

MANIFEST

Towards a democratic model of media literacy: From receivers to agents of the information

e-Quality Project
www.equalityproject.net



PREAMBLE

The Manifesto that we introduce is one of the results obtained from the e-learning european project *e-Quality (Virtual Spaces of Democratic Dialogue among cultures and images)*. The project's participants have generally been excluded from the participative process that generates the access to ICT. This is either the result of limited access to computer technology, or because participants are from socially marginalised groups; housewives, older adults, people with disabilities, immigrant workers or unemployed adults. The work carried out during the two years of the project shows that learning to use ICT in a democratic and critical way promotes confidence in using new technology and enables individuals to fully participate in the Information Society. The *e-Quality* Project presents this manifesto as a model of media literacy that we want to bring to public debate. This is the product of a social and virtual dialogue generated by the participants in the project.

TO GUARANTEE FREE ACCESS TO ICT AND PROMOTE THE USE OF FREE SOFTWARE.

The first step in promoting democratic access to ICT is to create a social environment that provides free and facilitated access to new technologies.

A schedule of access and learning adapted to our needs. Individuals' needs are very diverse (unemployed people, people with disabilities, immigrants, young people, housewives, etc.). The schedules of the organizations have to offer the maximum possible availability so nobody remains excluded from this process. It is also necessary to guarantee that every person has access to a computer. This is imperative to comply in order to make possible the objective of an Information Society for all.

To use free software in order to construct a shared-knowledge culture. Free software is not only characterized by its exemption from payment (even though it is a decisive factor for most of us). « Free » means that we are free to use the software, free to copy and spread it, free to study how it is made and

free to modify and adapt it to improve its functionalities. The software developers simply decide to distribute their creation as a free creation: they ask the users to respect their will by a license agreement. This freedom guarantees that free software remains free and is disseminated by all users without any discrimination. Even if we have not the technical knowledge to modify the software ourselves, we can contribute to the development of free software by suggesting improvements to the creators, reporting problems encountered, disseminating them among our friends and keeping and making other people aware of the importance of this freedom of knowledge. Usually free software has web pages maintained by its community of users ready to help and share their experience. The adaptation possibilities are of great importance to disabled people. Free software promotes a culture of sharing and helps users fight against individualism and restrictions. Many governments around the world, international organizations like UNESCO and NGOs support and promote free and open software. We think that it is very important that representatives of institutions take this into consideration for their action programmes.

FROM RECEIVERS TO AGENTS OF INFORMATION: CREATION OF E-QUALITY SPACES

The following step to advance in an Information Society for all is to promote a model of democratic media literacy. We do not only wish to know how to find information through the different media, but also to debate and analyze it, share our opinions and diffuse it through the media.

We want to go from receivers to agents of our own information. We suggest the creation of e-Quality spaces based on dialogical learning. It is very important that the people that are with us believe in our learning capacities and promote an environment where the egalitarian dialogue is the way of interacting between people. This is the only way for us to be free and able to help with our opinions and knowledge. In doing so, we hope individuals are enriched by participating in this dialogue.

In these groups we want to encourage participation among socially marginalized groups, people without academic qualifications, immigrants, people with disabilities, young people, unemployed, etc. The variety of people that have participated in the project has enriched the contributions and showed that this type of spaces is suitable for any type of collective.

The objective of the group is to debate a theme through the search and the selection of information through the Internet. Subsequently, we all analyze our findings together, enlarging participants' critical understanding and respect for information. The sessions of these groups are divided into two parts; in the first part we seek information on the theme chosen (as for example; racism, gender violence, education, etc.). Through the Internet, participants consult web pages of public administrations, mass media (newspapers, television, etc.) and social movements. In this process, participants learn to seek, select the information they want, and learn how to use the basic programs selected. As many participants have commented, not all the information is trustworthy and one must know how to find the right one. The second step is to collect all the information selected and make a dossier with the information some groups have chosen to classify according to the source of information previously cited. The second part of the group consists on debating this information, and contrasting it with personal opinions and experiences on the theme in a session.

