

Sociedade da Informação

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"Information Society" is an overworked expression that has been used to denote many different concepts. The general sense in which it is most commonly used refers to a growing high-technology, materially affluent service society where, information rather than raw materials or energy is the dominant technology. It strives toward a society characterised by increasing responsiveness towards individual human needs, and toward preserving ecological balances.

An information society is the one that:

- enables most of its members to engage in productive pursuits that, are knowledge-intensive, knowledge-generating and knowledge-based;
- has a communication network that freely circulates information so that this information is consistently, effectively and efficiently acted upon in the making of choices
- manages inevitable conflict between conservative pressures and pressures for adaptive change by reason, knowledge-based understanding, and enlightened creative wisdom blended with human values, rather than traditional resort to base emotions and brute force alone.

Society has always been an information society, it has always been dependent on information. And there has always been a rudimentary infrastructure. For thousands of years society's dependence on information was not apparent - as the quality of information was small enough that it could be remembered and passed on by word of mouth as was the case of our vedas and upanishadas. The earliest written records in all cultures were inventories, laws and histories the basic mnemonic tools to preserve society. Even written literature was intended to prompt memory and not to convey meaning directly. When the quantity of information became too great for memory to remember, society created approximate methods for its storage. Information was still seen as passive, ancillary to the activity it recorded, rather than as a dynamic resource.

However, people in charge of government and income-generating activities certainly knew the value of information as a dynamic resource. They used it and as far as possible controlled it. In Europe from the middle ages to the nineteenth century, governments took steps to control information channels such as the book trade and newspapers, education was limited to the wealthy families that already controlled the income-generating activities.

In the nineteenth century, however, governments in many countries were persuaded to become more liberal, simultaneously industry became aware of the need for better educated workers, an increase in the publication of information, and an improvement in general education, along with a general economic

development, and the cumulative effect of the growth of universities and the scientific discoveries of the eighteenth century caused a fundamental change in society's view and use of information, and indeed in knowledge itself that started in the late nineteenth century and generally recognized by the middle of this century.

? TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

What is information society? Can we talk about the existence of different kind of societies coexisting at the same time? All of us will take place in the information society? Are there groups of people excluded of the progress? Where can we find out them? What kind of processes produce social exclusion? Would be the access to technological innovation a mechanism of social exclusion in the near future?. These are questions we will try to think about.

II. What is at stake with the Information Society ?

" We are living through one of the most fundamental technological and social changes in history. The revolution in information technologies that took shape in the early 1970s, and diffused throughout the economy, society, and culture in the last quarter of the twentieth century, has profoundly transformed the way we live, work, produce, consume, communicate, travel, think, enjoy, make war and peace, give birth, and die. It has also transformed, as have all major technological revolutions, the material foundations of human life, time, and space;" (*Manuel Castells*).

II.1 What is information society ?

"Information society" means the latest stage of an economically developed society, the main activities and institutions of which are based upon use and development of information and communication technologies : **"By informational city, I understand an urban system with sociospatial structure and dynamics determined by a reliance of wealth, power, and culture, on knowledge and information processing in global networks, managed and organized through intensive use of information/communication technologies."** (*Manuel Castells*)

Since communication as well as information is involved in the definition of information society, there are two main dimensions to be considered in it : a **social** one, related to the communicational aspect, and an **intellectual** one, related to the informational aspect.

II.2 What is communication ?

SHANNON's Model Diagram

- **Transmission is not communication itself, but only its material support**
- **Rational animal**
 - = **social animal**
 - = **communicating animal**

Man needs society not only for his material wants, but furthermore for his spiritual existence and development. People need communication to exchanging the soul goods. Communication, as expressing the spiritual nature of person, is oriented to its development. In any philosophy of communication, there is an anthropology of person.

- **Language is the archetype and the basis of social communication means.**

Now sign (or symbol) is the central concept for linguistics, hence sign (symbol) is a central concept for communication study.

"Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (*Aristotle, On Interpretation, 1*).

Signs and symbols can be **material**, but the sense or meaning of "mental experience" is definitely **immaterial**.

- **Definition of "communication":**

- exchange of mental experience through articulated signs or symbols.
- communication is exchange of information.

II.3 What is information ?

- **Information analogically means both :**

- ? 1/ the content of mental experience, as exchangeable in communication
- ? 2/ what is dealt with by computers and is flowing through networks.

- **Information in sense 2 is sign (or symbol) of information in sense 1.**

• **Computers and networks are materially dealing with something immaterial. Here is the reason of their power.**

- **Definition of "information":**

To "in-form" means to give form. As a matter of fact, information is related to Aristotelian form. But we must keep in consideration the two modalities of existence of the form :

1/ "**entitative**" form, as the immaterial part of the existing thing ;

2/ "**intentional**" form, or, say, "**cognitive**" form, as constituting the content of the concept abstracted from the thing through the knowing process.

- **Definition:**

- **as the immaterial content of communication, or as knowledge (sense 1), information is intentional or cognitive form.**

- **as the material object of computing (sense 2), information is the sign (or symbol) of cognitive form.**

New Dimensions of Time and Space

It is obvious that along with the other factors the social dimensions of time and space are changing. This development is, of course, in a very essential way dependent on the development of technology. At the same time it has changed people's social and psychological horizons.

The modernization is to a large extent about simply the creation of disembedding mechanisms which always contain a spatio-temporal dimension, too. (Giddens 1990) The information society is as itself an aggregate of instances which overcome some spatial obstacles of special action fields as well as those of everyday life.

What is Information Society?

