

## **e-Inclusion and Public Libraries: A Literature Review**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The aim of this paper is to review how the e-Inclusion concept has been explored through the public libraries in the last two decades. The author also chose to focus on some examples of the European and Estonian projects which have reflect digital inclusion in public libraries. In addition, the paper includes some selected portions from the literature review chapter of the author's Master Thesis. (Unpublished).

**Design/methodology/approach** - Peer reviewed articles have been selected mostly from EBSCOhost databases, Emerald, Google scholar, Mendeley and European Commission Catalogues (ECLAS) using a simple search technique, in both full text search and keyword search using Boolean operators. More than 35 sources were reviewed. Basically, the terms and phrases such as "e-Inclusion", "digital inclusion" and "public libraries" were applied during the search. Relevant articles in English and Spanish languages have been selected and reviewed. In addition, books, book chapters, organizational websites, official reports, and blogs were also used for this review.

**Research limitations/implications** – To conduct this research, the author faced the difficulties of language problems, as some of the relevant information/data was found in several documents that were written in Estonian. In addition, as the mother tongue of the author in not English, expert reviewers may find some language grammatical errors in the writing. The time factor has been decisive as well, because the author consumed much time writing and looking for the clearest possible way to express his approaches and statements.

**Originality/value** – This literature review was made based on a number of previous searches, but the researcher believes that it will have a value in raising awareness of the public library managers and decision makers about the importance of access to electronic information for everyone, and create policies that address e-Inclusion issues, in order to provide access to the most vulnerable populations in our information society.

## **1. Introduction**

The spectrum of possibilities brought forward by the Internet has been incredibly broad in the last few years with a major change in the profile of computer applications' users. Factors such as immediacy, accessibility and globalization of the electronic services have been determinant to make the traditional user profile change rapidly as well as to facilitate that a greater number of users have benefited with the electronic content.

The World Wide Web, as well as other information and communication technologies (ICT) provide an environment that offers new opportunities to participate in the democratic processes (Dahlgren, 2006). Thus, Dahlgren points out "to be able to read, write, speak, work a computer and get around on Internet can all be seen as competencies important for democratic practices" (Dahlgren 2006, p.26).

Undoubtedly, Internet has come to change our lives. This tool has revolutionised our everyday experiences in recent decades, making everything easier for us. With the advent of the World Wide Web and its fast expansion, more and more electronic services are being implemented, by helping people find the information they need to make major decisions. At the same time, new concerns regarding to ICT have also emerged, such as e-Inclusion or digital integration, issues which have great importance for making a real inclusive society for everyone.

In this context, public libraries have played an important role because they have been involved in several projects around the world and also in the European Union (EU). In addition, they have been always open to innovations and the use of ICT. Their function is to constantly update information, manage it according to the needs of the society, and make it accessible to all citizens in a most suitable way, acknowledging that every person, without distinction, should have access to fair and full information.

Obviously, this type of experiences varies dramatically from one country to another, even between libraries belonging to different regions of the same country, with numerous individual examples of success.

e-Inclusion efforts and initiatives can serve to encourage two-way communication between the libraries and its users and achieve a rapprochement between them, for instance, to promote awareness of the citizens about the necessity of information literacy as well as the importance of IT use in all the everyday processes of life experienced in a modern society, and provide people opportunities for mutual learning.

On the other hand, in terms of equal information access in the modern society, different wording to describe the same concept has often been used, such as: "e-Inclusion" or "digital inclusion". Throughout this study, both terms have been used interchangeably, putting more emphasis on the concept of e-Inclusion because this is the term more used in the European context, where this research focuses on.

For the purposes of this paper, the author presents a review of the literature on the topic of e-Inclusion and public libraries, and he also points out some projects and initiatives launched by the European Union and Estonia government.

## **2. E-inclusion a conceptual approach**

e-Inclusion is a relatively new approach, widely used in Europe, and which can cover all aspects of the use of technology to ensure the inclusion of all members of the society (Abbott, 2007). However, since the beginning of this century, within the framework of the EU, this term has been used to encompass activities related to the achievement of an inclusive information society (European Commission, 2000).

