
**Creation of Telecenters to support learning,
entrepreneurship and access to Information Society
in isolated areas**



The TELEACCESS project

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ORIGIN OF WORK



- Spread of **WWW**/Internet. Main **source of information**.
- New form of **illiteracy**, “digital”. Only those who afford PC and (fast) Internet, take advantage.
- **Gap** between rich – poor, developed – developing is widening in most cases (few exceptions: India, etc.)
- “**Digital Divide**”: the gap in the opportunities to access ICTs between geographic areas or by individuals at different socio-economic levels.
- **Key factors** :
 - Missing infrastructure or access
 - Missing incentives to use ICTs
 - Lack of computer literacy/skills to take part in the IS
 - Poverty and social exclusion

Digital Divide and disadvantaged communities



- People unable to **access** the expected benefits (health, education, e-gov)
- Greatest for **rural** and **remote** areas (lower rates for data access, low interest from ISP companies, economy)
- **Example** for broadband access: Region of Western Greece (including Patras) >10%, Dymi (rural municipality) <3%
- **World wide experience:** specialized initiatives for rural areas to stop expansion of current digital divide and provide solutions (including universal \$100 laptop initiative)

An approach for the creation of Telecenters in digitally disadvantaged rural areas

- For effective use of new ICT in rural communities, we need a **support mechanism** managed by local forces (admin, business groups etc).
- Through the Teleaccess project we presented a **methodology** for the creation of such mechanisms (we call them “*Telecenters*”) in digitally disadvantaged and rural areas.



THE PROJECT AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS

Telecenter: a definition

A Telecenter:

- **enables** and **promotes** the Information Society.
- **uses** and **develops** ICTs, and provides **support services** or **advice** to SMEs and the community.
- focuses on work-related and **professional** activities including services for **social groups**.

Not an Internet Cafe

TELEACCESS Project Showcase

- *An interregional project funded under the framework of Interreg IIIB CADSES program.*
- *Partners from Greece, Italy, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia*
- An attempt to formulate a detailed plan on how disadvantaged regions can overcome their problems in the field of Information Society using Telecenters as Support mechanisms.
- Objectives
 - To utilize advanced broadband telecommunications to provide participated areas with access to InfoSociety,
 - Improving the availability to citizens of enhanced IT-enabled services;
 - To encourage the creation of a digital culture among citizens of the participated regions and bridge the widening digital divide, by supporting its isolated communities to produce their own local information and content based services, offering them lifelong learning opportunities harmonised with spatial policies and promoting their local identity;
 - To provide the initial local telecomm infrastructure, which will catalyze economic activity, mobilizing local resources and attracting external investment, towards a sustainable and comprehensive rural development;
 - To reinforce competitiveness in the participating regions;

The logo for Teleaccess features the word "Teleaccess" in a red, sans-serif font. A yellow arc with a red dot at its peak is positioned above the letters "e" and "a".

Teleaccess



TELEACCESS Activities

- *TELEACCESS is piloting the Telecenter concept in selected sites in the participating regions.*
- *The pilots adapt best practices according to local analyses (user needs, cost/benefit of options, compatibility with national strategies).*
- *Pilot work includes a plan for the creation of the Telecenters, design and development of applications offered, pilot operation, as well as a concrete plan for sustainable operation after the end of the project.*
- *Future action will also be decided and formulated through networking and exchanges in the participating regions.*
- *The services to be offered by the Telecenters are:*
 - *Training*
 - *E-services*
 - *Info-points*
 - *Consultancy*
 - *Business support services*
 - *Specialized Broadband service*
- *Utilize existing structures and enhance their contribution to spatial development, while local influential authorities are advanced to change agents tackling rural skepticism towards technological innovation.*
- *In premises such as public offices, a Telecenter will be set up which will serve as the gateway of the community to knowledge and the Info-Society.*

Activities

- **1st step:** Collection of needs and problems for the use of ICTs, to help identify characteristics of the local rural territories, on the following:
 - Strategic background and **community needs** (administration model, relation with national and regional strategies, current useful services, potential useful services for the local groups)
 - **Economic situation** (main economical activities and problems)
 - **Geographical** description
 - **Internet** penetration (for business and at home)
 - Additional **problems** (situation on computer literacy, and motivation on using new ICTs)
 - Existing **mechanisms** to support the use of new ICTS in the territory (What kind, What they are offering, Problems, Positive impact)

The situation in the TELEACCESS sites

Broadband Access

Territory, Country	Population (%) using broadband internet in the partner's region (2006)
Dymi, Greece	<3% (>10% in the whole Region)
Puglia, Italy	10%
Umbria, Italy	15%
Marche, Italy	15%
Dresden, Germany	32%
Alonnisos, Greece	<3%
Haskovo, Bulgaria	<10%

