

Information Society and Media: Linking European Policies



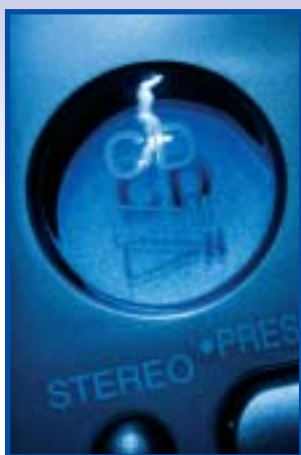
Information Society
and Media



European Commission

The Information Society brings important benefits for the media and audio-visual industries. To help ensure this promise is fulfilled, the Information Society Policy Link initiative is linking Information Society projects with relevant European policy-makers in areas as diverse as digital television, home audio-visual networks, content creation and management, and media industry business models.

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Challenges for Digital Media

The Information Society offers benefits to European business, society and culture only because it can deliver useful content and services. Digital content and services are therefore crucial to the Information Society, as well as being a potentially major source of new jobs themselves. Europe has assets in the sector, but faces unique challenges in translating them into the Information Society.

Media and related industries are already significant economic players. Europe's content sector alone - media, publishing, marketing and advertising - contributes around 5% to Europe's GDP (some €433 billion), putting it ahead of Europe's telecommunications (€254 billion) industry. In total, the sector already employs some 4 million Europeans and strong growth is expected as the digital age progresses.

In addition to their economic importance, media industries also play a key social and cultural role: television is the most important source of information and entertainment in European Societies, with 98% of homes having a television, and the average European watching more than 3 hours television per day. But the influence of other media channels, such as games, internet streaming, DVDs and mobile services, on culture and society is increasing rapidly.

Creating digital content and services is no simple matter, particularly after the dotcom bubble. In many cases existing content and software need to be significantly transformed, while in others they have to be developed from scratch. Although the software sector is currently dominated by American firms, the new landscape still offers opportunities to innovative companies.

The innovations required often cut across boundaries, bringing together players as diverse as freelance artists, publishers, independent film-makers, distributors and advertising agencies. National boundaries must also be crossed if Europe's digital content industry is to benefit from single market economies of scale. This means tackling issues such as copyright and privacy protection at the European level, and stimulating players in different countries to pool their resources in research and development.

Achieving critical mass, however, does not mean cultural homogenisation - Europe's rich cultural and linguistic diversity must be developed as a valued asset of the Information Society.

Given the pressures of globalisation and technological convergence, standards occupy a particularly important role in media markets: relevant developments are described in the *Information Society Policy Link* brochures and policy cases on Standardisation. In addition, the brochures on Education & Training and Culture & Multilingualism cover developments in two areas which are major users of digital media.



Media Policy

The Community has a long history of involvement in media and audiovisual policy, going back at least to the early 1980s. The current policy framework dates from the 1992 Treaty on European Union, which makes a specific reference to the audiovisual sector. A Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam contains further provisions in relation to public broadcasting. In practical terms, recent actions have focused on three main areas:

1. A regulatory framework allowing the realisation of an effective single market for broadcasting, whilst also safeguarding cultural diversity and protecting minors from harmful audiovisual content;
2. Support mechanisms at a European level to complement the systems existing at national level;
3. External measures, in particular the defence of European cultural interests in the context of the World Trade Organisation.

In the regulatory sphere, one of the main measures is the "Television Without Frontiers Directive" which aims to create the conditions necessary for the free movement of television broadcasts throughout the EU. A subsequent Communication, issued in 2004, clarifies in particular the way in which the Directive applies to the new interactive advertising techniques. A number of further issues are under review, which should lead to amendments of the TVWF Directive, or the proposal of a new directive at the end of 2005.

