

GCD Spring Summit 2011 in Cologne:

Global Cities Dialogue: From Digital Divide to Digital Solidarity

GCD set clear priorities at this year's Spring Summit in Cologne: representatives from all over the world discussed the development of a Digital Agenda for Europe, special attention was given to the call for international digital solidarity. With its initiative "going ecolocal", GCD once again underlined the active role of communities in the building of a citizen-centred Information and Knowledge Society.

An article by
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Each year, political representatives of the international network Global Cities Dialogue and their invited guests meet for the annual GCD Spring Summit to share experience and best practices. The GCD Spring Summit 2011 took place on 21 & 22 February in Cologne and provided an appropriate framework for an active and open dialogue between experts and decision makers from policy and administration.

About 60 participants from 15 countries were welcomed by Mayor Angela Spizig on behalf of the city of Cologne. Within two Round Tables cities' representatives, representatives of intergovernmental organisations, and from science and ICT-industries discussed how to take and implement "green" decisions in an economically and technologically sustainable manner. The development of a local Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) was at the centre of the discussions, especially the digital solidarity aspect, which was identified as a key element.

In the video message addressed to the participants of the Summit, Vice-President of the European Commission and European Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes highlighted the need for initiatives implemented on a local level in order to efficiently meet current global challenges in a citizen-centred manner. She acknowledged GCD as an important partner and catalyst for the required change. As a grass root initiative with global reach GCD represents a perfect partner for the international exchange of local best practice initiatives.



Commissioner Neelie Kroes was represented in Cologne by Constantijn van Oranje-Nassau, a member of her Cabinet (on the right, with Angela Spizig, Mayor of the city of Cologne, founding member, and the Mayor of the city of Luxembourg, Paul Helminger, who was elected Chairman of the GCD during the last General Assembly in 2010).

The projects "Smart Work Center" and "Dialogue Café" were presented as local best practices: The "Smart Work Center" in Amsterdam offers WebEx- und TelePresence facilities, meeting rooms and desk space, as well as childcare, catering, and some financial services to help people better balance their private and professional lives. "Dialogue Café" links real existing places: state-of-the-art video conferencing technology enables face-to-face conversations between people from around the world thus promoting greater understanding and co-operation

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across cultures. The technology provided by Cisco served as proof of concept for this ambitious idea.

In accordance with the current GCD priority areas, three GCD Task Groups were launched during the GCD Spring Summit 2011: “Digital Solidarity” led by the city of Dolisie, Republic of Congo, “Sustainability supported by ICT – going ecolocal” led by the city of Cologne, and “e-Government” led by the French city Issy-les-Moulineaux. Interested cities and organisations, members and guests, are warmly welcome to join the Task Groups.

Towards global digital solidarity

The digital divide can no longer be reduced to a simple geographical or structural gap. It is a local reality all over the world due to various factors such as social class, gender, age, level of education and income. In the efforts to bridge this divide and based on the current debate on the deployment of a Digital Agenda for Europe, it makes sense not to limit the discussion to aspects related to digital information access but also to consider the different user needs, ways of learning and usage purposes.

On the basis of the discussions held in Cologne about the change of paradigm in moving from fighting against the digital divide towards digital solidarity, GCD went a step further in its initiative “going ecolocal” launched in 2010 and called for a joint effort to foster local initiatives and support sustainable growth policy.

The current debate is about whether mobile applications, and in particular m-Government services, can contribute to the successful



implementation of a local digital agenda. What are the challenges associated with rolling out mobile government services? Is mobile government all about cost savings and efficiency? Are the benefits clearly understood? Does easy access mean increased citizen engagement and democratic legitimacy? How can we ensure that m-Government doesn't create new digital divides? These and other questions have been discussed during the event of the “GSMA Mobile Meetings Series” on the topic “M-Government: A new public space for European citizens?” on 17 March in Brussels.

In the context of the preparation process of designing a DAE, GCD was invited to provide inputs during the Stakeholder Day held on 25 October 2010 in Brussels. Furthermore, GCD was invited to help concretise a vision for a “really local” bottom up approach at the conference “Local Digital Agendas meet Digital Agenda Europe”, organised by the Province of Friesland (NL) and supported by the Committee of the Regions, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, and the European Union represented by its Regional Policy and Information Society & Media Units at the European Commission, on 4 and 5 April 2011 in Brussels.

Note

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Info

Global Cities Dialogue:

☞ <http://www.globalcitiesdialogue.com/>

Digital Agenda for Europe:

☞ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/index_en.htm

Dialogue Café:

☞ <http://www.dialoguecafe.org/>

Local Digital Agendas meet Digital Agenda Europe:

☞ <http://www.daegoeshlocal.com/>

GSMA Europe's Mobile Meetings Series:

☞ http://www.gsmworld.com/mobile_meetings_series/

Background

The Network

Launched in 1999 in Helsinki by twelve founding members, the GCD is a political network operating worldwide for a socially fair and sustainable Information Society. GCD was the world's first initiative for ICT based on a joint commitment by cities represented by their mayors and high political representatives. Today the network counts around 200 members worldwide and is registered as an international non-profit organisation under Belgian law (AISBL).

