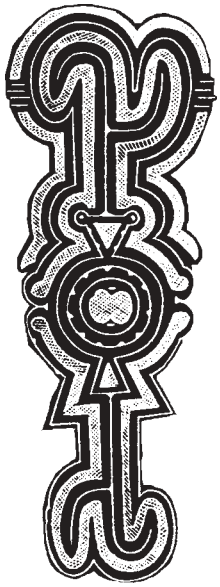
Other side of the divide

Latin-American and Caribbean Perspectives on the WSIS



Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie

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The Francophonie has been the promoter of a effort of collaboration of several organizations of the french speaking, spanish speaking and portugues speaking worlds establishing an alliance to accept the challenges raised by the information society in relation to the cultural diversity. The project Three Linguistic Spaces (http://www.3el.org/) is an innovating environment of reflection for the design of new strategies of international cooperation to reinforce, through the dialogue between the cultures, the construction of a peace culture, one of whose main values it is the respect by the differences.

Also Francophonie has contributed to the World Summit on the Information Society (http://smsi.francophonie.org/) and, in complement to its intergovernmental role (see the contributions for the Summit products of the Inter-ministerial Conference of Rabat in http://www.francophonie.org/documents/pdf/declarations/declaration_rabat_esp pdf) has supported to the participation of actors and actresses of the civil society to the different stages of the Summit.

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The "Internet and Society" Program of the Bolivarian University of Chile has as objective to contribute to the formulation of public policies to assure the access, use and social appropriation of the Internet by the public sector, the private sector and the civil society. All this in order to maximize the social welfare and the sustainable development. It develops activities oriented to feed the debate on the impact on the Internet in the Society, to develop capacities to make the social appropriation possible of the Internet, and to design and to execute pilot projects to facilitate learning processes and to replicate the successful practices.

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Thinking about knowledge society in Costa Rica

Kemly Camacho

Last year Costa Rica was placed in the Report on the Human Development Index (produced by the United Nations) as one of the countries with the highest potential for becoming a knowledge society. This placing is principally due to a low level of illiteracy, a high degree of telephone and electricity cover, a program of educative computer skills that has been going on for 15 years – giving priority to rural areas, a program of English as a second language in public schools, and foreign investment in the extremely important area of technology (for example, Intel, which contributes significantly to the Gross National Product. Also, Costa Rica has one of the highest indices in Latin America for locally developed software. However, it is not yet clear what a knowledge society means nor what its implications are for the country. Without this consideration it will be very difficult to prepare the conditions for an appropriate entry by Costa Rica and other Latin American countries into this global dynamic.

Several months ago took place the**National Conference on the Knowledge Economy**, in which the main guidelines were set out that are being promoted to 'prepare the country' for the new economy. Representatives from different national sectors participated in this event. This document aims to make some contributions to a discussion on the knowledge society and the actions that have to be undertaken by the State for it to be incorporated in it.

The vision of a knowledge society: The above Conference emphasized the need to prepare the conditions for national businesses to be able to easily link up with multinational businesses. To achieve the greater contact and interaction that this process will require, the creation of an improved telecommunications infrastructure is called for.

However, the knowledge society needs to be understood more widely, since, although a transformation of capitalist society is not implied but rather a reinforcement of it, it does involve changes in economic structures and social fundamentals.

Without wanting to mention all the fundamental changes, since that is not the aim of this paper, it is important to emphasize that the basis of this new economic structure is not companies, as until now, but networks. This implies that individual and business competition, which might be for jobs or for products and services, does not only develop in a national or regional market but in a global market. Material possessions lose importance in this new society, thus questioning the concept of private property on which the wealth of capitalist society is based. What acquires value is knowledge and its continuous development, which is expressed through new technologies and new services. So businesses reduce their assets, their facilities, and their demand for permanent personnel, from which appear new ways of recruiting. This produces a redistribution of work, diminishing even further opportunities in the agriculture and livestock area, also reducing demand in the industrial area and expanding it in the area of services and knowledge. The opportunities lost in other sectors are difficult to make up in the knowledge and services sector, since the training required in these new kinds of employment is expensive and ongoing.

Aspects such as those already mentioned, whch are fundamental features of a knowledge society, are not yet being seen, and are not yet being discussed in the national Costa Rican environment, in politics, in national businesses, in teaching centers, nor in social organizations. One of the most important of these aspects which have a bearing nowadays is that of creating a series of national debates which could put on the agenda the vision that is held of the new society, other countries experiences and the implications for their people.

Parallel investment: Another of the important challenges that a State like Costa Rica has is trying to drive parallel investment. The majority of the resources that are available to the knowledge society are being directed towards creating and changing the telecommunications infrastructure. It starts with the premise of 'It'll be alright on the night'. That is to say that, once the infrastructure is established, the rest of the aspects necessary to be successfully incorporated into the new social organization will develop spontaneously thanks to the availability of this infrastructure.

However, parallel investment should be encouraged. Scarce resources should be distributed between four important aspects: a) infrastructure development, b)

change in working processes at all levels, c) change in primary, secondary and tertiary education, including options of permanent education, d) change in the legal and regulatory framework that would allow the country and its participants to be easily incorporated into this new social order.

a. The development of the telecommunications infrastructure as a State monopoly: One of the most insisted aspects National Conference is about the need to eliminate the state monopoly of the telecommunications sector and allow free competition to make services offered in this area more efficient and cheaper. This is also a requirement that large national businesses and multinationals are making to stimulate investment.

On the contrary to what is proposed, the national state company that up till now has had responsibility for electrification, telephony, and currently telecommunications, in Costa Rica should be strengthened. The satisfactory situation we have in our country in terms of the cover and quality of electrification and telephony (more than 90% of the national territory) has justly been due to this state monopoly. The telecommunications sector should not have to be an exception and

access to new technologies should be considered a right of the man in the street. The only possibility to guarantee that knowledge technologies are a citizen's right is for them to be put them under state control and for that to go on developing actions to provide universal access to technology. What is necessary is to eliminate obstacles in order to speed up the actions of the state enterprise and allow part of its resources to be invested in research and development of new technologies.

That is a question of principle, which should not be undervalued by the pressure that the new model of development based on information and communication technologies could exert.

b. Work processes cannot go on as they are: Another aspect that is unclear in the Costa Rican political, academic, business and organizational environment is the vehement need to transform processes by means of which products and services, state actions and organization in general are developed.

The process of change, creativity and ongoing innovation that involves the knowledge society is not understood, nor is it perceived in the national environment. There exists a magic perception that by incorporating new technologies into existing work processes changes will make themselves. However, it is becoming necessary to reflect on, convert and reformulate traditional ways processes are carried out. This implies time, effort, great willingness and a positive attitude to change. This is the most difficult aspect to make clear and for this reason it is more complicated to convince the various participants that it is important to invest effort.

c. Education that goes beyond the needs of multinationals: one of the aspects that attracted most attention was research that was undertaken to guide the country's educational policies and job creation. This was based on the needs that multinational companies have in respect of the kind of co-workers they need. Broadly speaking, it talks about young people with specialized technical knowledge and an excellent command of English.

Although Costa Rica's good level of education is recognized, this is not reflected by such companies in the research, innovation, and creation of new knowledge in my country. In this sense, one of the most important aspects in which it must have a bearing at a political level is in understanding that entering the new economy means more than just satisfying these necessities.

Entry in the new knowledge economy requires new features in the training of human resources that are different from traditional processes. Amongst them, ongoing education in place of finite education. Inter- and multi-disciplinary education and not so much specific and closed training as at present, training in multicultural teams, training towards creativity, innovation and the ongoing generation of new knowledge, excellent use of new technologies and foreign languages, psychological education for an unstable and very competitive world of work, of great opportunities but with high degrees of uncertainty and stress. I believe that this last aspect is extremely important in the new training; whereas at present the curricula of nearly all careers include some subjects for preparation for work in the world of business or of organization, the new curricula should include subjects for preparation for distance learning.

d. A user-friendly and flexible regulatory framework: For those of us who are convinced of the importance of the State as a regulatory body in the service of development, a State like that of Costa Rica - with a universalistic character - guarantees to a certain extent the redistribution of resources and responsibility for those who have fewer privileges.