One of the most important aspects of postmodern society, or as I prefer to express following Giddens' terminology, of the **radicalization of modernity**, is the state of social development which has been referred to by the concept of information society. This concept as such is not very stimulating, nor illuminating. It is, however, so widely used in scientific and public contexts that there is no point in disregarding it. Rather, we must try to show what is the use of it, and what kind of actors in our society use it and why and how they do so.

In short, the concept of "**information society**" seems to be the way of (A) describing technologically driven tendencies and opportunities of our societies, as

well as (B) legitimizing certain public policies. The latter aspect is well presented in the European Union's policy, see for example following net sources

- ? Bangemann report, <http://www.echo.lu/eudocs/en/bangemann.html>
- ? Europe's Way to the Information Society: An Action Plan by Commission of the European Communities, <http://www.echo.lu/eudocs/en/com-asc.html> and
- ? EC Information Society Project Office Webserver ISPO, <http://www.ispo.cec.be/>.

- ? *See also Information Society web sites,*
<http://www.uta.fi/~kuaran/links.html#infosociety> (VALOGOS)

Information society is part of the public and everyday discussions, and forms as such an inherent part of the reality of our social life.

The Concept of Information

There are many concepts which should be clarified if we wish to understand the meaning of information society. They affect our social life and construction of social realities, and are in this sense "real" (though not material) entities of our world. But what does the concept of "information" tell about information society?

In the dictionaries the concept of **information** is usually defined something like *the facts that tell us something about the world we live in*. Sometimes it looks very similar to "knowledge" which refers to the facts, skills and understanding that one has gained through learning or experience (there is also the concept of knowledge society, but I leave it aside here).

In the information society the "information" is seen as a key resource or means of production. Gathering and classifying information, processing data, using and evaluating information and knowledge, should, then, be vital concerning the dynamics of society. And in fact, it really seems to help in forming new efficient ways of production and reproduction. It increases economic activities, and intensifies wide range of transactions. Edward Blakely has emphasised strongly this aspect in his article in 'Cities of the 21st Century' (1991, 230): *"It is very clear that flows of data and information will play a larger role than the flow of goods or capital. Cities that are the transmission points and the control centres for information systems will play an increasingly important role in shaping the world."* (Cities of the 21st Century edited by Brotchie & Batty & Hall & Newton).

If we think about this aspect, there is no doubt that the technology is in a special role in the play.

Information Technology

There is no information society without information and communication technology. It is a way of extending and intensifying the use of information. As a matter of fact, the contents of the concept of information society seems to refer very often, at least in everyday speech, to information technology society.

The so called technological push has been in recent years the driving force of development. Consequently, information society is dependent upon complex electronic information and communication networks, and allocate relatively great portion of its resources to information and communication activities, such as new telematic services (Cities of the 21st Century 1991, 67, 73-75, 95-97).

Instances of Information Society

Though information society is quite vague and narrow concept, there are a lot of instances which indicate and reflect the tendencies and trends it is meant to describe. Wide range of technology industry and related services known as information economy are the core of it, but hardly enough to create the information society.

However, the change in the relevance and use of information and knowledge change also our institutions (Cities of the 21st Century 1991, 66-67). Most private enterprises and public sector bodies use very much information technology in their day-to-day activities. In the educational systems in many countries, from schools to universities, technological infrastructure of information society is both used and studied. Beside the television and videos, home computers are more and more "must" in standard household equipment. The list of these kinds of instances could be made almost endless. And, because most of the people are in some ways using information technology in their work, we can even say we already live in the information society.

Summary

Information society is a concept which emphasizes the use of information and information technology in practically every field of society.

References

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Information Society

Information Society is a term for a society in which the creation, distribution, and manipulation of information has become the most significant economic and cultural activity. An Information Society may be contrasted with societies in which the economic underpinning is primarily Industrial or Agrarian. The machine tools of the Information Society are computers and telecommunications, rather than lathes or ploughs.

Policy makers for the G7 (now G8) group of nations recognised, only a few years ago, that:

Progress in information technologies and communication is changing the way we live: how we work and do business, how we educate our children, study and do research, train ourselves, and how we are entertained. The information society is not only affecting the way people interact but it is also requiring the traditional organisational structures to be more flexible, more participatory and more decentralised. (Chair's conclusions from the G-7 Ministerial Conference on the Information Society, February 1995.)

The idea of a global Information Society can be viewed in relation to Marshall McLuhan's prediction that the communications media would transform the world into a "global village."

Here is a succinct definition from the IBM Community Development Foundation in a 1997 report, "The Net Result - Report of the National Working Party for Social Inclusion."

Information Society: A society characterised by a high level of information intensity in the everyday life of most citizens, in most organisations and workplaces; by the use of common or compatible technology for a wide range of personal, social, educational and business activities, and by the ability to transmit, receive and exchange digital data rapidly between places irrespective of distance.

What is the Information Society

The information society is a term used to describe a society and an economy that makes the best possible use of new information and communication technologies

(ICT's). In an Information Society people will get the full benefits of new technology in all aspects of their lives: at work, at home and at play. Examples of ICT's are: ATM's for cash withdrawal and other banking services, mobile phones, teletext television, faxes and information services such as the internet and e-mail. These new technologies have implications for all aspects of our society and economy, they are changing the way in which we do business, how we learn and how we spend our leisure time. This also means important challenges for the Government:

- ? Our laws need to be up to date in order to support electronic transactions.
- ? Our people need to be educated about new technology.
- ? Businesses must get online if they are to succeed.
- ? Government services should be available electronically.