Therefore, e-Inclusion aims to ensure that "no one is left behind" in enjoying the benefits of ICT. It means both inclusive ICT and the use of ICT to achieve wider inclusion objectives, focusing on the participation of all individuals and communities in all aspects of the information society. Thus, e-Inclusion policy aims at reducing gaps in ICT usage and promoting the use of ICT to overcome exclusion, and improving economic performance, employment opportunities, quality of life, social participation and cohesion (European Commission, 2010). On the other hand, in 2004, a Working Group on e-Inclusion, which was established within the eEurope Advisory Group, defined this concept as follows:

“e-Inclusion refers to the effective participation of individuals and communities in all dimensions of the knowledge-based society and economy through their access to ICT, made possible by the removal of access and accessibility barriers and effectively enabled by the willingness and ability to reap social benefits from such access” (Kettemann, 2005, p. 53).

The same report points out that e-Inclusion refers to the degree at which ICT contributes to equalizing and promoting participation in society at all levels (eEurope Advisory Group, 2005).

The concept of e-Inclusion includes “overcoming social and geographical differences, ensuring an inclusive digital society that provides opportunities for all, thus minimizing the risk of ‘digital divide’” (European Commission, 2005). Moreover, another report written by European Commission (EC) in 2006 and titled “e-Inclusion: Creating a more inclusive Europe with technology” claims that e-Inclusion is about using ICT to remove the obstacles that limit or prevent people's participation in the economy and wider society. It also seeks to overcome barriers to ICT products and services that exclude people. e-Inclusion is an important aspect in building an inclusive Europe with greater social cohesion and mobility, highly participative democracies, better quality of life, and enhanced opportunities for employment and education (European Commission, Information Society and Media, 2006).

As we note throughout the literature on this topic, several European authors have written about this subject, especially authors from the context of the EU. Undoubtedly, this concept always appears linked to the ICT and constant efforts to make an inclusive society for everyone, especially for those who are socially excluded. Digital divide, minority groups, e-Government and social inclusion are some issues closely related to the e-Inclusion.

Kettmann (2005) for example, after evaluating different concepts such as: e-Adoption, e-Learning, e-Accessibility, e-Competences concludes that all of them refer to skills and knowledge of ICT, but e-Inclusion is the broadest notion of all, making its delimitation challenging.

In recent years, the most important initiatives that have been undertaken by the EU in the framework of e-Inclusion are analyzed as follows.

### **3. e-Inclusion Initiatives and European Union**

During the recent decades, the EU has assumed a series of action plans, policies, and projects to improve the life of its citizens by reducing the digital divide providing easier access to electronic information. Moreover, they have worked on the presentation of proposals and have invited everyone involved (Member States, European Institutions and citizens in general) to contribute ideas about how to cooperate to close the gaps, acknowledging from the beginning that every person, without distinction, should have access to fair and full information with the confidence that their viewpoints and worries are heard and taken into account.

In that sense, for example, a project called Distance Education in Rural Areas via Libraries (DERAL) was implemented in the late 1990's. It aimed to encourage public libraries to play an increasingly important role transferring information, knowledge, and education to users with difficulties following normal courses of study. According to Kulturerbe Digital (1998) "this often applies to those living in rural areas, to the unemployed, and to elderly or disabled people who cannot normally attend university, college, or high school" (p. 1).

This initiative was part of the European Union's fourth Framework research programme and it is classified under the Action Line: "Library services for access to networked information resources". (Shapcott, et al., 2001, p. 5) Four European countries were involved (Spain, Ireland, UK and Austria).

At the beginning of the first decade of the 2000s, other e-Inclusion projects were undertaken throughout the EU.

#### **3.1 e-Europe 2002 Action Plan: an Information Society for all**

One of the first initiatives launched by the European Commission at the beginning of 2000 was the eEurope 2002 Action Plan, with a series of objectives to develop the Information Society for everyone. In late 2002 they had achieved almost all of the 64 outlined objectives for this action plan (European Commission, Thematic Portal, 2003).

These objectives were grouped according to three key priorities:

- A cheaper, faster and secure Internet;
- Investing in people and skills;
- Stimulate the use of the Internet.

This Action Plan focused on exploiting the advantages provided by the Internet and therefore on increasing connectivity. It was an integral part of the Lisbon

Strategy, which was launched in March 2000 and aimed to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the EU economy (Webb, 2009).

This Strategy, in the words of European leaders aimed to make EU by 2010 “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion and respect for the environment” (Kok, et al., 2004, p.6).