However, it is clear that within the present regulatory framework, with its existing laws and current state processes, it is very difficult for Costa Rica to be able to succeed in its entry into the knowledge society, principally because the slowness with which changes and new initiatives get approved does not allow for the fluidity and agility that this kind of society implies. **The present regulatory framework restricts innovation and creativity.**

For example, it is difficult to favor new forms of employment that innovate and change the ones used at present to contract co-workers without losing the social guarantees that have been won by them themselves. It is necessary to find a way of transforming national accounting processes that are still based on possessions and assets. It is necessary to give support to working in networks and the flexibility that this implies for transforming and retransforming the institutions and businesses that participate in them. It is necessary to have a regulatory framework and financial and training support for creating new small and medium-size businesses that work in the sector of services and knowledge (at present priority is given to small and medium-size businesses that work in production).

The big challenge is in how to create a freer and more flexible regulatory framework that does not lose its universalistic character and does not give space for favoring only those who have most possibilities.

In conclusion, I believe that there still exists very little clarity about what the knowledge society means in my country, how its development will affect us, how we can enter into it and what actions we need to take now to be prepared for the near future. Without this understanding we will be walking with a 'blind man's stick', investing in cables and computers, creating websites in State institutions, but without a clear view of what is involved in the qualitative leap that has to be made with the effort of all the participants.

Information Society in Haiti: mechanisms and conditions for technological empowerment

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July, 2003

In Haiti, the concept of the information society is already part of the public speech. That is a direct consequence of having in perspective the World Summit on the Information Society to be held in Geneva, in December 2003, and in Tunis, in 2005.

Somehow, the media echoes the happenings that encompass the process of preparation of the summit conferences and refer themselves sometimes to reflections, as a result of meetings in Haiti or overseas. Sometimes, they also question themselves about the attitude of the country authorities that seem utterly inactive as far as the preparation of these summit conferences is concerned.

This timid approach from some media to the subject of the information society is, to a great extent, an outcome of a sensitization work performed by some groups or institutions of the communication sector or NICT (newer information and communication technologies).

During specific events such the Fair of Internet, in April, 2002 and in 2003, organized by the group Médialternatif with the participation of the Réseau Télématique Haïtien pour la Recherche et le Développement (REHRED, Haitian Telematic Network for Research and Development), technological fairs, organized since quite some years by the Croissance group, brainstorming conferences, such as the ones organized by Réseau de Développement Durable d'Haïti (RDDH, sustainable development network of Haiti), the United Nations Developing Program (UNDP), the Francophony University Agency and the Haitian Office of Copyrights and the « e-journées », organized during Spring 2003 by Arobase organization, among others, there were references to the challenges that implies the information society.

Unfortunately, those efforts have been far from succeeding that a true public debate be established about the advantages and obligations of the information society. Even less one could say that it has been developed a Haitian shared vision about this matter that takes into consideration the socioeconomic, sociopolitical and cultural specificities of the country. The concept is far from being empowered.

This discussion has not taken place either within the heart of the social movements and fighting spaces. Actors from theses movements as well as organizations that participate in them, use, with more o less efficacy, the NICT to be informed or to get in touch with the world processes of making aware or mobilizing about themes of public or sectorial interest. The Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA, Haitian platform in favor of an alternative development), for instance, recognizes the strategic value of the NICT.

But in general, the use of the NICT does not goes further than the practical, without considering theses technologies the entry point to the information society, as a battle field for the fostering of some values and claiming in strategic terms, as has been shown in "Movimientos Sociales en la Red",[1] it means, aiming at developing individual and organizational capabilities for the flow of ideas, links and liaisons establishment, negotiation, resistance, etc.

From the traditional communication channels to the NICT

Nevertheless, if one looks at what has happened over the last thirty years, it can be seen that the problem of communication and information has been a crucial issue for the Haitian society, poorly literately and one in which dominates the oral culture. In this context, the radio acquired a capital importance during the last decades. More than 150 radio stations are operating today in the country, among which some are communitarian radio networks.

The Haitians have developed a culture of listening to the radio.[2] Radio remains as the media that reaches the greatest amount of public, not only for literacy related reasons, but also due to the weak development of electric and telecom infrastructure,[3] the uneven geography and the degree of isolation of local villages.

Despite energy difficulties, television gets greater importance in the cities and competes against radio, mainly at night. Twenty-five stations operate or have authorization to do so in the country.

The written press has a rather poor development, due to the high percentage of illiteracy and economic precariousness. The official daily, *L'Union* and a private

1 Osvaldo León, Sally Burch, Eduardo Tamayo, Movimientos Sociales en la Red (Social Movements in the Net), ALAI (Agencia Latinoamericana de Información), Ecuador, September 2001.

2 Cf. Gotson Pierre, NTIC, Médias et Défense des Droits Humains en Haïti, http://www.pancaribbean.com/wacaribe/ntic.htm, October 2001.

3 The official figures stated that in 2000 some 32% of homes had electricity, particularly in the capital city of Port o Prince. The total electricity production tends to diminish and was in 2001 of 440 MWh. In 2002, the number of fixed and cellular telephone lines were some 300.000, it means, some 34 phone lines per 1000 habitants.

one, *Le Nouvelliste*, are regularly edited in the capital city; but over the last decades many daily or weekly publications disappeared.

Three press agencies (Agence Haïtienne de Presse, Haïti Press Network y AlterPresse) operate uninterrupted in the country since several years, feed the radio, television and the daily journals and benefit from the on line diffusion.

In general, perhaps for a fashion effect, there is an increasing trend in the Haitians media to developing on line contents, that in the case of the radio, television and for the daily journals. Some radios, like Radio Vision 2000 and Radio Solidarité, publish directly in Internet. Some others like Radio Métropole and Signal FM have information web sites, and even some have web pages as window sites.[4]

The television web sites are much less frequent. Attempts to regularly feed an Internet space by the National Television have failed. Out of our two dairy newspapers, the official diversifies its presence through Internet and two Haitian weekly magazines edited from the Diaspora (Haïti-Progrès and Haïti en Marche) outreach their editions by means of web sites.[5]

However, it does not seem that in the majority of cases the communication policy takes into consideration all dimensions of the information society phenomenon. "Informatics hardware within the majority of radio stations is poor. It is unusual that staff have computers available. In general Internet access depends on personal initiatives of journalists and entertainers."[6]

Anyhow, it is becoming a continual reference to Internet as source of news, both domestic and international. Many chronics are specifically based on Internet contents or are referred to multimedia. Sometimes, whole programs are dedicated to this problem.

Beyond Access

In addition to the media, despite the low availability level of resources in Haiti, Internet is playing an increasingly significant role in the life of many people. Many a person asks himself how would it perform without Internet.

It was during early 90s that Haitians discovered computer-mediated communication, and electronic mail prevailed during the three years of the bloody military coup d'état of September 1991. In 1993, REHRED was born. And in 1996, the first chances of access to navigation.[7]

4 Cf. Gotson Pierre, Internet, Radio, Communication Globale et Populations Marginalisées en Haïti, www.comunica.org/tampa/docs/gotson1.doc, September 2000.

5 In addition to the news content, the Haitian Internet offers a high percentage of cultural sites and discussion forums. Often Haitian communities outside the country create the forums and its participants come, mostly, from the Diaspora. Observers have pointed out that each time more Non Governmental Organizations, commercial institutions and public institutions integrate Internet within their communication activities.

6. Cf. Gotson Pierre,Internet, Radio, Communication Globale…

7 Cf. Ives Marie Chanel & Ronald Colbert, Haïti–technologie : l'Internet face à l'archaïsme des Structures, http://www.panosinst.org/Haiti/h10-99f.shtml, October 1999 (Report prepared by Panos).

A dozen of private Internet Service Providers (ISP) currently offers Internet access, either by dial-up connection or by radio waves. A survey published by RDDH in 2002, there were 7000 Internet users in the country. Theses could be institutions, families or physical individuals, with some 23% of the share being academic, 23% industrial, 23% home users, 19% commercial telecenters and 13% small commercial ISP.–[8]

The majority of internauts (mainly professionals, public administration executive staff, private sector, non governmental organizations, international organizations, students, faculty and journalists) live in Port Prince, but country cities are beginning to get access.