The MEDIA Plus Programme (2001-2006) aims at strengthening the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry. Equipped with a budget of €400 million, MEDIA brings support both before and after production. Activities supported through co-financing include: training initiatives for audiovisual industry professionals; the development of production projects (feature films, television drama, documentaries, animation and new media), as well as the distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works.

Many other aspects of the EU's policy framework for the Information Society are relevant here, including:

- Regulations that promote competition between infrastructure providers and service providers, while ensuring access for users of networks and citizens' rights.
- Measures on copyright and digital rights management;
- Access to and use of public information, as specified under the Public Sector Information Directive;
- eInclusion, ensuring that all Europeans can access the new generation of digital content and services.

Where the Information Society meets Media

In the digital age, information & communications technologies and media are intimately related. If ICTs are the engine of the knowledge economy, then digital content and services are its fuel. Put simply, the Information Society opens new horizons for media industries, enabling them to reach new audiences and deliver content in new ways. These digitised content and services are:

- delivered over a wide variety of devices, allowing users to access them by the most convenient means, whether it be PCs, mobile phones, televisions or other devices;
- personalised, according to the user's individual situation;
- localised, according to the user's physical location – a key value add for content and services delivered over mobile networks.

In this multi-platform approach, mobile internet devices could play a critical role. Based on a familiar medium, interactive television has the potential to provide a ramp for users who are reluctant to embrace other routes to the Information Society. It also brings a variety of additional benefits for consumers, such as more channels and higher quality pictures. The rise of DVD and home cinema are important drivers for this trend, while consumers' enthusiastic uptake of flat-panel provides further momentum. Online services are also beginning to offer new services for on-demand access to audiovisual content.

Information Society Activities

Fifth Framework Programme

Europe has a long-standing involvement in research for the media industries. Many of the technologies behind today's digital TV systems for instance, such as the MPEG2 standard used in DVD, were largely developed through EU-funded research in the 1990s. This work continues, underpinning European competitiveness in this field.

Under the Fifth Framework Programme, research activities focused on the much-heralded "convergence" between the computing, telecommunications and media industries. Activities covered a wide spectrum, from enabling technologies to system integration, end-user applications and service deployment. Relevant examples are found across the IST-FP5 Programme. They include:

- development of digital television and other AV systems from various aspects, including network infrastructure, the user interface, service provision and content delivery;
- the shift to all-digital broadcasting, including the introduction of digital techniques in editing and post-production processing;
- content creation and management, in particular the problems of adapting digital content to different media and technology platforms (known as "cross-media publishing");
- use of metadata for indexing and searching multimedia digital content;
- mobile information and entertainment services for a wide range of mobile users, accessible through devices such as PDAs, mobile phones and laptops;
- promoting the take-up of new technologies within the media industry by connecting creative artists and media industry practitioners with academic and technology partners;
- socio-economic potential of the media industries, including impacts on Europe's regions.

There was a high emphasis on standards, with clusters providing a means to coordinate projects' contributions to standardisation bodies. Coordination across Europe on issues as diverse as spectrum use, copyright and audiovisual policy also played, and continues to play, a key role in stimulating growth.

Sixth Framework Programme

Under FP6, media-related research continues, in particular under the Strategic Objectives:

- Networked audiovisual systems and home platforms: networked and interactive audiovisual systems, applications and user devices, notably for broadcasting and in-home platforms;
- Semantic-based knowledge systems: developing systems which can acquire, organise, process, share and use the knowledge embedded in multimedia content;
- Cross-media content for leisure and entertainment: improving the full digital content chain.

Relevant work is also found in the Strategic Objectives on: *Building the Grid and Grid applications; Technology-enhanced learning and access to cultural heritage; Open development platforms for software and services; and Cognitive systems.*

eContent

The €100m eContent Programme (2001-2005) was launched to encourage the growth and development of the digital content industry in Europe, funding projects which have a short time-to-market and experiment with new business models and partnerships using available technology. The main thrust has been to:

- improve access to and expand the use of public sector Information,
- enhance content production in a multilingual and multicultural environment,
- increase the dynamism of the digital content market by making it easier to access capital and by developing a consistent European approach to digital rights trading.