The Strategy was re-launched in spring 2005 after initially moderate results and became more focused on growth and jobs (Europe’s Information Society website, 2012).

### **3.2 e-Europe 2005: a new stage for Increasing e-Inclusion throughout Europe**

After achieving the proposed targets in the previous Action Plan, the European Council launched a new initiative. This second phase was called eEurope 2005 Action Plan, which was more focused on exploiting broadband technologies to deliver online services in both the public and private sector (Europe’s Information Society – Thematic Portal, 2012).

e-Europe attempted to provide a favorable environment for private investment, boosting productivity and creating new jobs to give everyone an opportunity to participate in the global information society. This initiative was based primarily on the following objectives to be achieved by 2005:

- Modern online public services;
- e-government services;
- e-learning services;
- e-health services;
- A dynamic e-business environment;
- A secure information infrastructure;
- Widespread availability of broadband access at competitive prices;
- Benchmarking and the dissemination of good practice.

The strategy eEurope 2005 follows the same approach to build a Europe more inclusive for all like eEurope 2002. It consists in defining clear objectives and to benchmark its progress regarding the previous stage.

Europe 2005 also aims to stimulate the development of services, applications and contents while speeding up the deployment of secure broadband Internet access. There is also the general aim of providing access for everyone in order to combat social exclusion, whether it is due to particular needs, a disability, age or illness.

This action plan called on the Member States to make some far-reaching commitments. It was also an invitation to the private sector to work with the Commission and the Member States to achieve the objectives of eEurope.

This stage of eEurope met the set goals by 2005 and highlighted the vital importance of an inclusive approach (e-Inclusion) for all stakeholders in the information society, and the need for this to be reflected throughout its implementation. As result of this strategy, a range of projects were implemented

throughout Europe: for Instance, Ireland launched a campaign called "e-Inclusion: expanding the Information Society in Ireland" (O'Donnell, McQuillan & Malina, 2003, p. 1). This initiative focused on how to create a more inclusive information society in that European country.

Firstly in their report, O'Donnell, McQuillan & Malina (2003), consider that the key to an inclusive information society is to ensure that citizens from all demographic groups - such as the elderly and retired, housewives, people with disabilities, farmers, skilled tradesmen, the unemployed and others – have the opportunity to participate.

They pointed out three important ways to ensure that all Irish citizens could achieve a fair access to all resources in the Information Society. The three core issues were:

- “Citizens from all demographic groups should have the opportunity to use ICT - particularly the Internet - to improve the quality of their lives and their communities.
- Citizens from all demographic groups should have the opportunity to contribute to a knowledge-based economy and society.
- Citizens from all demographic groups should have the opportunity to use the Internet to engage with government services and participate in democratic processes” (O'Donnell, McQuillan & Malina 2003, p. 7).

O'Donnell, McQuillan & Malina, (2003) conclude that “an inclusive information society also includes the active participation of the community and voluntary sector, which has a unique ability to reach out to and understand the needs of marginalized groups” (p. 7).

Under this campaign, Ireland launched new initiatives at the local, regional and national levels, all in accordance with European standards. One of these initiatives was: The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003–2005 (NAPincl), which aims:

“to build a fair and inclusive society and ensure that people have the resources and opportunities to live a life with dignity and have access to the quality public services that underpin life chances and experiences” (Office for Social Inclusion, 2001, p. I).

Other national-level strategies include the Government's Action Plan on the Information Society, “New Connections”, in which e-Inclusion is one of the important pillars amongst Telecommunications Infrastructure, Legal and Regulatory Environment, eGovernment, eBusiness, Research and Development and Lifelong Learning (Government Action Plan, 2002).

This action plan also involves the libraries as cooperating agencies to reduce the digital divide in the information society; for instance, Chomhairle Leabharlanna<sup>1</sup> developed an Internet Users Guide for library users, and all library staff was trained to provide instruction for their customers using PCs and

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<sup>1</sup> Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) is a state agency that provides advice, assistance and services to local authorities and central government in relation to the public library service.

the internet. Proposals are also being advanced to install optical scanning equipment to facilitate Internet access for the visually impaired (Government Action Plan, 2002).

Another project launched within the framework of this action plan was ‘*Equal skills*’, which was a project based on ICT literacy initiative piloted in the South West and Shannon regions during 2001 - 2002. It aimed to provide 100,000 people with the basic skills to use a PC, browse the Internet, and use email. Moreover, following the end of pilot phase, and after its evaluation and feedback, it has been extended and improved, and is now available nationwide.