The most important phenomenon within the last years is the continuous creation of telecenters with Internet access to those who are not able to pay for a computer or connection fees. Almost 85% of telecenters are based in the metropolitan area.[9]

Being the case of domestic access, institutional o through access centers, it's being observed that research, emailing and files interchange needs are fulfilled. But the application with the grater impact is telephony. "Telephony is the first service among the more used in telecenters, with 62,6%, even with a cost 6 times greater",[10] shows the RDDH Report.

A journalist was asking himself recently if theses users could be considered interenauts. In a more general way, the question should be to find out what is the Haitian user's attitude towards the ICT, to what extend he/she feels consciously integrated to information society and what critical path could take with respect to the currently processes gong on. At this time it is not possible to answer theses questions, due to the fact that there has not been a survey or study aimed at them.

What is true is that there exists a great need to educate on the critical approach of communication processes, both in the professional media and the great public in general.

As it can be seen, the central element that lacks in Haiti, related to information society, is an active attitude towards ICT. The risk is the Haitians using the newer media, as they were used to with their antecessors: as mere receptors.

Radio and ICT, a formula for technological empowerment

A sector that, in the Haitian experience, has proved that people can shift from a passive to an active role is communitarian radio.

Nine years ago a relatively important movement of communitarian radio was born in Haiti, at a time when the constitutional legitimacy was being returned, after the military coup d'état of September 1991. Was a time of openness and empowerment of the public voice, what favored the emergence of many communitarian radio stations.

8 RDDH/GSIS, "Enquête sur l'interconnexion des fournisseurs d'accès Internet, September-October 2002", quoted in RDDH/PNUD, Plan d'Action pour le Développement des Technologies de l'Information en Haït, December 2002.

9. Ibídem.

10. It most be stressed that approximately 1/8 of Haitian population lives abroad. Out of some 8 millions of Haitians, more tan a million lives outside the country. To keep communicated the expatriated relatives and the country residents would be the main preference for telephony through Internet that allows a considerable reduction in costs.

Currently more than forty, collectives of democratic and popular organizations often own theses radio stations. The operate in cities, small towns and villages favoring, in many cases, the participation of the local population in the public debate, sometimes, in the material and financial management of the radio stations, that transform thus into true own achievements for the communities.

But it cannot be denied that, unfortunately, several of theses experiences, faced with the challenges of the political situation as to economic and organizational problems, were unsuccessful with effects opposite to what was expected.

However, originating from the potentiality that showed some of theses projects was possible to put forward the idea of fostering a combination of media and informatics and radio phonic devices in order to enable underserved sectors have ICT access. [11]

The radios, equipped with telematic resources, would play thus, somehow, roles as the ones assumed by telecenters. But even better that those, its diffusion media would allow them to reach vast populations, offering practical services, such as messaging, and acting as channels for educational efforts with respect to the challenges of communication.

All players of the ICT sector in Haiti do not share this idea. Some think that in a numeric literacy perspective, it is absolutely necessary to empower the population to directly use the technology and in some way or another people should realize that in future Internet will become part of their daily lives.[12]

On the other hand, professor Harry Regis, head of the Communication Department of the Humana Sciences School, considers, on the contrary, that much is to be gained is e process of radio and Internet integration were promoted, which would favor a better lever of information to local populations, given the accessibility of the radio.[13] It would remain to organize the process of feeding Internet and of the global network, by local populations.

Obstacles to overcome

The professor Regis sees two obstacles that interpose to the development of ICT in Haiti: the way of introduction of these technologies and the structure of Haitian society. The fact that Internet development in Haiti corresponds to initiatives almost exclusively commercial, keeps away, firstly, the underserved sectors, since it is assumed beforehand that they might not have access. Secondly, the elitist orientation of education and of society in general strengthen the idea that technology is something reserved to whom have certain degree of education.

Just theses arguments make necessary a demystification of technology. Professor Regis thinks that, in this context, the socioeducative Haitian system is one of the mayor obstacles that prevent that the majority of population will become technologically empowered.

On the other hand, certain academic sectors of the country think that it is essential that the discourse of the communication problematic most not be limited to the journalistic worries. It is true that the current situation of the media, subject to and endless pressure from the political sector, is too precarious, with systematic attacks against journalists and newspapers.[14] But when raising the question of communication it should not be avoided the question of the propagation of ideas and experiences, and the access to knowledge for a democratic, socioeconomic and cultural development.

In the current context, the political framework implies problems, to the extent that it has not been defined a proper policy, leaving things to some'*laisser-faire*. In such circumstances, what responsibility has a State that is unconcerned to the common wellbeing and only worries about keeping itself in power?

All in all, as Professor Raymond Noël, of the Sciences School,[15]points out, in the perspective of an information society based on the ability of Haitian people to communicate, it cannot be overlooked the transformation of structures that promote ignorance and exclusion.

11. Cf. Gotson Pierre, Internet, Radio, Communication Globale…

12. Opinion expressed in the Party of the Internet in April 2002.

13. Idem.

14. Between December 17, 2001 and mid February 2003, some thirty journalists had to escape out of the country due to threats, from data published by the Association des Journalistes Haïtiens (AJH).

15 Jean-Marie Raymond Noël [National Director of the Project of Accompaniment of Haiti in the Information Society (AHSI)-PNUD], Aider tous les peuples du monde à communiquer: Sommes-nous prêts en Haïti?, http://www.medialternatif.org/alterpresse/article.php3?id_article=503, May 2003.

The role of the civil society in info-inclusion processes

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July 2003

"I live in Brazil, I'm not sure whether I live very well or very poorly, I do know that I am now part of the country and intelligence is fundamental"[1]

The Rio Summit in 1992, or ECO 92 as it was known, made the city of Rio de Janeiro the epicenter of the global environmental movement. Those who couldn't make it missed part of the show, but only a part. The UN event brought more to Brazil than discussions concerning the environment and sustainability – it led to the arrival of permanent Internet access in Brazil. Betinho and Carlos Afonso were behind this using funds from the Ministry of Science and Technology, in order to enable activists and journalists from all over the world to follow the events at the Rio Summit in real time. Internet access came, and ended up staying put.

Over ten years later, the discussions now concern the challenges for achieving a real, effective assimilation of these technologies for strengthening citizenship, democratic participation and improving the methodology of projects undertaken. The theme is the same today – which means little progress has been made. This is not quite the case from a technological perspective, as although Brazil's Internet infrastructure covers less than 10% of Brazilian municipalities, for those who can afford it, a solution can be found. However, let's take a look at the facts. Just some 8% of Brazilians currently have access to the Internet. In other words, Brazil has not implemented public policies for making Internet access universal, nor has it employed real efforts to combat info-exclusion. Despite the fact that the use in Brazil of the internet arose from the common objectives of individuals who fought, and still fight, for social and democratic ideals, in the name of citizenship, it is undeniable that accessing, choosing, producing or disseminating information is impossible for the vast majority of Brazilian citizens.

Participation, democracy and the Internet in Brazil

The Internet is tailor made for people who wish to be heard, publicize their ideas and become involved.

The very structure of the Internet is suited to this participation: decentralized, horizontal, made up of many connections and without spatial limits. This thinking behind social appropriation and participation in the use of information and communication technology must be encouraged. This does not require unimaginable resources or mind-blowing technology. All that is needed is to create basic models of use which enable swift appropriation by individuals from diverse backgrounds and levels of society and then replicate them in several different places – meaning that the interaction of the individual via the internet becomes a tool for cultural resistance and political pressure in the best sense. Use the virtual world to include individuals and make them aware of the importance and possibility of getting involved – and implementing changes.