Through group dialogue, participants learn to understand how the media portrays and respects human rights. This critical reading widens their knowledge on the themes presented and the answers and processes that have been presented by different organizations, media, and administrations. We also want to emphasize that many of the participants are immigrants learning the language of their country of reception. In participating in the dialogical groups, individuals not only acquire a greater knowledge and understanding of the issues that affect the society they live in, but also enable them to become more fluent in their new language.

We want this kind of learning to have an administrative accreditation, as for example a certificate that accredits the knowledge on the process carried out.

SOLIDARITY MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: EQUALITY OF DIFFERENCES.

In this project we have had the good fortune to count on people of very diverse origins and cultures: Sweden, Scotland, France, Greece, and Spain. But besides the participating countries, there were immigrant people of other nationalities, like Pakistan, India, Japan, Morocco, and other countries of the Eastern Europe, Africa and South America. The fact that people from such different origins and cultures have talked evenly on themes that concern them, like racism, gender violence, citizenship participation or discrimination, highly contributes to create a dialogical and multicultural Europe.

We think that European politics has to bear in mind this type of experiences. We all believe that a society built on the basis of multicultural and solidarity has to live from the equality of differences. An important step debated in the forum of citizenship participation was to recognize the right of immigrant people to participate actively in the society of reception. We do not agree with some situations in Europe where some are recognized as citizens while others are not. It was commented in the forum that this does not respect human rights.

On the other hand we urge the different administrations to carry out plans of action to settle the situations of concealed racism identified in the different countries. Just as it was shown in the forum about racism, many of our companions have experienced racist situations that should not exist in the present. Education is a key item to transform this situation and the promotion of citizenship for all. In many occasions mass media promotes racism instead of contribute to its abolition.

To live differences as a source of enrichment for our societies. Once all people respect all human beings as equals regardless of their colour, religion or nationality our societies will be a precious place to live. We all have the responsibility to make this dream possible.

QUALITY OF INFORMATION

During the project one of the questions that we presented was the quality of the information that was selected from the different sources. Through the analysis that we have carried out during this project we have encountered many occasions when the offered information does not comply the quality criteria. We suggest the following criteria are kept in mind by mass media administrators:

Transparency and clarity. The information we have on the actions taken from administrations are often confusing, or explained in such a way that it is impossible to understand its objectives. Information must clearly identify how actions are being taken.

Respect to Human Rights. We have found that some mass media do not respect human rights. For example, some news often presents immigration as a threat to society. We require that the media, that has so much social influence, respects the Declaration of Human Rights in the processing of the information they generate. Besides promoting information, it is imperative that social values such as equality and solidarity are upheld.

Accessible language: most of the times the language used is not accessible to everyone. We want language and expressions to be closer to the population so that all the people can understand what we are reading or seeing. Information should be presented in a language that is clearly understood by everybody.

To promote the role of social movement media: we want the work of many social movement media to be recognized by all public administrations. Their labor offers quality information and promotes democracy within society.

GOT OUR VOICE HEARD

For many people who participated in this project this was the first time they openly expressed their opinions on a subject. The opportunity to share opinions not only in the group but also in the

forum with people from other countries has promoted confidence and encouraged participation. Our voice is important and during the elaboration of the project we have carried out different actions to have our voice heard, such as our contributions to the e-Quality forum, the e-mail we sent to the Ministry to protest against a law that was being made, or to explain with no shame the project being carried out in an international Congress of Literacy. For us it is important that our contributions are born in mind in order to take further steps in a society that has to be increasingly democratic. For that reason it is necessary:

To promote the participation of the people with fewer opportunities to access virtual spaces of debate through the different educational centers and social organizations.

To make the corresponding public administrations keep in mind our voices and develop plans of action so that all members of society can participate in determining social policy and promoting human rights.

e-QUALITY has improved our ITC skills and showed us how to use ITC to get our voices heard and construct the world the way we would like to see it. We want more collectives to access this kind of learning, and we demand the administrations to promote this action in their educative policies.