This plan, together with other initiatives from other EU Member States, was part of the eEurope 2005 as it intended to meet the objectives set by the European Council at the Lisbon Strategy of 2000.

On the other hand, The European Commission's Digital Competitiveness Report published in August 2009, shows that Europe's digital sector has made strong progress since 2005, when the next strategy i2010 was launched (Europe's Information Society, 2012).

### **3.3 i2010 Initiative on e-Inclusion “To be part of the Information Society”**

As the previous stage has been closing, a new one has been opening. Therefore, i2010 would be the initiative marking the continuity of eEurope 2002 and eEurope 2005. This project has a strong emphasis on the e-Inclusion process as a key facilitator of the goals of economic and social progress. It is an initiative focused on the information society for growth and jobs, and thus of the Lisbon agenda. Indeed, bridging broadband and accessibility gaps, or improving digital competences for i2010 allows new opportunities jobs and services (European Commission, 2007).

From the beginning, i2010 has been focused on digital inclusion issues, and thus it proposes a European Initiative on e-Inclusion comprising:

Firstly: a campaign "e-Inclusion, be part of it!" to raise awareness and connect efforts during 2008, to be concluded by a Ministerial Conference, to demonstrate concrete progress and reinforce commitments; and

Secondly: a strategic framework for action to implement the Riga Ministerial Declaration<sup>2</sup> by:

1. “Providing conditions for everyone to take part in the information society by spreading broadband, accessibility and tackling competences gaps.
2. Accelerating effective participation of groups at risk of exclusion and improving quality of life.
3. Integrating e-Inclusion actions to maximize lasting impact” (European Commission, 2007, p.3).

Undoubtedly, the importance of e-Inclusion was recognized in i2010 and the Member States, the European Commission, industry, and NGOs representing

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<sup>2</sup>Riga Ministerial Declaration: It can be accessed On [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/events/ict\\_riga\\_2006/doc/declaration\\_riga.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/ict_riga_2006/doc/declaration_riga.pdf)

users have undertaken several actions to advance e-Inclusion (European Commission, 2007).

In other words, this initiative aimed to bridge the gap between the "haves and have not's" of the information society by addressing issues such as equal opportunities, ICT skills and regional disparities in Europe in terms of Internet access. In 2010 was the EU policy framework for the information society and media (2005-2009). It promoted the positive contribution that ICT can make to the economy, society, and personal quality of life. The strategy is to be followed by a new initiative – the Digital Agenda – from 2010 to 2020 (Europe's Information Society Website, 2012).

### **3.4 e-Europe 2020. The Digital agenda for Europe (2010 – 2020)**

With the new Strategy Europe 2020, the Digital Agenda for Europe was made, together with others six flagship initiatives: Innovation union, youth on the move, resource efficient Europe, an industrial policy for the globalization era, an agenda for new skills and jobs and a European platform against poverty (European Commission, 2010).

This ongoing Digital Agenda is linked with e-Inclusion and involves all Member States. It aims to ensure very fast Internet access that will help enable citizens to buy, learn, create, socialize and interact online.

A clear target the European Digital Agenda is to bring Internet connections of 30 Mbps, or above available to all Europeans by 2020; and the possibility for half of the households to subscribe to connections of 100 Mbps or higher (European Commission, 2010).

In this new decade of eEurope, libraries have shown remarkable progress and have taken important roles, for instance, Europeana has been created (the portal of Europe's digital libraries 2008) and the Digital Agenda aims to find solutions for pan-European access to legal online content by simplifying copyright clearance, management and cross-border licensing. It will also promote large scale digitalization of the rich collections of national libraries, archives and museums, and access to them by Europeans.

For many Europeans today, using the Internet has become an integral part of daily life e.g. to find jobs, pay taxes, holiday, travel and hotel bookings. However, according to European Commission, (2010), more than 150 million Europeans – some 30% of the entire Europe population - have never used the Internet. In this context, the public libraries play an important role by offering the universal Internet access to all their users. Therefore, the e-Inclusion is a big challenge for the integration process of all citizens regardless of race, sex, disability, religion, nationality, social condition or any other factor.