We are currently living in a stable democracy, in contrast to the situation a few years back. This deepens the opportunity we have to strengthen the participation by individuals in society, which is decisive for transforming formal regimes into effective democracies. The following is one of the most important challenges faced by the civil and non-governmental societies: contributing to channeling the requirements of individuals, translating desires and creating instruments for achieving effective participation, making people raise their voices to propose solutions which are discussed in-depth with society. Within this scope, cyberspace could be put forward as a tool for realizing the potential of virtual "agoras", moments in time and meetings of common interests and languages in which – via dynamics chosen and agreed to collectively – the needs, desires, inclinations and talents of each member of a group are offered to all and points of agreement are identified. With the internet, it is possible for speeches to be democratized, problems to be identified and ways to be suggested instantaneously However, access to new technologies and the world wide web must be universal in order to achieve this. Should this not be the case, the possibility of democracy being exercised though digital communication and information technology is fallacious.

We are aware that making Internet access universal is both a problem to be overcome and the light at the end of the tunnel – a prospect for possible solutions. It really must be stressed that, on the one hand, the internet, in its current form in Brazil, is a reflection of the worsening social, economic and political inequalities, as most of the country's income and the

1. Lyric of a famous song of Seu Jorge, vocalist of the Farofa Carioca.

access to resources like computers and telephone lines are the privileges of the few not the many. This has led to the creation of two new social categories: those with access to the Internet and those without. The distance separating these categories is something to which we refer as the "digital divide""– on the one hand, a tiny percentage of the population which travels through a new universe offering thousands of possibilities. On the other hand, the vast majority of the population who have only heard about this new universe through others.

It is, however, indubitable that the Internet offers new possibilities for participation by individuals. An example of this is the strengthening of local initiatives, which take on other dimensions when multiplied between people via a regional or national internet: the shoring up of identities and cultures, recognizing local content by sharing the values of a given community with the world; the fact that it is possible for any individual to find out information on processes concerning him/her and take part in the performing of said processes; the sharing of challenges and talent – the possibilities are endless. As Norberto Babbio states in an article in which he analyses representative democracy and the prospects of direct democracy: "In order for direct democracy to exist in the exact meaning of the word, i.e. in as far as direct meaning that the individual himself participates in the decision making which concerns him/her, there must be no intermediary between said individuals and the decision-making concerning them". More simply put, the challenge must be set of moving from a democratic state to a democratic society.

The time is upon us: the World Summit on the Information Society

There is a pressing need for the struggle towards info-inclusion and the strategic use of Information and Communication Technologies to be increasingly adopted by non-governmental organizations as current political issues. It must not be forgotten that the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (the second phase is to be held in Tunis in 2005) is to be held in Geneva in December 2003. Governments and companies shall come together – at the invitation of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of Unesco and the ILO – to discuss a new model of society – the Information Society.

The time is clearly upon us for swift interaction between the organizations of the civil society in order to ensure that the issues of interest to them are included on the Summit's agenda, and to ensure that they enjoy the same presence and right of participation as governments and companies. All the steps in this process are strategic, and it is most important that the organized civil society be prepared to critically evaluate - from a viewpoint of cooperation - the directives of the United Nations.

Let's be realistic: the future scenario is neither surprising nor encouraging. We are facing the real possibility that the UN Summit will be an event at which governments and companies assemble to discuss what is good for the world in terms of telecommunications and new technologies – with good being understood as that which strengthens markets and neoliberal thinking. If we allow the discussions to be

limited to this scope, what will be left for the less fortunate populations (including people who are not male, white, university graduates, with high purchasing power and coming from wealthy nations or, consumers of their leftovers)? Further exclusion, once again. It is up to us - civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, activists and individuals - to change the course of these discussions and make an impact on the UN agenda. This will not occur, however, unless there is mobilization and desire; unless these issues are adopted by the organizations as their own concerns, concerns of the communities to which their work is directed, concerns of Brazil. We stress once again: there is little time. The process is underway. Throughout the world preparatory meetings are being held, agendas are being proposed, groups and strategies for getting involved are being organized - both by the private sector and the civil society. And what about Brazil? Are the civil society organizations and social movements prepared for these events?

Shared values - free information, equal opportunities and control by the individual

There are two main concerns shared by social and internet organizations in many countries with respect to the Summit: following the preparatory processes in order to ensure the participation of civil society organizations and activists in the UN event, and having an influence on its agenda, both of which are based upon the same principle: the principle that human rights and development must form the basis of the discussions at the Summit.

Amongst the issues proposed by these organizations is the issue of Info-inclusion, which encompasses effective universal access, education for using ICT, cultural diversity, inclusion in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, ensuring equal opportunities to all social groups in the information society, the use of free software, the importance of local content being produced, governance, censorship on the Internet, in addition to the debate concerning other more theoretical issues, such as the very concept of the Information Society and the belief that information and communication are rights and not commodities. There are many other issues - some of which address more technical aspects - which also concern NGOs and excluded populations, like service and connection costs. As Carlos Afonso states in an article published by the APC:

"(...) there are issues which affect virtually all the countries in the South - and some of these issues are technically complex, requiring the respective expertise for accompanying and forming proposals. One of these issues refers to conditions for exchange of data internationally, in addition to connection service costs in each country. There is a massive transfer taking place of funds from countries in the South to the large 'backbone' Internet operators in the US.

The Internet is configured in such a way that it is not possible to send data over it without making at least one consultation to the directory servers (the root servers operated by ICANN) in the USA. To send such data, a direct physical connection between the country in which the user is located and the USA is not necessary, however one way or another the US 'backbones' must be used for the service. This in addition to the fact that the vast majority of international information indexing services, plus 70% of the content, is located in U.S. servers – i.e. under the current network system, it is not possible to use the Internet without directly or indirectly connecting to the USA, regardless of the country in which you located".

As can be seen, though they may appear distant from the reality and immediate interests of most NGOs, the technical issues determine whether the free exchange of information and the autonomy and sovereignty of countries is possible (or impossible). We must not lose sight of these issues. All those involved in defending democracy and combating social inequality must demand that individuals have control over the use of information and communication technology, above all with respect to the Internet. Decision-making - regardless of the scope - must always take into consideration the desires, requirements and priorities of individuals, whichever country they are in. It should be remembered that individuals using communication and information technologies are not instantaneously transformed into users – they remain individuals, however, individuals in an area which goes beyond their borders. Their participation in projects or programs concerning info-inclusion, universal access and - for those already using the internet - governance and rights on the Internet is fundamental for the democratic construction of an information society which is truly for all individuals.

Concrete experiences in Brazil - what works, what doesn't...

In August 2000, a decree was issued concerning the regulation of Fust - Fund for the Universalization of Telecommunication Services, established by Law No. 9.998 of August 17,2000. Fust was set up with the aim of providing funds for making telecommunication services universal, in accordance with the goals stipulated in the PGMU (General Plan of Universalization Goals) of the Fixed-Line Telephone Service. The only national public policy with the aim of making Inter-

net access in Brazil universal, Fust gave hope for a while to those people involved in the task of making access to new technology in Brazil more democratic. Over two years and billions of reals (the Brazilian currency) later, Fust is synonymous with disappointment. It is uncertain what the funds obtained by collecting 1% of the gross receipts of the telecommunications companies were used for. There was and is money, but nothing has been accomplished. Lack of transparency and control by the individual, and drawn out legal disputes as a result of the arbitrary nature of the procedures for decision-making on the use of funds – many things happened. One less effective info-inclusion program in Brazil. The future of Fust remains unclear, however it is still hoped the present government will use it appropriately when it requires. Meanwhile, efficient info-inclusion initiatives do well - and are fruitful.

The experiences of deploying community Internet access centers in Brazil provide a good example of this. These community Internet access centers are spaces open to the public in which access to the Internet is free or very cheap; in which people are trained to use the information and communication tools and are made aware of the possibilities of their use. The centers have proven to be an effective alternative for overcoming the digital divide.

Successful projects like that run by the Sao Paulo City Council demonstrate on a daily basis just how fruitful the interaction between government, NGOs and the private sector can be as part of the process of combating digital exclusion. The centers have been installed in poor areas of Sao Paulo City and have provided new possibilities for people and the communities. The centers are producing individuals critical to the use of ICT and the internet, who can take from the technology by giving it meaning - access to greater numbers of work and income opportunities, access to public services, production of content, leaving the mark of their culture and daily experiences on the Internet, and communicating with their equals (or unequals). The community's participation in deploying and conducting the activities in the community Internet access centers, the partnership with non-governmental organizations operating in the communities and the recognition of local knowledge, people and cultures has enabled challenges to be overcome - like the high levels of violence in some regions in which the community Internet access centers operate - and the effective incorporation of this new world into each community. Not just info-inclusion but also social inclusion has been achieved - which is the only way that accessing and using technology makes sense.

