



VALORISATION PROJECT

IDEALiC

Setting the future scene of e-inclusion



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FINAL REPORT

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1. SUMMARY

Case studies led during the IDEALiC research project highlighted the lack of guidelines and information about digital inclusion among the community of digital services designers and providers. Although they aim to develop as *user-friendly* as possible digital services, there is no clear view on what digital inclusion is and what are the profiles at risk of being excluded by digitalisation. In parallel, IDEALiC project supported the conclusion that the traditionally defined two-folded and dichotomous categories of included versus excluded population groups – e.g. rich versus poor; young versus old or employed versus unemployed – are no longer valid. User researches has pointed out an increased risk of situations where individuals could face digital vulnerabilities. These situations affect individuals beyond classical socio-demographical patterns.

Therefore, the valorisation action purpose was to increase awareness on the importance of digital inclusion for digital services designers and providers, and on the role they could play in the development of inclusive digital services.

In practice, the project consisted of creating support tools to orient and to help designers anticipate situations of vulnerabilities and enable them to adopt a more inclusive design approach. To achieve this goal, not only designers but also social frontline actors and e-inclusion actors were involved in the process. The results are presented in a “guide for an inclusive conception of digital services”, which provides key principles, guidelines and resources to achieve a more inclusive design of digital services.

2. INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND VALORISATION FOCUS

The IDEALiC valorisation action consisted in the creation and validation of a support tool for digital services designers and providers. The initial objective was to disseminate the research results through a support tool that could participate in defining and improving e-inclusion practices among digital services designers and providers.

The project focused on two issues:

- (1) provide a more detailed view on the diversity of individual situations of vulnerability due to digital uses and non-uses;
- (2) encourage designers to take greater responsibility for the challenges of digital inclusion.

Accordingly, the support tool suggests ways in which designers can collect and integrate the concerns and needs of users, especially the less digitally included of them, in the design process of digital services. It also proposes lines to build an inclusive mindset in the development of digital solutions. The support tool is based upon the main findings of the IDEALiC project, which were discussed and expressed in a series of guidelines by means of multiple encounters with the project stakeholders.

The valorisation action builds on the principle of opening the boundaries between two types of networks: civil society actors (represented by social welfare and digital mediation actors) and service designers and providers (including different professions, such as project managers, IT developers, product manager, etc.). These fields know little about each other's work and issues. Yet, a truly inclusive digital society could only be obtained if all stakeholders acknowledge the relevance of e-inclusion and take action towards this common issue.

3. OVERVIEW EXTERNAL COLLABORATION(S)

The stakeholders who participated to the valorisation action were social welfare actors, including frontline workers, e-inclusion actors and digital services designers and providers. Experts and representatives in both fields were met during the action and were key-targeted users of the action and its results.

In the first workshop, dedicated to civil society actors, we collaborated with ARC asbl, the Fédération des Services Sociaux (FdSS) and CABAN. Representatives of each of these organisations attended a workshop in December 2019. ARC asbl also contributed to the preparation of this workshop and gave us feedback. The second workshop initially planned in April 2020 was first postponed for sanitary reasons and later switched to individual interviews with a dozen IT specialists from private, public and general interest companies.

The following collaborations took place during the project:

- **ARC asbl** is a Brussels-based association working in the field of e-inclusion. They shared their field experiences through the first workshop and several meetings. ARC participated in different steps of the process, such as the design of the first workshop, which they offered to host in their office. They also gave several feedbacks on the evolution of the action.
- The **Fédération des Services Sociaux** federates accredited social and psycho-social services in the areas of Brussels and Wallonia. They are important intermediary between vulnerable publics and public services. Researchers and frontline workers participated in the first workshop and gave significant insights on the content and main orientations of the tool regarding their field experiences with vulnerable users.
- **Dr. Ilse Mariën** is a senior researcher in the field of e-inclusion and coordinated the IDEALiC research project between 2015 and 2019. At the imec-SMIT VUB research centre, she is involved in large-scale projects such as the platform www.einclusie.be or the e-inclusion taskforce. She helped us setting up the basis of the valorisation action and gave us raw material on the e-inclusion profiles she designed.
- **CABAN** is a Brussels-based actors network for digital accessibility. One of their representative and founder was invited to participate in the first workshop.
- The **King Baudouin Foundation** is a leading actor in the support of digital inclusion initiatives in all Belgian Regions. Contacts for the second workshop/interviews were made with several companies with their help. They were also invited to the closing presentation of the tool.
- Interviews were conducted with services designers and providers from different companies such as **BNP Paribas Fortis**, **Triodos**, **STIB-MIVB**, **Cap Gemini**, **Itsme**, or **CIRB-CIBG**. We also had contact with **Inclunet**, a consulting company focused on digital accessibility. Some of the persons interviewed in this framework had already participated in previous initiatives related to the IDEALiC research project.

All of the participants to the workshop, interviews or further contacts during the project were invited to an online closing presentation of the tool in March 2021.

4. GENERATED PRODUCTS AND IMPLEMENTED APPROACHES

The valorisation action generated tool is a guide, available online, based on the main findings of the research project and the interventions of the various stakeholders during the workshop and interviews. The product of the valorisation action stems from an approach based on a series of encounters (workshop and interviews) with stakeholders to comment and validate the general guidelines of the support tool.

Workshop 1: validation of a tool with civil society actors

The first step of the valorisation project consisted in organising a workshop with social welfare actors and e-inclusion actors. The objective of the workshop was to integrate their point of view about the use of e-inclusion tools in their practices and discuss the relevance of inclusion-by-design persona support tools. Workshop showed that social welfare actors and frontline workers were not really demanding for an additional tool for their own practices and daily work. Instead, discussion identified some specific points of attention that could be further submitted to the designers and providers during the second workshop. These points concerned tangible actions that designers and providers could take to better include the needs and wants of vulnerable publics and their helpers.