## **4. Public libraries in the information society**

Throughout history, the public libraries have been a focal point for the provision of information services to the community, as well as a natural place for people to go to learn and promote lifelong learning. They have always served to meet educational needs and social integration.



Several definitions of public library have been given, but all of them agree about its crucial role in the society. A definition was stated by McColvin (1956), who pointed out, regarding, the public library:

“it is provided by the local authority, the town, or county council, entirely or mostly at its own expense; governed and administered by the authority or a committee, wholly or largely appointed by itself; available free of any charge to all who live in its area; and offering a wide selection of materials chosen to embrace as completely as possible the varied interests of the individually and the community, free from bias or religion, political or other motives” (McColvin, 1956, p. 12).

Viswanathan (1990) calls it a centre of communal study, an information bureau, a continuation school and a training school for democracy. IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994, p. 1), for example, defines the Public Library as:

“The local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups;” and “a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.”

On the other hand, Article 2 in the Estonian Public Libraries Act (1998) states that the purpose of public libraries is to guarantee inhabitants free and unlimited access to information, knowledge, culture and achievements of human thought and to support life-long learning and individual development.

Moreover, Parvathamma and Reddy (2009) agree that public libraries have been noted to improve literacy through the various information and educational services they render over time. They are also well known to stimulate imaginative thoughts and expand personal horizons while empowering the citizen, and providing access to the reality of a common cultural heritage. Nevertheless, for the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), public libraries are a more general concept. They are institutions “which serve the whole community in the context of the information society and ensure free and equal access to information at the local level. It also includes mobile libraries” (IFLA, 2012).

In this framework, we can understand the crucial role of the public libraries developing their potential as a community meeting place in the digital society. Audunson and Bakken (2005, p. 14-15) summarize three main characteristics of the public library that have special significance concerning the challenges confronting the digital society:

1. “Public libraries are institutions based on literature and culture as well as on information technology, expert in information seeking and retrieval. There are not many institutions with these twin roots.
2. Public libraries are institutions based in the municipalities and local communities of importance for community identity and cohesion, as well as being gateways to the virtual world, providing both computers

and assistance to use them in the search for information and knowledge. In this way libraries become bridges between the physical local community and virtual and global networks.

3. Public libraries are institutions involved in most of the municipalities' tasks towards the population, as a complementary resource. Public libraries develop services for elderly persons, for immigrants and ethnic minorities, for pre-school children, lifelong learners, persons with disabilities, etc. Also, when using the library, the person is not a client, not a consumer – but a citizen. There is a profound difference” Cited by Aabø, (2005, 14-15 p).

Definitively, the public libraries have not changed their social mission since they were created. Nevertheless, they have evolved throughout time by adapting to current circumstances. Nowadays we cannot see them isolated from the ICT. Most of the public libraries around the world are equipped with computers and Internet connections, and thus are making a greater contribution providing equitable access to information for everyone, both electronically and paper-based.

In addition, a great number of the public libraries have computerised their operations, such as: lending administration, cataloguing, user's registration among others. The provision of Internet access, however, is only one part of bridging the digital divide. The next challenge for the public libraries is to attract more people and teach them how to use all these technological tools that are key factors in the integration of people through e-Inclusion programmes.

In recent decades, a range of projects have been developed in the European context regarding to public libraries and ICT:

For instance, PLAL was a project which was ran for two years – between 1994 and 1996 - aimed at training public librarians to give proper assistance to adult independent learners, and it focused more specifically on the following objectives:

“...to improve the professional expertise and to raise the level of competence of public library staff as regards its abilities, and to apply and exploit new technologies in a public library setting in order to facilitate cost effective access for customers to appropriate information and study support” (PLAIL, 1997).

Another European project was Public Libraries Concerted Action (PubliCA), which started in January 1997 and finished in December 2000. It focused on support, development, and enhancement of public library services throughout the European Union (15 countries in that time). An extension (PubliCA-CEE) covered the 10 candidate countries which were joined in 2004.

PubliCA would “enable a coherent approach to the development of new services to meet the needs of the citizens in the Information Society, while ensuring that the new services are integrated with traditional public library services” (PubliCA, 2001). In addition, PubliCA aimed also at reducing the disparity between the public libraries of the EU member states by establishing training centres over Europe.