There are further examples. Projects like ComUnidade Brasil, a joint initiative by the Programa Comunidade Ativa (Active Community Program), Comunidade Solidária, Unesco, the Executive Secretary of the Electronic Government, the Electronic Agency, the National Program for Peace in Schools (the state Secretary of Human Rights, of the Ministry of Justice) and the Plan for Preventing Urban Violence (PAIPS, coordinated by the Institutional Security Cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic) are taking proposals for digital inclusion to very differing corners - in this case, the pilot project was implemented in the municipality of Santo Antonio do Leverger, in the state of Mato Grosso. At the end of 2002 in Rio de Janeiro, RITS opened a community Internet access center in the neighborhood of Santa Marta, in partnership with the Eco Group - a social organization which has been operating in the area for twenty-four years.

In addition to the projects in Brazil, it is most important to take a look around and see a number of very interesting proposals which are being prepared in several countries in Latin America. A good way of becoming further acquainted with the info-inclusion initiatives in the region, or more specifically through the installation of community Internet access centers, is to see the work of the group (www.tele-centros.org) coordinated by the ChasquiNet Foundation and Quito Ecuador, and supported by the International Development Research Centre in Canada. This virtual community brings together experiences from some 1,500 community Internet access centers in 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Conclusion

The information society is here, irrespective of those who can be considered a part of this or not. The inherent possibilities could be encouraging or terrifying, and the difference between one outcome and another depends on which priorities are established when conducting the societies and relationships between people. It would be naive to expect that the dominating powers and interests, which have directed the course of history thus far, will occupy themselves with defending human and individual rights, in whatever way. On the other hand, it would also be naive to think that opposing these powers is futile or that the responsibility lies with those bearing specific knowledge or working on projects directly linked to technology and the Internet. It is up to each and every individual on the planet to strive towards an information society whereby all individuals enjoy equal opportunities to access information, knowledge, and means and opportunities for expression. It must never be forgotten that we, human beings, compose the information society, and without us the Internet is possible.

Communities and civil portals: ¿What for? Thinking about internet from a social point of view

Rubén Araya Tagle

Introduction

During the last years the *World Wide Web* has experimented an explosive growth, to a great extend as a consequence of the influence from de commercial sector, and to a lesser one from efforts made by governmental entities, academic institutions, and from civil society organizations and networks in order to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits that this new medium may offer to them. Within this context, it has not been unusual the turning up and development of a multiplicity of experiences that get installed on the web as portals and online services oriented towards what may be called the *"social""*or *"civic" world*. Many of these initiatives have emerged within the framework of educational policies and Estate modernization, some others have been fostered by international or multilateral organisms, non for profit foundations and agencies for cooperation within the context of different projects and programs, while others have been the end result of the work made by civil society organizations looking forward to articulate their networks y to coordinate heir actions around common grounds.

1.¿Why asking for portals and virtual civil communities?

Portals and virtual communities, as we know them today, constitute entities of recent appearance on the web. In fact, before the commercial boom of Internet portals were practically limited to news pages by the ISPs, catalogues and search engines that served as integrating fields for the available information on the web, whereas the virtual communities developed themselves mainly as flows in communication networks with a high degree of segmentation and differentiation through newsgroups and interest groups. However, with the progressive increment in users and available information, and mostly as a result of the expansion of commercial services on the web, portals have been proliferating and diversifying adopting several communicating and service models, as well as integrating also some linking elements the previously were appropriate to online communities. The turning popular of this new concept of portals *as infocommunicational organizers oriented to create virtual communities* has had a great influence on the dominant discourses and actions within the named "*civil Internet*"[1]. In fact, analogous to what has happened with the initiatives that promote the *universal access*, where *communitarian infocenters* and *telecenters* are often conceived as standard instruments, *civil portals* have occupy a preponderant place on the discourses and actions that try to respond to what many have considered the second key problem to solve after connectivity: the "*lack of public social infoestructure*".

Nevertheless, the great enthusiasm brought back by these instruments, impregnated with a some *technological determinism*, that often mixes up the technological characteristics with its possible uses and implementations, looks as if forgets that behind computers and telecommunication systems are actual actors and power structures and social exclusion. Is in this context that from the civil society have emerged critical views that question certain aspects of the conception and design that some of these tools, expressing the need to subordinate any consideration about their pertinence and relevance to *a previous analysis about the results, effects and social impact that may be obtained from them, as well as their requirements, conditionals and assumptions under which it is considered feasible, viable and desirable.*

Thus, the question about communities and civic portals appears framed within a discussion more global about the meaning of the initiatives and public policies where they are inserted, which leads to rise questions such as: *¿What are the needs or purposes that these social or civil portals are supposed to contribute or might contribute to? ¿How do they might turn into useful tools to support actions and infocommunicational actual processes at the civil level? ¿How and in what conditions do they might help in improving the digital inclusion and thus to contribute to social development and strengthening democracy?*

2.¿Informational divide or the right to information and communication?

In order to set up these questions in a field of *public policy analysis*, it helps to take a more general view on the *public social infoestructure* and the ways that that can be seen as subject of policies, considering both principles and actions involved in it. To do so

1. In general terms, by "*civilian Internet*" we mean the set of uses and social empowerment of Internet aimed at intervene on public matters of societies, at the local, national, regional and global levels.

2. The "social vision of Internet" constitutes an alternative approach developed collectively by several investigators and activists from Latin America and the Caribbean, framed within a process of reflection about the subject of the digital divide, information society and the social impact of Internet. This alternative states that for ICT and Internet be able to contribute to social development and to reduce the other social divides it is required to simultaneously advance towards both the equitable access and to the aimed-use and social empowerment of these technologies, and not only by increasing connectivity. See "Trabajando la Internet con una visión social" ("Working the Internet with a social vision"), collective document of the Virtual Community Mistica for the Olistica project, http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/ciberoteca/tematica/esp_doc_olist2.html.

3. The "digital inclusion" promotes the use and social empowerment of the digital technologies in order to tackle the needs of communities, and to promote the public policy making, the creation of appropriate knowledge and contents, and strengthening people capabilities. This way, the digital inclusion contributes to improve the economic, social, political and personal conditions of the vast majority, particularly of the poorest and

we adopt as angular stone the premises of the so called *"social vision of Internet"*[2], in which it is questioned the concept of digital divide stating that at *the roots of the problem of technological exclusion lie the social, economic, political and cultural divides present within and between societies*. In particular, we want to look deeply into the concept of *"digital inclusion"*[3] at the level referred to *the use and social empowerment of the information and communication media*.

Looking into the mail experiences and debates related to this subject, we found that like it occurs around definitions of *digital divide*, it is possible to distinguish here a couple of streams or main views[4]:

- A **dominant view** that considers that, once the issue of access is overcome, the main challenge that remains to solve is what can be called the *informational divide*, which shows itself as a *deficit in the development of the social infoestructure of public character*. Hence, its priority is centered around *promoting the development and production of contents, services and applications social and culturally relevant for the population*, having as ruling guideline the *"universalization of the access to public information and to civil services"*, with emphasis on the *more vulnerable* or *excluded sectors of society*. The assumption behind this approach is that, once the public social infoestructure is set in place, the conditions will be given allowing people to equitably make use of the advantages and benefits derived from the access to Internet, improving their possibilities of accessing education, information and knowledge, incrementing their labor and economic opportunities, and facilitating their participation into the public affaires of their communities.
- An **alternative view** that states that behind the *informational divide* exists a *structural state of dependency and subordination* whose social, economic, political and cultural causes are the same that the ones that originate the digital divide. This situation manifests itself as social inequalities at the level of *ability to access, to use and the empowerment of the information and communication media*, which in turn produces that the development of the IT in general become *hegemonized by the interests and perspectives of the dominant groups* that concentrate its property and control.
- Hence the priority should be *to stimulate the participative, universal, democratic access* and *inclusive to the information and to the communication technologies and media*, having as a ruling guideline the *"universalization of the rights to* information and communication*"*[5], with emphasis on the protection and enlargement of public domain. Under this approach it is assumed that the *informational divide* most be tackled together with the other divides that hinder *access, use and equitable and solidary social empowerment of these technologies and media*, in order to brake this vicious circle.

marginalized sectors of society. Op. Cit. in "Telecentros… ¿Para qué? Lecciones sobre Telecentros Comunitarios en América Latina y el Caribe" ("Telecenters...What for? Lessons about Communitarian Telecenters in Latin Ameica and the Caribbean"). Ricardo Gómez, Karin Delgadillo, Klaus Stoll, 2003. Pan Américas - Fundación Chasquinet - IDRC. http://telecentros.org/tcparaque.

