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Step from the cold October air and into the atrium of the Lecture-Conference Centre on the campus of the Poznań University of Technology. Banks of plasma screens display super crisp, high resolution images. Delegates use their mobile phones to manipulate images on monitors. Or perhaps you would like to see your future home and office?

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--- *Posted by DG INFSO's team attending the Future Internet Week*

Step from the cold October air and into the atrium of the Lecture-Conference Centre on the campus of the Poznań University of Technology. Banks of plasma screens display super crisp, high resolution images. Delegates use their mobile phones to manipulate images on monitors. Or perhaps you would like to see your future home and office? You can wander through several 'rooms' and see how devices adjust to your preferences - thanks to the RFID tag in the conference pass.

As you leave one room the TV switches off, only for the one nearest you to spring to life and continue your film from exactly where you left it. Your favourite jazz is playing and the personal profile you filled in online also tells the PC on your desk to boot into Windows, not Linux. Even the lights adjust to your preferred levels! It might sound like a gimmick, but this exhibit is just one demonstration of the Future Internet in action. And if you want more serious stuff, then simply listen to the talks and sessions.

The Future Internet Week [3] **kicked off on Monday with the Future Internet Conference**, a day to explore some of the strategic policy issues which Europe, Member States and the regions must tackle to make sure that they don't miss out on the great opportunities that are springing from the digital revolution. "Now is a perfect time to take a huge step ahead," asserted Maria Elżbieta Orłowska, Poland's Secretary of State for Science and Higher Education, in her address. "The Internet is a driver for growth and we must build economic growth on this new technology backbone."

The importance of that backbone of connectivity was a recurring theme throughout the day. The conference heard about the European Commission's recently adopted €50 billion plan to boost the EU's transport, energy and digital networks. More than €9 billion has been earmarked by the [Connecting Europe Facility](#) [4] for broadband rollout. The Future Internet is also seen to have an important part to play in European cohesion too; in the current [European Regional Development Fund](#) [5] (ERDF) over €2 billion is allocated to improve internet access in the regions and almost €13 billion for innovative regional ICT applications.

The Future Internet is viewed as an exciting opportunity for regional development, each region building on its own strengths in ICT and innovation. **The buzzword for this 'localisation' of Future Internet development is 'smart specialisation'**. After 2013 each region will be expected

to draw up a smart specialisation strategy which will be used by the Commission to allocate cohesion funds appropriately – to increase innovation in low innovating regions or to concentrate resources in strong regions to build and exploit critical mass.

The Commission also announced that a [Smart Specialisation Platform](#) [6] is currently in development and should become operation in 2012 to support the regions in their efforts to specialise and access funds. A series of Future Internet activities and networks among organisations throughout the Baltic states, falling under the umbrella of CyberBaltic, was presented as a good example of smart specialisation in practice.

But is Europe really ready for the digital revolution, wonders Ziga Turk? As chair of the [Reflection Group on the Future of Europe 2020-2030](#) [7], he has had plenty of time to ponder. The reason why the west has done so well over the past 500 years is because its liberal values and social circumstances meant that it could turn the information technology of the 1500s – paper and printing – into a revolution. But will Europe lead the digital age?

This latest revolution in communication can be used to empower people or as a tool for control and power autocrats, dictators and the state. “We must be careful to ensure that the Future Internet is a democratic instrument. Every talent in Europe is important no matter which region they are in,” argues Professor Turk. “We must keep the Future Internet open and free and use it to make the most of our talented people.”

And you only have to walk through the atrium to realise just **how much talent is out there.**

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