

## **NAPLE – EBLIDA CONFERENCE ATHENS 2014**

**Monday 12th May 2014**

### **Government Information and the role of public libraries Contribution Jan Braeckman on behalf of NAPLE**

#### Part 1

Public libraries are recognized as a local information point for all people. Often the advantage to be in all communities, very well known, and open during hours other public services are closed.

In some countries public libraries are established information centers of the EU.

#### Flanders:

All government campaigns are systematically distributed through this network.

#### The Netherlands:

The same: the national institute responsible for information distributes via two channels: the libraries and post offices.

#### Denmark

Public libraries are recognized as a local information point for all people. All kinds of governmental and local municipality information is distributed by the public libraries.

#### Spain: the case of Madrid:

A specific project to have the public libraries promoting knowledge about the electronic services of the City of Madrid.

A co-operation between Three General Directorates: Information to the Citizen, E-Administration and Libraries.

#### Why the Municipal Library Network?

- Public Libraries are an information node of the community. They have trained staff, with experience in information and computer literacy activities
- They have the infrastructure: computers freely accessible with Internet Connection
- They contribute to reducing the digital gap
- Their patrons are the community as a whole
- They have presence in every district in the city
- They are opened 12 hours a day, some of them 7 days a week

## Part 2

In 2012 a pan-European research was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on the role of public libraries in creating a more e-inclusive society. Or more precisely: the perception in the public of the value of public libraries in providing ICT support. Also Greece participated in this research.

In general the survey learned that 4,6 million Europeans first used a computer to access internet in a public library. So libraries play an important role in setting people on the path to computer usage.

### Findings of the research on e-government and active citizenship

- Across the EU, about 3.3 million adults had used PACs to interact with public authorities. The figure varied considerably by country – from just 14% in Poland to 37% in the Netherlands. Men, those currently employed, those in rural areas, minority groups and the Roma were particularly likely to interact with public authorities in this way.
- The survey estimates that around 0.3 million people across the EU have used PACs to send filled in forms for the purpose of tax declaration.
- Use of PACs for active citizenship\* varied considerably by country, with a clear South/East and North/West Europe divide. The former were the most likely to engage in this way; the latter the least likely. Overall about 3.7 million adults in the EU had used PACs for active citizenship in the last 3 months.

\*Active citizenship covers areas such as civic participation (reading/posting opinions, taking part in on-line consultations, petitions etc) and seeking information on consumer or legal rights, and on government activity or politics, or grants/benefit schemes.

## Part 3

But libraries sometimes actually go much further in bringing government information and services to the public.

Good example is Romania.

In Romania there are a lot of small-scale farmers that don't know about farming subsidies by the EU. Or if they do, they don't have the means to apply for them. A program was developed by Biblionet, a national organization, to activate libraries in helping local farmers. Farmers were helped to understand the subsidies and apply for them. The amount of subsidies for farming in Romania increased considerably.

In Romania public libraries are also involved in giving information on banks to local people. 25% of Romanians haven't got a bank account.