Activities

- **2nd step:** Identification of:
 - Where to create a Telecenter
 - By Whom and How (local force to operate and organize)
- **3d step:** Small-scale survey, on issues such as:
 - Target group(s) and useful services
 - Existing premises and equipment that could be used for the Telecenter
 - Local structures which can operate and / or support the Telecenter
 - Existing broadband connectivity
 - Establishment plan and actual establishment

Activities

- **4th step:** Information on all above issues, was considered and analysed, for **decisions** on:
 - the **character** of the Telecenter,
 - the **services** to be offered,
 - the needed **infrastructure**,
 - the appropriate time and synergies for **creation**,
 - an overall estimation of **actions** and **timing**.

Activities

- **5th step:** Establishment of customised pilot Telecenters
 - 13 Telecenters
 - 11 services to be offered based on specific needs (e.g. e-consultancy, e-learning etc)
 - Pilot operation
 - Evaluation of results and suggestions/plan for further viability and exploitation of project's results

Telecenters established based on the methodology

Casarano - ITALY

Narni - ITALY

Perugia - ITALY

Piegaro - ITALY

Urbino - ITALY

Dresden - GERMANY

Raba Wyzna - POLAND

Mineralni bani - BULGARIA

Stambolovo - BULGARIA

Vincovci- CROATIA

Skrad - CROATIA

Kato Achaia town, Dymi - GREECE

Patitiri village, Alonnisos - GREECE



Casarano (Italy)



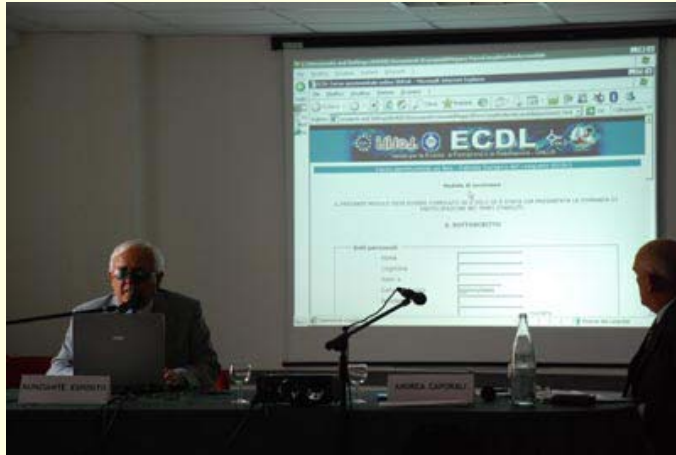
Urbino (Italy)



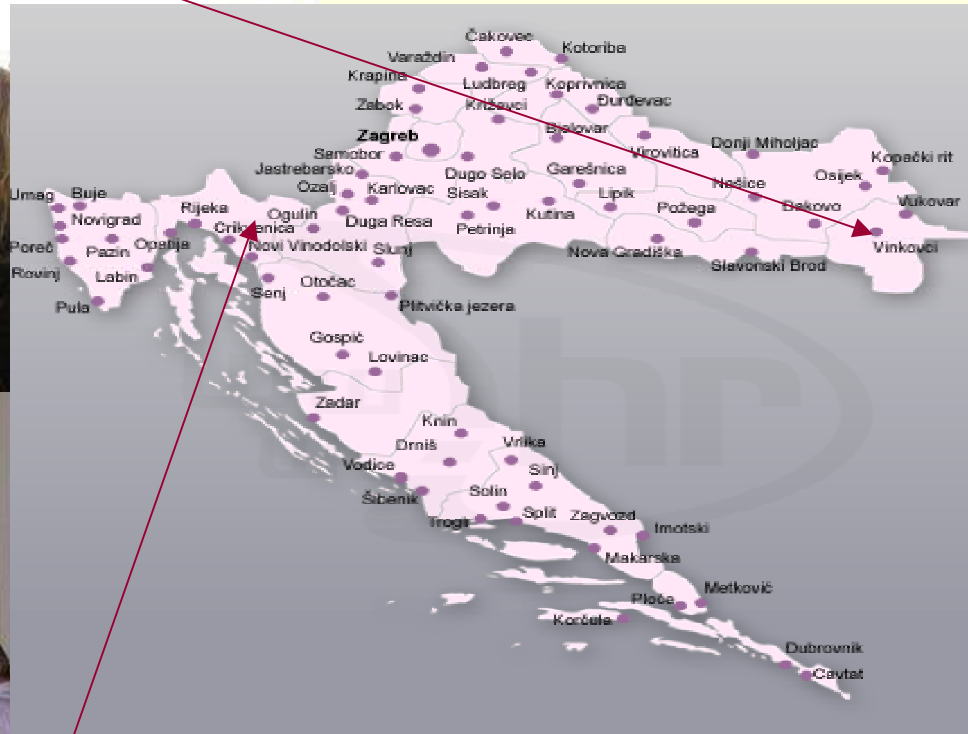
Narni (Italy)



