



ASSEMBLÉE DES RÉGIONS D'EUROPE
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ASSEMBLEA DELLE REGIONI D'EUROPA

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Press release

Region of the Future, closer to citizens

On 7 December 2000, the Region of South Ostrobothnia and the Assembly of European Regions (AER) organised in Seinäjoki (Finland) a reflection seminar about the impact of the development of new communication technologies, and in particular that of the Internet, at the regional and local levels. Numerous regional and transregional services instantaneously accessible via the Internet, such as social services, telemedicine, distant learning, virtual universities, databanks, etc. are being created and today almost all the regions have at least one web site at their disposal. New information technologies contribute to the creation of new jobs but they can also lead to the reduction of jobs in the traditional fields, and even cause the marginalisation of people who do not know how to or do not have the opportunity to use Internet resources. "It is a very important challenge for regional administration to be able to measure the impact of this development and to take the most adequate decisions to preserve the cohesion of society", said Mr Latva-Rasku, the Executive Director of the Regional Council South Ostrobothnia, in his introduction to the seminar.

New technologies also offer opportunities regarding interregional cooperation in Europe in fields so diverse as communication, exchange of experiences, economic development, interregional services or working in a network. Mr Lunnas from the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities - who presented some major interregional projects (Locregis, Erisa, Teleregions, Ernact, etc.)- underlined the advantages of projects related to information society for regions: increased efficacy and profitability, better communication and increased supply of services. He also insisted on the importance of political engagement all along the development of technology projects in order to assure their success.

Dr. Macpherson from PSAMRA-Integral Studies, Berlin, outlined different opportunities that communications technologies offer with a view to increase citizens' participation in public affairs. "The diffusion of information and transparency form the base of democracy, and all the levels of governance should use these new technologies to make citizens involved with the democratic process. However, projects related to electronic democracy are not yet very highly developed and this remains an important challenge to meet", he said.

M. Haglund from the Information Society Project Office (ISPO) of the European Commission emphasized that founding of information society was among the key priorities for regional and local development schemes in Europe. Several programmes and initiatives have already been launched by the Commission, aimed at developing the fields of technology, legislation, economy, commercial applications, services for citizens as well as at taking social and societal aspects into account.

The Region of South Ostrobothnia, which receives European structural funds for Objectives 2 and 3, participates in this development in cooperation with other Finnish regions and municipalities. Several projects are already available, such as epliito.fi (database and network of municipalities), etelapohjanmaa.fi/teemat (database of projects financed from the Structural Funds 2000-2006), hubnet.org (interregional economic development project), wfa.fi/paraddis (the RISI project) or LifeIT.org (interregional medical care services).

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