4. This analysis adopts and expands the thesis proposed in: Martínez Juliana, "Visión social de la Internet y políticas públicas: Ideas para debatir estrategias de incidencia desde la sociedad civil" ("Social vision of the Internet and public policies: Ideas for debating strategies for interventions from civil society"), Fundación Acceso, Agosto 2000, http://www.idrc.ca/pan/panlacjulaant.PDF.

By contrasting both approaches it makes it manifest that, although the *universalization of public information and of civic services* be a relevant aspect to make it possible for the *public social infoestructure to respond at needs, interests, ambitions and expectations of society as a whole*, it is not a matter of a principle in itself but only a medium.

In addition it results evident that the mere availability of contents and services "to" the people is not and it can not be enough to produce significant transformations over the inequality status related to the"*social empowerment of the media and the information and communication technologies*, therefore the approach of developing the *social* infoestructure "top down", as it is currently defined, at the end only reproduces the informational divide, and does not guarantee its *democratic, participative, inclusive and universal character*.

Taking off from this difference at the level of the problem and the enunciated principles, these approaches follow different paths when proposing **actions** to tackle them:

- To the **dominant vision** the principal actions to undertake are related with the *development of electronic services addressed to citizens from organisms and institutions that administer, manage and supply information and/or public services* (governmental entities, public services, academic and educational institutions and private sector with some public orientation). In addition, it is also suggested the need to carry out *actions of educational community aimed at facilitating the access and massive use of contents and available services by people*, as well as *promoting the development of portals and other digital media with local content and services letting the telecenters, infocenters and other initiatives of communitarian infocommunication to have a basic social infoestructure in agreement with the needs and interests of their communities*.
- From the perspective of the **alternative vision**, these actions are not and cannot be enough to solve the root problems. Thus, while in the dominant vision the media and information and communication technologies are conceived as *resources for the people be able to access information and public services*, assuming roles as *receptors, beneficiaries*, customers or *consumers*, on the other hand in the alternative vision it is assumed that in order that these instruments to enable empowerment and human development, it is required that them could *be handled by those who use them*. Hence the efforts should be oriented to provide the *conditions in order that the different people, groups and communities* may actively participate the management and control of the information and communication technologies, media and resources, *assuming roles as broadcasters, producers and developers, both individually and collectively*. For that it is needed to delineate more comprehensive strategies for intervention that, in addition to minding for providing contents and universal electronic services, embody a broad set of actions, among which stand out:
  - Strengthening of public domain through the creation of global collective goods that guarantee the universal access to information and communication.
  - Fostering non-for profit networks and electronic collectives that assure the production and open, plural and diverse flow of public information and relevant y contents for human development.
  - Promoting participative initiatives "from" and""towards" the community that include the traditional and innovative use of communication and tools for information management, especially at a local level.
  - Educative and training actions that enable the overcoming of technical, cultural and linguistic barriers for the use and social empowerment of information and communication technologies and media, and to contribute to develop new technological imaginaries and social capabilities from identities and local, regional and national cultural perspectives.
  - Promoting the development of alternative, open and free information and communication technologies, in order to store and integrate technological know-how and communicational practices from the diverse communities and groups, with emphasis on the communitarian level.

In this approach it is also assumed as a priority need the active participation in these actions, both at executing them as well as its design and evaluation, by diverse actors that from de dominant vision play a role somewhat secondary or subordinated, like civil society organizations, local governments, micromedia, and communitarian radios, telecenters and infocenters, academic and educational sectors and non for profit private sector, among others.

3. Portals and virtual communities for a civilian Internet

Even if the subject of the *instruments, modalities and methodologies* had not been explicitly developed within the precedent discussion to undertake policies related to the *social infoestructure*, the aspects that have been referred to are enough to clarify as to retake the original question about the portals and civil communities, and to provide some interpretative hints about its meaning and potential role from the social vision about Internet.

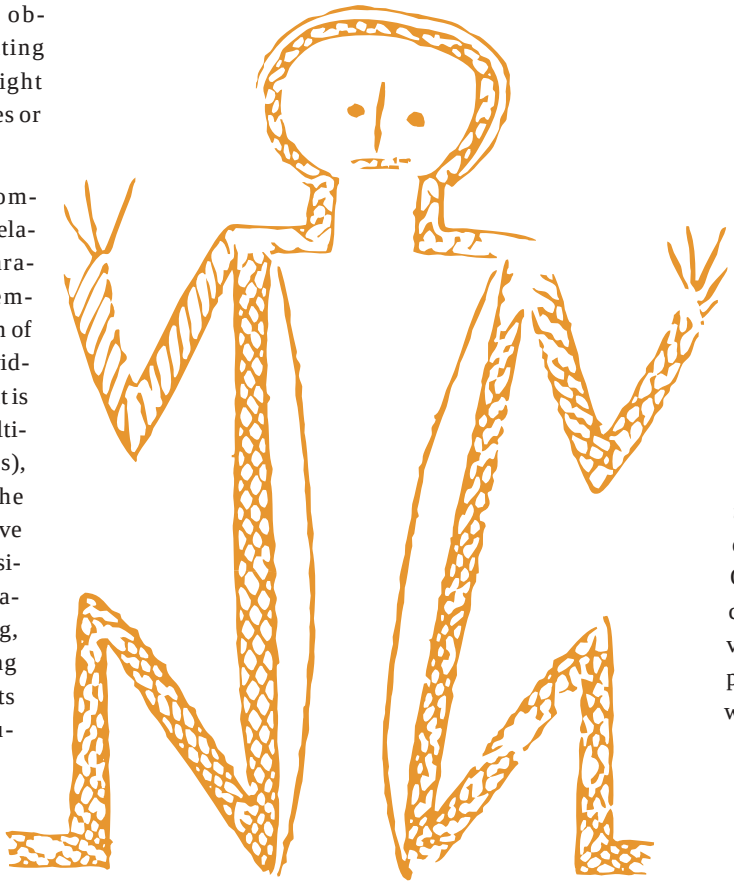
5. This perspective is being outlined and debated within the framework of the "Campaña por los Derechos de Comunicación en la Sociedad de la Información" (Campaign for the Communication Rights in the Information Society") (CRIS). Their web site can be found at" http:// www.crisinfo.org.

There are many different definitions and descriptions about what portals and virtual communities are, the majority of which focus themselves enunciating and typifying the content and services offered to their users. The more theoretical approximations often emphasize the new dimensions of usage and interactions being possible due to the technology applied, stressing aspects such as de media and service integration as a result of information digitalizing, the *ability to select information and personalization* enabled by *information processing*, *remote interactivity* and *time and space globalization* facilitated by electronic networks, among others. However, what the majority of these definitions leave behind is that portals and virtual communities actually existent are *electronic means of social intermediation that*, beyond the theoretical potentialities of technology, have been intentionally designed and modeled as applications to certain purposes. That means that they are not neutrals nor transparent, since their conceptions imply different *organizational models* and *social integration*, which define role structures, rules and control mechanisms, which in turn frame and link several weaves of social relationships among social players of the real world. From this it is concluded that the approach and the options that implicit or explicitly adopted to understand and to organize the social spaces were these tools are applied, will have deep implications and consequences both on the conception and development of the technological devices and their know-how and associated imaginaries, as well as the results, effects and social impacts that can be obtained from them, demarcating the usefulness that they might have related to specific policies or strategies.[6].

