



**DIGITAL COOPERATIVES**  
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# **„DIGITAL COOPERATIVES”: WHO ARE THE MEDIATORS AND WHY ARE THEY NEEDED? HOW WILL THEY BE SUPPORTED?**



**European Union**  
European Regional Development Fund



**INTERREG IVC**  
INNOVATION & ENVIRONMENT  
REGIONS OF EUROPE SHARING SOLUTIONS

This thematic brochure is a result of the shared analysis operated by the E-COOP project partners about the evolution of “digital mediation” policies.

It focuses on the mediators’ profile and missions.

The project has two more thematic brochures; one on the participation of all citizens and stakeholders in digital public spaces and the other one on the coproduction of public services through digital cooperation.



## WHO ARE THE “DIGITAL MEDIATORS” (INTERMEDIARIES)?

### *Public employees and volunteers*

Most „e-mediators” in Digital Public Spaces are public employees (sometimes civil servants). Yet there is no common legal status or framework to describe what a digital mediator actually is, even though in some EU Countries specific initial training programmes exist.

Local volunteers represent another kind of mediator. Whether they operate in NGOs or not, they play an important role in the social life. Volunteering is often a positive way to reinforce one’s self-esteem around one’s peers. Unfortunately, most observers notice that it becomes more and more difficult to attract new volunteers for community and non-profitable commitment, as volunteer activity is often also time-consuming.



## WHAT ARE THEIR MISSIONS AND MAIN SKILLS?

### *Facilitators*

Digital mediators aim at sharing knowledge on digital practices and facilitating access to all IT services and innovations. They work in a Digital Public Space, sometimes within a library or a community centre. Such a profession stands at the crossroads of technology, education and entertainment areas.

### *Innovation supporters*

In a digital society, there is a need for intermediaries to lead the way. Their mission is to build and coordinate a community of people with different skills and talents, to help them to promote these skills and talents through the ICT and to finally let the community develop. Thus, their main task is to identify and promote the various skills that exist in an area, and to encourage people to share them both within their community in order to support the design of innovative services.

### *Social connectors*

E-mediators are the necessary social connectors who should raise awareness of the information and services offered in the Digital Public Place as well as in other local structures.

Primarily they have to be capable of using computer and Internet technologies in order to respond to requests from members of the community for information or for help in solving technical some problems. At the same time, they have to be able to transfer and share their knowledge with the people visiting the Digital Public Space and to understand the potential of ICT for social change.





## HOW COULD IT EVOLVE?

### *From a digital gate...*

As a general rule, the main mission of a Digital Public Space is to democratize access to ICT and digital culture for those who need it the most. It facilitates digital and social inclusion in the information society, and thus helps people take advantage of the increasing number and quality of e-services.

### *...to a collaboration and innovation centre*

Tomorrow, a DPS may become a „digital cooperative”. It will then be expected to provide services and support to a larger part of the population, and to find solutions to various local issues. It will also serve as a hub for local innovation and entrepreneurship. By doing so, it could have a more powerful impact on local innovation, by engaging and involving citizens into social and economic life. Such a new type of place could be used as an incubator for local initiatives and collaborative projects.





## WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF FUNDING OF A DPS?

### *From a community beneficiary...*

One of the main weaknesses of most digital public spaces is funding. In order to maintain its sustainability, a DPS has to generate revenue that can cover all operational expenses, ensure maintenance of equipment and also fund further development of new services. Initiatives are usually funded by public bodies but donation does not seem to be a solution any more. Long term sustainability of a DPS highly depends on alternative modes of founding.

### *...through the creation of new partnerships ...*

New initiatives and solutions continuously appear when it comes to raising funds for the creation or evolution of a Digital Public Space. For example, private foundations or partnerships are getting more involved in the creation and implementation of such a model. By doing so, they sometimes have an impact on the missions and targeted audience which may use that particular Digital Public Space.

### *...to an implementer of the community's needs*

The idea of “digital cooperatives” behind e-Coop sustainable economics is to recognize and analyse community needs and, based on them, to define the structure and role of an “e-Coop” in the community. The e-Coop should implement services that local municipalities and commercial bodies are willing to outsource, and use them as a main source of the funding.



## WHAT KIND OF MISSIONS COULD THEY OPERATE TOMORROW?

### *Support the stakeholders' needs*

E-mediators will be essential to support the development of the community and its members by providing guidance, tools, techniques, and the relevant environment to achieve their goals. In other words, they will be projects facilitators in their area and thus responsible for the development of networks between local stakeholders and with the entire world!