Two key contributions made by both social welfare actors and e-inclusion actors are key inputs to the final production:

- (1) They usually come at the end-of-line, dealing with all sorts of difficulties that users encounter, while having little space and to report their feedback and share experiences to the digital services providers and designers. Yet, this experience could provide valuable insights for anticipating digital exclusion.
- (2) Persona are a kind of support for designers to have a broader view on their public and their vulnerabilities. However, certain barriers of access and uses are cross-cutting challenges that persona do not reflect. There should be more focus on the needs, the context and the will of use.

Workshop 2: validation of a tool with the service designers and providers

Given the impossibility to meet during the pandemic, we decided to conduct individual interviews with the participants instead. The participants were professionals involved in digitalisation projects led by their companies (project managers, digital products manager, programmers, consultants, etc.).

Interviews focused on two set of tools. First, it discussed the practices used to gather the voice of users during the process of digital conception. Second, the interviews looked at the use of user-profiles and persona, especially those representing more vulnerable users, and how designers and providers identified and characterised them.

Certain elements appeared quite frequently in the discourse of the designers and providers of digital services:

- (1) Digital inclusion is an emerging issue for service designers and providers, and most of them lack clear understanding about digital inclusion. Many of them acknowledge digital accessibility concepts, but the meaning of digital inclusion remains at a technical level.
- (2) Except for senior users or people with physical disability, vulnerable profiles of users are not very diversified. Further, these profiles are not taken into account right from the start of the design processes. As a result, there is a lack of diversity of fragile public representation.

Support tool

The input of the workshop and interviews allowed us to develop a tool that met the main objectives of the valorisation action while including the remarks of the stakeholders about the content of the final product. The project resulted on a click-and-print document that could support and orient the action of any digital service designer or provider interested to take a step in e-inclusive practices.

The document is a guide organised around three axes:

- (1) Provide key information about digital inclusion and the many individual and social barriers to digital inclusion.
- (2) Develop a set of guiding principles for an inclusive conception of digital services.
- (3) Propose relevant external resources to orient and assist designers and providers in their efforts to improve their e-inclusion practices.

The guide contains a set of seven guidelines, each assorted with examples, inspiring practices and external resources. It goes as follows:

- Principle #1 – Making inclusion a collective issue.
- Principle #2 – Extend knowledge on the situations of digital vulnerability.
- Principle #3 – Engage with the expertise of all the stakeholders.
- Principle #4 – Develop the mediations between digital services and users.
- Principle #5 – Strengthen the accessibility standards.
- Principle #6 – Articulate environmental and social dimensions.
- Principle #7 – Maintain alternative to digital services.

Dissemination

The valorisation objectives were to propose an informative and participative action around the research results. The process of creation of the guide reaches these two aims. The guide will be permanently available on the CIRTES website, BELSPO and in annex of this report. It will also be disseminated through the researchers' network as well as to intermediary actors in order to broaden the diffusion.

A wrap-up event would be held to disseminate the results and the tool. Although sanitary restrictions due to the pandemic do not allow to maintain the event, an online presentation to all participants involved in the project is scheduled for 11th March 2021 (see Point 3).

5. IMPACT AND ADDED VALUE OF THE VALORISATION ACTION

Digital inclusion is a major challenge for society, a fact that the Covid-19 pandemic could only confirm over the past year. Indeed, the ongoing digitisation of private and public services, and essential fields for social participation such as education or employment represents a potential threat for a growing amount of individuals.

The IDEALiC research project aimed at supporting the implementation of policies and actions towards e-inclusion. However, research results do not always reach all stakeholders. The valorisation action allowed to meet and discuss digital inclusion issue with several designers of digital services. With the support guide, the research results have been made more accessible to a wider audience of stakeholders directly involved in digitalisation processes.

The valorisation action also gives greater visibility and awareness on e-inclusion, with an accessible and concise tool that outlines the main challenges about e-inclusion and provides guidance for further actions. This guidance is oriented towards more inclusive and participatory design approaches and methods to include the diversity of digital users.

The added value of the valorisation action relies on the combination of the research results, multiple references to inspiring practices of e-inclusion in Belgium and France, and its aim of valorising the already existing dense network of actors in our territory.

Integrate the point of view of digital services providers on digital inclusion was one of the innovative approach to the IDEALiC research. It is still an emergent approach in research today, although more and more providers are concerned by the social, but also ethical and environmental, impacts of the digitalisation of society. This project participated in the continuous and growing attention for this aspect of research in the scope of digital inclusion.

For further researches, the valorisation action confirmed the interest to investigate the domain of inclusive digital design for the upcoming years. Moreover, the discussions with the actors has shown that there is a need to investigate and develop policies, support and spaces to make all the different stakeholders (civil society, e-inclusion actors, service providers, ...) able to collaborate durably with each other on digital inclusion projects.

6. MEASURES TO MAINTAIN THE COLLABORATION(S)

During the valorisation action, multiple contacts with stakeholders were held. The interviews with digital services designers and providers were the opportunity of new contacts with providers who wants to take a step in digital inclusion policies, as well as renewing long-standing contacts with some other stakeholders. Links were also established with associations and consultancy actors in digital accessibility, that open the path for further collaboration on digital inclusion challenges.

Through the realisation of her PhD, Périne Brotcorne maintains numerous contacts with fieldwork actors, associations, and stakeholders concerning the issue of digital inclusion.

The guide will also enable the establishment of new or renewed contacts with actors who could not be integrated here during the various encounters.

Finally, we will ask the collaboration of intermediary actors (e.g. King Baudouin Foundation, AdN, etc.) to support the visibility and accessibility of the guide.