With funding of €149 million, the eContentplus programme (2005-2008) will tackle organisational barriers and promote take up of leading-edge technical solutions to improve accessibility and usability of digital material in a multilingual environment. The Programme addresses specific market areas where development has been slow: geographical content (as a key constituent of public sector content), educational content, cultural, scientific and scholarly content.

eTEN

The eTEN Programme is concerned with the large-scale roll-out of public interest services, primarily in support of the eEurope Action Plan. In this context, eTEN projects address the deployment of digital content as a basis for online public services in areas such as culture, education, tourism, transport and mobility, and inclusion.



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Next Steps

Since the beginning of 2005 the Commission's policy activities relating to Media have been combined with those relating to Information Society. The new Information Society & Media DG will ensure the strong policy interfaces between these two domains necessary in the context of convergence. Activities under *Information Society Policy Link* will further reinforce this relationship.

A virtuous circle should develop, with improved communication between researchers and policymakers ensuring that:

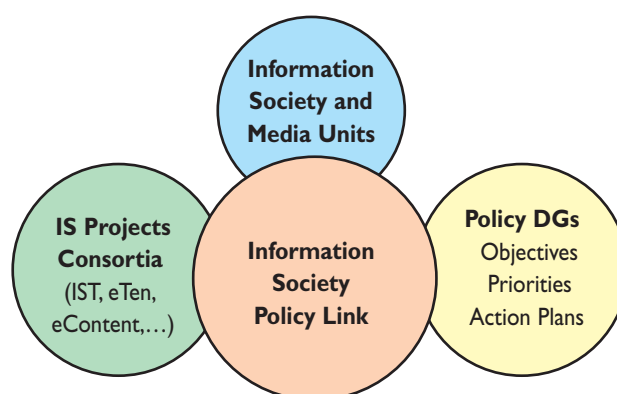
- Information Society & Media programmes better reflect relevant EU policies;
- EU policies better account for Information Society technologies;
- ICTs are better applied to meeting Europe's challenges.

At a later stage, specific actions will be launched addressing policy-makers in national and regional administrations in Member States, European institutions and national parliaments.

Getting Involved

The *Information Society Policy Link* initiative links policy-makers and researchers in a number of ways, so as to leverage the benefits of Information Society & Media projects for European policies. A variety of activities are planned, including a series of Policy Workshops and events targeted at the European policy community.

Project Consortia play a crucial role in the development of this joint effort, providing a valuable source of information for European policy-makers on relevant technological developments, as well as improving the quality, impact and awareness of their own projects for the benefit of EU policies. Organisations involved in past or present Information Society projects with relevant activities or results are invited to contact the Initiative at the address shown.



Information Society Policy Link at a Glance

Information Society related actions constitute a considerable effort of the European Union. For instance, Information Society Technologies (IST) research has been the largest thematic priority in the EU's Fifth (1998-2002) and Sixth (2002-2006) Framework Research Programmes. Together they represent an investment of over €7bn in IST research, and are complemented by programmes such as eContent (€100m) and eTEN (€315m), which focus on digital content and eServices deployment respectively.

The projects funded by these programmes offer benefits to all areas of Europe's economy and society. To fully realise these benefits the technologies need to be linked closely to European policy-making in the relevant areas.

Information Society Policy Link is an initiative of Information Society & Media DG to identify and reinforce links between its projects and relevant EU policies. More than 3000 projects from Information Society programmes are being analysed, identifying a wealth of concrete results that support EU policies across all of the principal policy domains.

By exchanging information and experiences, the Information Society Policy Link initiative aims to ensure that results from European ICT research provide greater leverage, both in implementing current policies and shaping priorities for the future.

Further Information

Information Society Policy Link initiative

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Information Society & Media DG

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Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/