### *Cooperation leads to innovation!*

The e-mediators' new competences may be grouped into to three main areas:

- Design and conception (production of digital resources, promotion of creative contents, implementation of digital projects)
- Cooperation (management of partnerships, identification of local resources, mobilization of stakeholders, co-design of actions and services)
- Innovation (support of local production with social or economic added-value)







## WHAT TRAINING WOULD THEY NEED?

### *From technical training...*

In the past, most digital mediators were chosen for their technical ability. In many cases, the implementation of a Digital Public Space relied on computer science knowledge and know-how. In private organizations or small NGOs for instance, retired computer scientists have been very helpful for the development of a local DPS, in particular for providing IT training to beginners.

### *...to the development of human capacities*

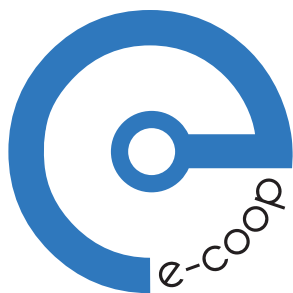
Tomorrow however, technical capacities may not be enough. What is becoming increasingly essential are interpersonal skills, communication expertise, a good knowledge of the community and genuine capacity to work in a team. In a digital society, technological knowledge will have to be combined with high level life and network skills. Instead of having all the competences and information themselves, e-mediators will be expected to know HOW and WHERE to find the right skills, at the right time.

## WHAT WILL THE USERS NEED INTERMEDIARIES FOR?

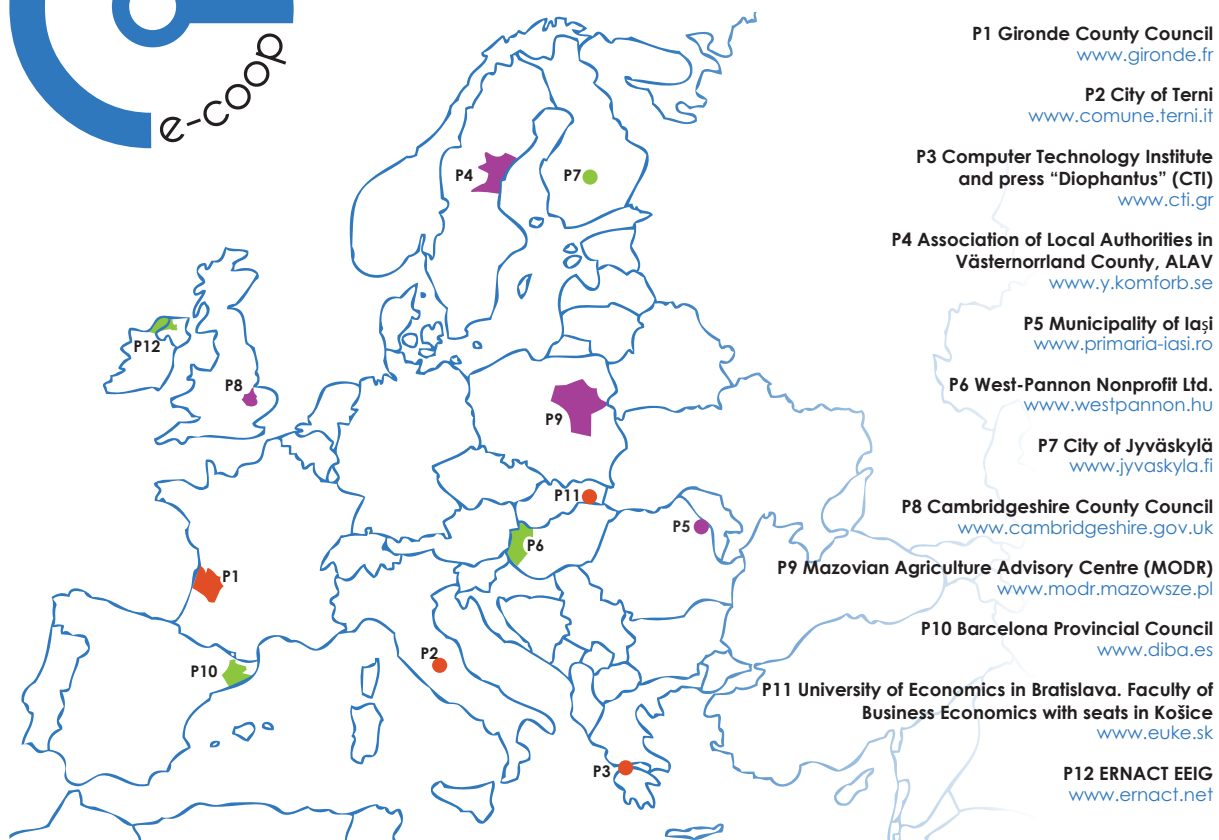
### *From e-inclusion to e-cooperation*

E-mediators will become more vital than ever to users as signposters to digital resources and information, based on the culture of “e-cooperation”. They will guide citizens, regardless of their level of digital experience, so as to create new forms of digital applications and public online services. Together with others users in a dynamic community E-mediators could become the conductors of a local digital ecosystem.





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