The prevalent approach of commercial portals have a close relationship with the liberal paradigm and the market logic, emphasizing the implementation of business models from as individualistic conception about what is social (the audiences as multitude of atomized individuals), an approach that privilege the quantitative over the qualitative (attracting the maximum possible audience), with a strong rationalistic bias (segmenting, differentiating and identifying the users with specific contents and services) and an instrumentalist vision of the action (retaining and making the users loyal giving them something in exchange).

Many communities and portals that approach aspects related to social development and public interest have look forward to make it explicit their differentiation related to the previous approach, proposing the notion of a "civilian Internet", as an alternative space to the""commercial Internet". On this line we find both state experiences and the wide spectrum of the civil society, in addition to the great amount of small projects and initiatives at the communitarian level. However, the plurality of models and the very polysemy of the term "citizenship" make it difficult to find out elements and common meanings among them. In the face of it, it can be question: What concepts, values and practices about""the social" and/or "the civil" are implied in them? ¿How are built and organized the functional and power structures on their models of management? ¿What capability of affecting has their different participants over the information and the very media and technologies used? In the majority of portals of the state sector predominate the *assistance* and *universalistic* approaches, centered on the supply of electronic public services to the citizens and, to a lesser scale, on aspects such as the provision of public information aimed at the transparence and accountability, and the generation of closed channels of individual communication between citizens and the government[7]. These models often emphasize the notion of *e-government* above *e-citizenship or e-democracy*, blending modalities of internal organization based on the creation of intergovernmental networks (the *Network-Estate*), with traditional and bureaucratic modalities of relating to users based on hierarchical structures and centralized schemes of the control and communication. This approach shares with the commercial portals the adoption of am individualistic conception of people more as *customers* than as *citizens*, which determines a "provider-user". On the other hand, within the civil society there are a great variety of experiences about portals, communities and networks that have developed

6. Many experiences that have not obtained the expected results, have just made the mistake of transplanting human activities to the digital world without considering the complex relationship existing between the social world and the virtual space, pretending to a great extent to subordinate the former to the later. Similarly, the discussions –and many time confusions- commonly posed about what ought to be or not to be incorporated into portals of a social or civilian character, have to do generally with an overestimate of these artifacts as if they would be "carriers" of social relationships, forgetting that they are just a medium to stimulate them.



some alternative models, where it is stressed the uses for building practice communities, to create alternative mediatic channels and to organize political campaigns, among others[8].

The approaches used have been diverse, but in general they have as common denominator the use of a cooperative logic, which aims to generate structures more horizontal and decentralized and distributed schemes of communication and control, with collective and flexible modalities of relationship that combine interdependency with autonomy of each one of their parts.

Where to place the sphere of "the civilian"? Undoubtedly the time period in which we all live is signed by the ever increasing politic-economic globalization and socio-cultural fragmentation, it is not possible to continue defining"*citizenship* exclusively in relation to the concepts of Estate and nation, nor could it be reduced to the *formal sphere of the rights, duties, regulations, procedures and social benefits.*

As currently configured, the *civil sphere* encompasses every space and dimension where the *public agenda are built* and *decisions about public issues are made*, intersecting the local, national, regional and global stages, and implying at several levels every actual social player from different sectors that plays in this dominion (state sector, private sector, civil society).

From this approximation, we can define in generic terms the *portals and civil virtual communities* as *collective virtual spaces socially enabled in order to take part in the public spheres.* The aim of these spaces would be to contribute to the *generation of social and/or political effects in the real world*, so a central aspect is that who participate in it be *actual citizens and social players* with interests and relationships in it, in order that their *virtual interactions* might traduce themselves into *agreements, practices and actions on non virtual spaces.*

According to this definition, not every portal and virtual community affiliated to the so-called "civilian Internet" is properly speaking "civilian". And there are also many others that would be included within this category, even though from a traditional approach to the *public sphere* they seem to come closer to the private because they tackle needs and interests of minorities and subgroups. The key element for distinction is found at the *social connectivity* that these media promote and/or enabled through their management models, understood as the *collective articulating capacity* and that of *intervention over actual realities.*

Under this definition, and from a social vision about Internet, *portals and civilian virtual communities* are profiled as tools with a great strategic value *to promote the development of a democratic, participative, inclusive and universal public social infoestructure*, as long as they might *contribute to coordinate actions and to articulate social conversations that respond to the needs, expectations, interests and aspirations of the different people, players, groups and communities at different levels and spheres of the public space.*

Nevertheless, if that is to be possible it would be needed that the promotion and development of these *civilian virtual spaces* constitutes in itself as a priority aspect of policies for development of the *public social infoestructure*, and that it be approached from a perspective that take in account the needs to advance both towards *social and technological empowerment* and the *strengthening of social rights to information and communication.*

On the other hand, the *civilian spaces and infocommunication media* need to have resources and regulatory frameworks available that respect and preserve their *autonomy and independence from governments and commercial corporations.* In this sense, an important responsibility that belongs to estates is *to guarantee the public access to these technologies and media assigning them and status of universal common goods.*

Burt the development of the *civilian Internet* will not be possible within the stated terms unless the citizens also have the *capabilities of access and control over significant technical resources.* In this matter, the possibility to *access, manage and administer quality services and applications and to the empowerment of open and free technical standards*, constitute aspects of particular importance.

Daily we listen to lectures in which the ICT and Internet are often introduced to us as self-valued objects that are transforming our lives, thus hiding a great deal of *the creative capability and the right to intervene that we human beings have on the historic self construction of this technology.* In this paper have been exposed synoptically some reflections that propose an alternative look and that point out to a *focus change about the principles and orientations of the public policies about Internet and citizenship*. In addition this perspective leads us to abandon the seeing of portals and *civilian virtual communities* as artifacts belonging to the digital world inviting us to understand them in its condition of social builders to the actual world, so that we could be in charge of their use and benefit as useful tools for the task of transforming among us all our societies building a better world, not only it constitutes a possibility for the future, but our responsibility for the present.

7. An analysis on this theme can be found in: "El Papel del Ciudadano y de las OSC en el e-Gobierno: Un estudio de gobierno electrónico en ocho países de América Latina y el Caribe" ("The role of the Citizen and the CSO on the e-government: An study on electronic government in eight Latin America and the Caribbean countries"). K. Reilly - Raúl Echeverría. APC, 2003.

8. A formal description of some of these experiences can be found in: "Comprender los portales de la sociedad civil: contenidos en línea y modelos comunitarios para el sector de OSC" ("Understanding the portals of civil society: online contents and communitarian models for the CSO sector"), M. Surman. APC, 2002.

Indigenous peoples and the information society in Latin America and the Caribbean: A framework for action

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1. Estudo realizado en colaboraçao con o Instituto para la Conectividad en las Américas (ICA) (http://www.icamericas.net)

Officials of the Population and Development Latin American & Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) at ECLAC. Joint research with The Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA).

Latin America is home to four hundred indigenous communities, composed of about 50 million people, the majority of whom suffer from various forms of discrimination due to their ethno-cultural background and survive under marginalized conditions that contrast with the modern world around them. Their economic exclusion is based on *general discrimination*, similar to that experienced by the impoverished strata in rural and urban environments; however, their marginalization is intensified due to the *intolerance and ethno-cultural discrimination* existing in the national societies of the region.

The paradigm of economic globalization is sharpening the historical processes of social marginalization of the indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, in the cultural arena, a process of "homogenization" is beginning, which attempts to undermine the pluricultural identity of the continent, ignoring the fact that the construction of modern citizenship involves the challenge of reconciling the historical and cultural specific features of each community with world development and modernity.