The programme Heritage and Culture through Libraries in Europe (HERCULE), however, developed the concept of young European citizens as information consumers and producers in the emerging Information Society. It generated a Web site for European schoolchildren as library users. The site contains signposts to learning resources linked to school curriculum, validated by teachers and mapped by librarians.

The Web site is also a place for the viewing and exchange of multimedia cultural material produced by children and supported by Arts workers. This project began in September 1999 and was designed to take into account the needs of children with disabilities.

On the whole, all these projects - mentioned above - were created to enhance the work of public libraries in Europe in different ways, and they were supported, mainly, in ICT - and in order to build a fair society.

To conclude, according to Gill, et al. (1997), these types of libraries have been established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. They provide access to knowledge, information and work of the imagination through a range of resources and service both traditional and electronic; and are equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language.

In the following section, an analysis of the state of the question of public libraries in Estonia in recent decades is provided.

### **5. Estonian public libraries into information society**

Estonia, despite being a small country, has a wide public library system. Veskus, (2011) points out that there is a broad network of 557 public libraries located throughout the length and breadth of the country. They are part of the public sector and are subordinated to the local authorities and governed by the Ministry of Culture.

Furthermore, Veskus, (2004) considers that the network of Estonian public libraries has been relatively stable since its creation in the 1920s and its role and importance in the Estonian society has been increasing constantly. She claims public libraries are very popular in the country, and their use is increasing.

Since Estonia re-established its independence in the early 90s, it has placed greater emphasis on creating its libraries as a place where citizens can freely access their collections, resources and services, but also tries to take advantage of the opportunities brought by the age of the information society driven by ICT, making a more inclusive society for everyone, regardless of sex, age, race, nationality, social condition, or other motives of exclusion.

Valm (1999) states that the turning point for public libraries of Estonia was in 1996 when the financial support from the Open Estonia Foundation enabled the launch of an automation project for public libraries. This resulted in over 300 public libraries operating the new system.

Moreover, in 1998, the Estonian Parliament approved the Public Libraries Act, in which details the responsibilities of each level of government. It states that the public libraries are established by the local government body, and that the

county or city library is responsible for the coordination of library services. The financing of the public libraries for the purchases of books, computers, electronic devices, for Internet connection, and for the costs related to government-initiated programmes comes from the State (Estonian Public Libraries Act, 1998).

Other programmes and initiatives have been undertaken in Estonia in order to overcome the digital gap on the public libraries. For example, in 2000, the Estonian Ministry of Culture started the "Internetisation" process of public libraries and the goal of the project was to equip all public libraries in Estonia with a permanent Internet connection by the end of the year 2002 (Veskus, 2004).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture, together with a private firm and a state-owned foundation, began a programme based on joining as many public libraries as possible in an internet-based information network (Lagerspetz & Tali, 2012).

Since 1995, Estonia participated in several international projects concerning public libraries, some of them already mentioned above: PubliCA and HERCULE, and – amongst others – Public Libraries Development Project (PLDP), Excel, Libecon/2000 and Central and Eastern European Copyright User Platform (CECUP).

According to Valm (1999), "this number may seem rather small but in reality it is optimum considering the profound changes in our library society, IT development in particular".

The project PLDP was launched in 1996 within the European Union Phare Programme<sup>3</sup> and supported local authorities giving them the means to support libraries, specially, public libraries. Fourteen Central and East European countries, including Estonia, were invited to join the project.

Excel was another project initiated by the European Union Telematics for Libraries Programme. This initiative aimed at encouraging the establishment of standardized library networks and helping information suppliers and publishers. Poland, Hungary and Estonia were the countries chosen to implement this project.

Finally, CECUP addressed technological developments of digitization and enhanced electronic services. Developments that also confront libraries in Central and Eastern Europe, where they must also deal with the problems of infringement of copyright laws (Telematic for Library Project CECUP, 1999).

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<sup>3</sup> The Programme of Community aid to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Phare) is the main financial instrument of the pre-accession strategy for the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) which have applied for membership of the European Union. Since 1994, Phare's tasks have been adapted to the priorities and needs of each CEEC. The revamped Phare programme, with a budget of over EUR 10 billion for the period 2000-2006 (about 1.5 billion per year), has two main priorities, namely institutional and capacity-building and investment financing. Although the Phare programme was originally reserved for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it is set to be extended to the applicant countries of the western Balkans.