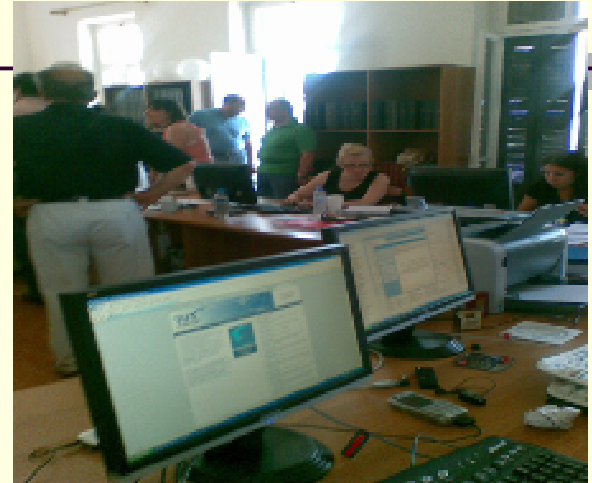
Piegaro (Italy)



Skrad, Vincovi (Croatia)

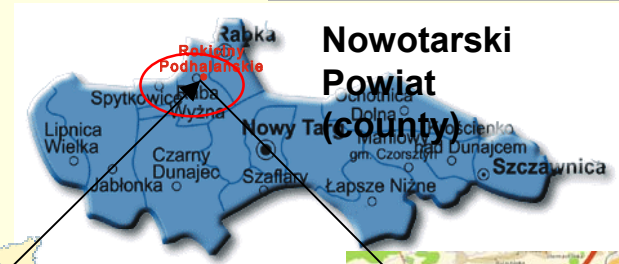
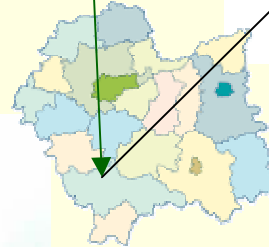


Dymi, Alonnisos (Greece)



The Dymi Telecenter (above) before the earthquake of June 2008, and (above right) after the earthquake, functioning as a Crisis Management Center

Myslenice (Raba Wyzna municipality) (Poland)



Malopolska Region



Stambolovo (Bulgaria)



Mineralni Bani (Bulgaria)





Dresden (Germany)





UTILIZATION OF RESULTS

Identified categories of Telecenters based on specific needs of rural population

1. Telecenters to cover the needs of rural population for accessing new technologies and services (with no possibilities to do so until now)
2. Telecenters to assist tourists and tourism business
3. Telecenters to provide additional opportunities to students, for access to new technologies
4. Telecenters to cover specialized needs of specific target groups of disadvantaged people
5. Telecenters acting as innovation hubs providing support to groups of people already in touch with new technologies/services and WWW

1. Telecenters to cover the needs of rural population for accessing new technologies and services (with no possibilities to do so until now)

- Stambolovo and Mineralni Bani in Bulgaria
- Vinkovci and Skrad in Croatia
- Dymi in Greece
- Raba Wyzna in Poland
- Main characteristics:
 - Low density population
 - Low penetration of high speed internet usage
 - No effective use of ICT applications from citizens and low level of Computer Literacy
 - Main economic branch of activities are: forestry, agriculture.
- The digital divide in such territories is basic and it refers to the low capabilities/possibilities to access the internet and therefore innovative ICT applications through it.



1. Telecenters to cover the needs of rural population for accessing new technologies and services (with no possibilities to do so until now)

- Focus on local business and general public and provision of specialized e-services and consultancy/training on ICT.
- The established Telecenters have become a “social center” gathering the local population.
- For example in Stambolovo Municipality there will be no exaggeration to say that the Telecenter building is now the central meeting point of the population, providing the local people with opportunities to access innovative services which have never been used until now.



