

With reference to the concept of 'info rich and info poor' discuss the view that rather than binding society closer together information technologies are increasing divisions both within countries and between countries.



**Mestrado em Gestão de
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Abstract

There are many complex issues about the information society that we need to be aware before it truly spread across the globe bringing benefits to all.

One of those is the gap between “info-rich” and “info-poor”.

This gap divides not only countries, regions inside countries but people in the same region.

Cultural and Social problems exist alongside economic problems.

Information technology needs to be brought to affordable levels to be available for all.

Keywords

Information society, Info gap, “info-rich” and “info-poor”.

Introduction

The Info gap is a very important problem in this beginning of the century.

I will present the relation between people and their society, the benefits the Information Society can bring to all and the subtle line between the info-rich and info-poor.

The person and the society

The values of a person are the product of a complex and long process generated in the relationship between the individual and the society where he is inserted.

This relationship is in direct proportion with the knowledge and civilization degree that the societies offer to their citizens. A better education process will give the individual a better knowledge of his rights and duties, a better conscience of his place on the society that is suffering internal and external pressure to which it is needed to answer in a growing fast, efficient and intelligence manner.

The prosperity and well being of a community is in direct proportion with the proved capacity of the individuals (organized or isolated) that answer to the challenges every time more complex that the external competitiveness proposes.

This movement is uncoiled in the margin or in the periphery of the instituted powers and at differentiated speeds, which are function of the degree of development of the most developed countries.

Information Society

The Information Society will also be a knowledge society, where know-how replaces land and capital as the basic building blocks of growth, in which the need for life long learning - in school, in the home, and on the job - will be paramount.

The use of the information society can be a way out of the abyss. Anyone can use it to find information or look for a job.

The Information Society can also enhance the social integration by decreasing combat exclusion and isolation in all its forms and can increase participation and therefore involvement and co-responsibility of citizens.

It will permit more people to work from home for at least some of the time and will allow more services - especially education services - to be available to all.

But, the transition to the Information Society poses challenges. People living in isolated communities (rural or poorer neighborhoods), or people who are unemployed or uneducated are unlikely to have access to new technologies. This brings the danger of creating an info-excluded Society.

“Info-rich” and “Info-poor”

The poverty or the wealth of each nation, its educational system, its development degree and access to the new communication systems, constitute the indicators that delimit the first border that separates the calls “info-rich” of the “info-poor”. The second border line, in the so called “info-poor”, settles inside each country, or region, between small communities or individuals that, through voluntary initiatives, gathered technological and communication capacities to free themselves of the narrow border of the isolationism and the info-poverty, entering for own initiative in some of the systems of the society of “third wave”.

There is a close correlation between economic and social development and access to telecommunications. Access to new communication technologies expands much more rapidly in the north hemisphere than in the south one. Still half of the world's population has never used a phone.

Developing countries are in a position of inferiority because the principal media means are in the hands of a few main western groups. Many times, information about Africa and broadcast for Africans doesn't come from the African continent, but is broadcast by westerners who transmit their own vision of Africa, without any real perception of its economic, cultural and social situation.

The demarcation between the "info-rich" and the "info-poor" does not systematically follow the demarcation between the so-called developed and developing countries. Access to information technology in the so-called rich countries is also rather uneven.

In the same country there are gaps between the rich and the poor, the employed and the unemployed, old and young, single and dual-parent families, those with and without disabilities, the people who belong to society and the people who are rejected

by it. And certain groups are systematically excluded, such as racial and ethnical groups, poorer neighborhoods, women, working class households, or peripheral rural communities.

Many people cannot afford to subscribe to Information Society services as individuals. Others live in locations where the IS infra-structural facilities are less well developed. In addition, it is important to take account of the needs of people who find IS-based services difficult to use or hard to come to terms with.

Thus, European Union with “The Green book for the Information Society” aims for the democratization of the access to the information society with the creation of regional and local resource centers to facilitate access to information for members of local communities.

Particular attention needs to be given also to the needs of older people and disabled people who are often perceived as being less geared to the use of technology and unable to take part in the Information Society. There are already ways to help the “reading” for disabled people, but these devices are expensive and not all the information society is prepared for their use.

To access to the information society at this time you need: an access device with telecommunication access, device operation skills, normally reading skills and most of the times to know English because the information is still most in English.

An aspect to be aware of is the lack of literacy of many people in the world. In some regions of Europe the degree of analphabets is more than 10%. In Africa in some countries this number gets to 50% and in the case of women to 90%.

But nowadays, it's not only important to have people that can read and operate the technology, but to get more information of the IS they need to know English. This is because English is the main language on the Internet (one of the most important aspects of the Information society), which can be easily explained by the fact that the Internet was created in the United States and also because English is one common language in US and Canada where the most internet users are living. To reach as large an audience as possible, the solution that is appearing in the Internet is to create bilingual, trilingual or even multilingual sites; or to provide translation software to improve communication between everyone in the international Internet community. This kind of software may be very helpful but will never have the same quality as a

translation prepared by a human translator with special knowledge of the subject and the contents of the site.

Visions

There are two kind of visions about the information society: there is the ones that think that the new cyberculture will be available to all and the ones that think that it will only wide the gaps.

We must be skeptical when reading the utopian vision of the positivists. We know that the world lives according to the big economies and we cannot imagine that a world with so many gaps between the economic-poor and economic-rich can like magic make the gaps disappear.

Even if the economy is not the only factor of the gap, it's one of the most important. Technologic and education investments in a global way are needed to make the Information Society a real global Society.

We also must not be totally negatives about the Information Society: it can improve lives. Some disabled people have already used the technology and Information society to contact others, write books and work in different areas.

If the social aspect can be deal with, between countries and inside them, the gaps will start to disappear.

Some countries like the European Union countries have already traced a plan to get the Information Society near the people, but these actions need to be brought to daylight and need time to be implemented.

We must not forget that the 20th century saw a lot of changes in governments and in the "world size". An idea, that something that happened in that country can have impact in our small street as arise. "We are not alone" doesn't apply only to alien people in Science fiction, we are now a product of the various contacts we have with the other societies.

Conclusion

The new Treaty of Tordesilhas, that today separates the info-poor of the info-rich ones, no longer is like its predecessor, a dividing line solidly implanted in the middle of the ocean, and to the left of the line everything belongs to Spain, while to the right they will be the Portuguese to enjoy the lands and discovered goods. The border of this century is quite more subtle: it is defined inside the countries, the regions and, sometimes even, in the breast of the families separate by the acceptance or refuse of giving the jump of the border that delimits the ones that already have access to the new means of interactive communication, of those that still didn't accede her.

A challenge is to use the Information Society to strengthen social cohesion and enhance people's ability to participate fully in every aspect of social and economic life, to make it a tool for the creation of an inclusive society.

Information technologies offer a broad selection of tools for supporting citizens with special needs. It is imperative in a democratic society to support citizens in such circumstances to ensure they do not become excluded from society.

The Information Society should be used to unlock the power of information, not to reinforce existing or create new inequalities between the “rich” and the “poor”.

Releasing the potential of Information Society involves adapting the technology to peoples' needs and to get it at affordable levels.

The country society will reflect the contact that it will have on the Information society has as already be noted with the contact with other “physical” societies.

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