. **Development and implementation of a programme to change the use of ICT in education and the introduction of the Polish education system into the 21st century.** Such a programme should take into account spreading the use and contributing to the creation of public Internet resources by all teachers, and the use of electronic communication as a primary medium of modern education. At the central level it is necessary to develop technical standards and requirements of teaching and to stimulate the market of educational services providers. The programme should introduce mechanisms for a strong cooperation of the government, voivodship governments and school authorities to consolidate services rendered to schools at the regional level. It is necessary to establish a sustainable system mechanism for technological support for schools involving local infrastructure planning at the school level, regional data centres and thematic public education portals.

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This memorandum is a final document of the 14th Conference "Cities on Internet", supported by public authorities and bodies engaged in the development of information society, which we submit to the most important people in Poland.

Support for the theses contained in the document was declared by the following organizations nationwide:

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