In Estonia the CECUP project was focused on organizing and coordinating several training programmes and thus it contributed to the development of libraries as equal partners in the field of copyright.

On the other hand, in 2001, Estonia's most influential companies<sup>4</sup> established a Look@World Foundation<sup>5</sup> and its main objective was to lead Estonians to the Internet. This institution was created as a non-profit organization and its goal was – and is - to serve the public interest by supporting education, science and culture via encouraging and popularizing use of the Internet. By this goal the Foundation aims to raise the quality of life in Estonia, and also the competitiveness of Estonia in Europe. Look@World Foundation has launched several projects in Estonia in which Public Libraries have participated, for instance:

- 2002-2004: 102 697 participants were trained to use computers and the Internet. It was in collaboration with other institutions and public libraries such as Tallinn Central Library. In the same period, 442 Public Access Internet Points (PAIP) were set up successfully.
- Computer Security 2009 project (Arvutikaitse 2009) started in May 2006. The objective of the project was to raise Internet users' awareness about security and other means of authentication in electronic services. The target of the project was reached 400 000 ID-card users in January 2010 (20 000 users in 2006).
- Come Along! (April 2009 - November 2011). 100 000 people received help and advice for using the Internet and e-services: hands-on trainings in classes and mobile counseling. 35 Computer Clubs across Estonia were opened with Microsoft Grant. Almost 300 instructors and organizations took part, and the training sessions were held in almost 300 locations throughout Estonia (in Russian and Estonian).
- New beginning – volunteers fixing up used computers (250 computers in 2009 and 200 in 2011)
- Training 100 unemployed persons to work as customer support specialists at IT helpdesk (1.3.0102.10-0284) (from May 2010 until June 2011), co-funded by then European Social Fund.
- Training long-term unemployed persons to work as customer support specialists by IT-training and work practice (Pikaajaliste töötute ettevalmistamine IT-kasutajatoe spetsialistideks läbi erialakoolituse ja tööpraktika, 1.3.0102.11-0377): Training 65 long-term unemployed persons to work as customer support specialists at IT helpdesk (from June 2011 until June 2012), by co-funded European Social Fund (Look@World Foundation, 2012).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> AS Hansapank, AS Eesti Ühispank, AS Eesti Telefon, AS EMT, IBM Eesti OÜ, Oracle Netherlands BV Eesti filiaal, AS Microlink, IT Grupp AS, AS Baltic Computer System ja AS Starman

<sup>5</sup> Vaata Maailma Sihtasutus in Estonian.

<sup>6</sup> This information was gathered from a power point presentation of the Look@World Foundation. It was provided by the director of Tallinn Central Library.

The work of this foundation has been and continues to be a key piece in the process of e-Inclusion in the Estonian society because it ensures that fewer people are left behind to enjoy the benefits of ICT.

On November 2006, the Government of Estonia approved the Estonian Information Society Strategy 2013. It is a development plan, which sets out the general framework, objectives and respective action fields for the use of ICT in the development of knowledge-based economy and society in Estonia during 2007- 2013.

For the elaboration of this strategy several international documents and EU-level, most notably the i2010, - which were mentioned previously - and some eGovernment action plans, were taken into consideration (Estonian Information Society Strategy, 2006).

This strategy concerns “a certain part of the population, in particular the economically underprivileged and the elderly, for whom access to the internet is often restricted by the lack of home PCs. Survey results reveal that for half of non-users, lack of home PCs, due to high computer prices, is the main reason for not using the internet”. (Estonian Information Society Strategy, 2006, p.7).

## **6. Conclusions**

The literature review showed that in recent years, the issue of e-Inclusion is becoming increasingly more important over Europe (Government Action Plan, 2002), (European Commission, 2007) and many initiatives and projects have been launched with the intention to include more people.

Throughout this paper, the e-Inclusion has been defined and viewed from different angles. All of them focused on the need to work on a larger scale in the European and Estonian context in order to overcome the digital divide and integrating all social groups in the access and use of the information technologies.

Furthermore, this research has presented the literature review about some initiatives and projects developed through Europe and particularly in its State members like Estonia. The public libraries appear as institutions which play a crucial role in overcoming digital gap. Thus, a theoretical framework about this kind of institutions has been developed and several concepts were cited by different authors. Finally, the last subsection summarised some experiences related with the public libraries and the e-Inclusion in Estonia.

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