2. Telecenters to assist tourists and tourism business

- Urbino in Marche Region (Italy)
- Allonisos Island in Greece
- Main characteristics:
 - Important tourist attractions based on cultural and/or environmental strong points
 - No effective use of ICT applications to support the tourists
- Significant problem for the tourism economy since on the one hand there is a lack of capabilities in order to effectively communicate all possible services offered, and on the other hand a weak point is created in comparison with competitive tourist attractions near by



2. Telecenters to assist tourists and tourism business

- Focus on visitors/tourists and provision to them of specialized information (info points) and e-services (e-booking for specialised services).
- The contribution of these Telecenters to the development of the region will be sought in relation with the provision of an effective answer to the basic question: “how can we effectively promote a remote territory and support its visitors to make them come back?”
- The established Telecenters, situated in strategically selected points (central square, harbor, library) have already provided a useful experience and gain significant interest from the tourists, providing them with useful information and services (e.g. booking of tours during their stay in Urbino).



3. Telecenters to provide additional opportunities to students, for access to new technologies

- Casarano in Puglia Region (Italy)
- Narni in Umbria Region (Italy)
- Main characteristics:
 - Remoteness (mountainous or distant areas)
 - Lack of initiatives and encouragement for young people to use new ICT applications due to isolation
- The main focus for such territories is to work on the digital divide issue focusing on young people and students.



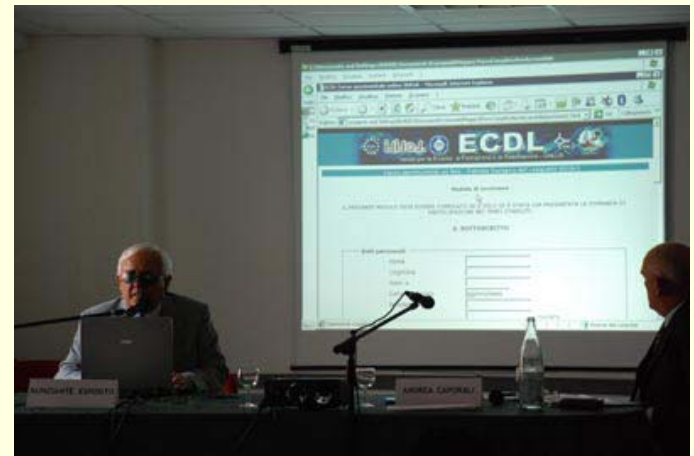
3. Telecenters to provide additional opportunities to students, for access to new technologies

- Telecenters which were established within these two territories situated in areas accessible by students (library and central place near main school) providing basic internet access and also e-learning applications (focusing on training to use the internet and the opportunities derived from it).
- The contribution of these kind of Telecenters is high in order
 - to encourage young people to use Internet access (and consequently all citizens) and
 - to set the base for the provision of additional possibilities for the provision of innovative ICT.



4. Telecenters to cover specialized needs of specific target groups of disadvantaged people

- In some cases the Digital Divide problem is related with the lack of opportunities for people with disabilities, to access the Internet and services derived from its effective usage.
- For the specific case of rural territories already active in the field of activities to support Internet penetration and effective usage, a very important next step is to take this situation into account, and try to provide solutions.
- This was the case of the established Telecenter in Piegaro. Its main scope is to provide specialized internet accessibility services for the disables, by means of installing specific software for “not being able to see people”.



5. Telecenters acting as innovation hubs providing support to groups of people already in touch with ICT and WWW

This last case involves the following Telecenters:

- Dresden (Germany)
- Perugia (Italy)

In these territories there is no existence of primitive digital divide (lack of computer literacy, lack of access to internet and to basic ICT services, lack of lifelong learning opportunities through the use of new ICT), but there exist disparities among the population in relation with the provision of innovative services and support for innovation.

So the need for these cases was, to create new opportunities for all local population using specialized services. As a result either specialized Telecenters have been created or additional services to existing ones have been established.



Viability

- With the end of the TELEACCESS project, all established Telecenters had to find ways to keep providing their services.
- Each Telecenter established a viability plan, which also described actions to support strengths and to eliminate weaknesses of the pilot phase..
- The aim of the viability plan was to support the operators in finding options for minimizing or solving problems which are visible and non-visible today.
- All partners, in collaboration with their local actors, managed to assure viability, and at this point 4 months after project ending, all Telecenters are continuing to operate

Further work

Further work based on the above outcomes, in order to capitalize the project results, would be dual:

1. *Regional policies* to adapt and utilize the TELEACCESS experience on:
 - **scaling up** the creation of Telecenters, cooperating with local authorities.
 - **Additional application** of proposed methodologies on several other territories
2. Propose a roadmap for the *transformation* of existing Telecenters in rural regions to category 5 ones (from the categories presented above). Thus the effort should be to utilize the TELEACCESS experience towards going one step further, turning Telecenters to innovation incubators providing opportunities to communities working on overcoming their digital divide problem

Thank you!

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