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ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF DIGITAL FABRICATION

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Policy Brief

Access to technology as social infrastructure

POLICY BRIEF • 2026 • ZAGREB

Not a technology organisation that does social good — a social organisation for which technology is a tool.



Access to technology as social infrastructure

A proposal for the negotiation process — national and EU level

This document makes one clear request of decision-makers: that democratic access to technology be recognised as **shared social infrastructure** — as fundamental as a school or a library — and that the 2028–2034 financial framework be designed so that this infrastructure reaches where it is needed most: on islands, and in rural and remote regions.

The problem: digital poverty is structural

The widening gap between those who can access new technology and those who cannot is not a side effect of progress to be tolerated — it is **a form of poverty in its own right**. When access depends on where you were born or what you can afford, the gap is no longer personal — it becomes structural. Left unaddressed, the gap compounds: communities that cannot participate in shaping technology become dependent on receiving it, and dependency accelerates the very depopulation and loss of confidence that created the gap.

The premise. When access to technology depends on where you were born or what you can afford, closing the gap is not charity — it is a social obligation. And the means of closing it is infrastructure.

The approach in three moves: Recognise · Trust · Verify

Recognise Treat makerspaces and access to technology as social infrastructure — as fundamental as public schools and libraries, in the spirit of the New European Bauhaus.	Trust Recognise peripheral communities and local actors as contributors, not recipients. Build resilience from local capacity, with funding that reaches those least served.	Verify Answer the fair question — “if we extend trust and funding, how do we know it is justified?” — through accountability built from within the sector, not control from above.
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The same logic that built public schools and libraries must now extend to the tools of the digital age. Democratic access to technology is a condition for cohesion — not a reward for it.

What we concretely ask for the 2028–2034 period

For the next multiannual financial framework, this translates into concrete programme-design choices. **None of them requires new instruments — only the deliberate use of existing ones.**

01 Recognise makerspaces as social infrastructure

Include open innovation spaces within social-infrastructure investment categories — not solely within innovation or culture lines.

02 Funding that reaches those least served

Mechanisms that genuinely reach the organisations and territories existing programmes cover most weakly — islands, rural and remote areas, the Slavonian plains, Lika and Gorski kotar.

03 Recognition of distributed education models

Support for models that validate informally acquired skills — because the future workforce is increasingly educated outside formal lecture halls.

04 Durability rules measured in decades

Let reactivated heritage spaces plan in decades, not project cycles — because renovating an abandoned school or hospital makes no sense if funded on a three-year horizon.

Why trust us — the evidence we already have

30.000+

CHILDREN REACHED

4

SITES IN REACTIVATION · 1
COMPLETE

15

FUNDED EU/NATIONAL PROJECTS

12

COUNTRIES IN THE NETWORK

FabLab Zagreb, Croatia's first FabLab (2013), works on three levels at once — on the ground with schools and communities, institutionally with universities and cities, and at the European level through Horizon Europe, Interreg and Erasmus. Grobnik — the first completed transformation of an abandoned village school into a centre for creativity (2025/26) — is proof the model delivers, on time, with a small municipality.

ACCOUNTABILITY FROM WITHIN – AN ANSWER TO THE COURT OF AUDITORS

The European Court of Auditors found (Special Report 11/2025) that the overview of funding granted to NGOs remains unreliable. Our answer is not more control from above, but a **self-evaluation platform** already built and piloted: organisations voluntarily record their work with evidence, and a public profile and comparable impact index generate automatically. This directly supports the direction of Opinion 10/2026 — **measuring impact, not just spend.**

Notes