However, the causes of the increase in indigenous exclusion and their current marginalization from the information society are not exclusively attributable to the unequal relations generated between the center and the periphery. Furthermore, the analysis must be focused on the internal dynamics of these societies and their forms of leadership, on gender relations and the migratory processes that define the differences between indigenous groups and individuals with respect to the educational level, ethnic awareness and acceptance of one's identity, possibilities for involvement in non-traditional activities and on the acceptance or rejection of the digital means of communication. In some cases, intellectuals, directors and indigenous organizations have seen the ICTs as a valuable opportunity to transcend the local level and achieve a regional, national and international presence. Digital technology has rapidly and efficiently been appropriated and has the potential to strengthen their political-organizational and communication processes, as well as those of linguistic and cultural revitalization. Also, other indigenous sectors have criticized the ICTs as a new form of interference from the national society that attempts to add the communities to the established information consumption in order to serve the interests of others.

To promote indigenous involvement in the information society, it is necessary to define proposals of innovation and reparatory social policies, which strengthen indigenous attempts to overcome the challenge of information marginalization. The strategies to achieve this end come from the native people who have achieved greater levels of community cohesion and representation, direct and legitimate, in second- and third-tier organizations. In some cases, the non-indigenous political and civil societies start to support these processes, generally at the local level. However, as far as public policies are concerned, the consensus necessary to act in an integral and coordinated manner has not been reached. Such a consensus would join governmental forces with those of the international community and civil society associations, in order to stimulate the so-called "digital opportunity".

The current **Virtual Workshop on Indigenous Involvement in the ICTs** provides a space to deepen the conceptual debate and contribute to the development of a framework for action that facilitates indigenous access to the ICTs by serving as a vehicle of social transformation. The Virtual Workshop is a window of opportunity that adds proposals for an integrated course of action from a great diversity of criteria, experiences and cultural perspectives.

Taller Virtual sobre Inclusión Indígena en las TIC

Challenges	Opportunities	Proposals
• Cultural prejudice of governmental agencies, NGOs and broad sectors of the national societies. • High levels of distrust within the indigenous communities with respect to the possible disruptive impact of the ICTs on cultural and social guidelines. • The gap between the cultural conception of time and space of the indigenous society and the global • Low levels of literacy and computer literacy of the indigenous peoples. • Intra-community processes that impede the appropriation of the ICTs. • High unemployment indices; weak indigenous economic base. • Rate of technological change that impedes the community decision-making process. • Elevated costs of technological infrastructure, associated with geographical isolation and a lack of basic infrastructure services. • High levels of technological obsoleteness. • Absence of legal frameworks that facilitate access to credit lines and/or funding for technological programs. • Expansion of the ICTs according to market logic. • Concentrated production of hardware and software in a small nucleus of industrialized countries. • Predominance of English in the technological arena.	• The indigenous communities' historically successful appropriation of the global society's cultural goods. • Ascent of the ethnic movement to the continental level. • Existence of new types of leadership. • Rise of second-and third-tier organizations. •Greater recognition of the global society of the role of the indigenous peoples in the sustainability of development. • Increase of the international social sensitivity towards indigenous demands. • Experiences of economic, political, cultural and information self-management. • Increase in the educational level of the population, especially the migrants, leading to a significant number of indigenous professionals. • Greater acceptance of the incorporation of the gender equity approach. • Social experience accumulated starting from the effective appropriation of the ICTs by the people and organizations that independently manage the communication and information strategies. • Installed capacity in technical and human resources. • Experiences of e-involvement carried out through the model of shared access (telecenters). • Increase in social capital of the communities. • Increase in the technological incorporation of information literacy in basic education.	• Reduction in the levels of prejudice and discrimination in the national societies, through specific communication strategies. • Promotion of favorable attitudes towards the ICTs in the indigenous population and leadership. • Implementation of specific access programs (short, medium and long-range), designed following integral diagnostics carried out with the active participation of the indigenous communities and respectful of their social, cultural and economic structures. • Articulation with long-range economic, social and cultural programs that involve strategic investment to provide basic services (electricity, telephones, education) and promote the autonomous organization of the indigenous peoples. • Legal regulation of the participation of the private sector in such programs and support of the public sector when the market cannot provide effective solutions to combat social inequality. • Implementation of long-range programs that permit intra-community exploration to decide in what way the ICTs will be incorporated, on the premise that the indigenous communities can decide to use them in a different way than other groups of the national societies.

Bringing Up Citizens for the Information Society: The experience taken from the Communitarian Information Network Operators

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Since the 90´s the Instituto de Informática Educativa de la Universidad de La Frontera (Chile), has developed actions aimed at solving the cognitive and digital divides both at national and regional (Araucanía) level. At a country level, it was conducted a pilot project that laid the foundations of the Red Educacional Enlaces (Educative Network ENLACES) of the Education Ministry (www.redenlaces.cl), while at the regional level their actions are framed within the Program "Red de Información Comunitaria" ("Communitarian Information Network")(www.redcomunitaria.cl).

Acknowledging similar purposes as well as several audiences, the Communitarian Information Network has learnt diverse lessons from ENLACES (pedagogic, technical and managerial), all of them useful to set up a technological program, has managed to implement a Communitarian Telecenters network and within the academic point of view develops a training program for Telecenter operators, whose aim is to develop in people from their communities, knowledge and skills to administer those centers for accessing the ICT.

This paper presents the model for training operators, emphasizing both the attributes of the trainees, as well as the essential of the model, highlighting the comprehensive character of this process (training on: management, technology, software, evaluation and community).

1. ¿What is the Communitarian Information Network?

Following Araya and Orrego, the above mentioned Information Network is a group of Communitarian Telecenters and Infocenters distributed in different places within La Araucanía[1] and whose functioning is coordinated by the Instituto de Informática Educativa of the Universidad de la Frontera (www.iie.ufro.cl) [1].

Currently, this network depends on thirty-one communitarian TIC access centers, most of them administratively belonging to the Municipality. The process of setting in place and expansion of the Communitarian Information Network, could be summarized as follows:

Table1. Process of implementationof the Communitarian Information Network

Date	Status	Founding source
1997	Setting up Communitarian Telecentros Comunitarios at Cunco and Temuco[2]	Conicyt[3], UFRO[4], Municipalities of Cunco and Temuco
1999	Setting up 10 Telecentros and strengthening of another	GoRe[5], UFRO and Municipalities of La Araucanía
2000	Setting up 5 Telecentros	BancoEstado, UFRO and Municipalities of La Araucanía
2001	Setting up 1 Telecentro and strengthening of four	CORFO[6], SubTel[7], UFRO, TelSur[8] and Municipalities of La Araucanía
2002	Setting up of three Infocentros for MyPes e strengthening of another	SERCOTEC[9], UFRO and Association of Municipalities of Nahuelbuta
End of 2002	Setting up of eight Telecentros	FDTII[10], UFRO, DIBAM[11] and Municipalities of La Araucanía
2003[12]	Setting up of three brand new Telecentros Comunitários	FDTII, UFRO, DIBAM and Municipalities of La Araucanía

2. Operator: key player to the Development of a Communitarian Telecenter

Endorsing the central elements of several definitions that exist about a Telecenter operator [2], it can be stated, that he/she is that one that mediates between the end user and technology. Usually he/she belongs to the community where acts, which is understood as coherent to a model of social development, in as much as the fact that knowing the members of his/her community favors the generation of an environment of empathy and communication, suitable for developing actions between the community and the Telecenter.

2.1 Profile of the Communitarian Telecenter Operator

This profile considers three dimensions: management of the Telecenter, relationship with the community and production of local content. For each one of these dimensions some qualifications are pointed out that the operator must have and which are substantial to the training process developed at the Instituto de Informática Educativa

a) As to the management of the Telecenter:

- Skills on the use of informational resources and whose main role is to mediate between the technologies and the end users of the Telecenter services

1. La Araucanía region is the area in the country with the lowest Human Development Index (UNDP Report The Communes of Chile, 2002)

2. Both Telecenters were the first in the country. During the same year it opened the Communitarian Telecentero "El Encuentro", in Peñalolén, Santiago, managed by El Encuentro Corporation (www.elencuentro.cl).

3. Cientific and Techologycal Invertigation Regional Council

4. University of La Frontera

5. La Araucanía's Regional Government

6. Production Corporation

7. Telecommunications Sub-secretary

8. Telefónica del Sur

9. Technical Cooperation Servicie

10. Telecommunications Development Fund

11. Libraries, Archives and Museum Direction

12. First Semester 2003

- Ability to generate joint ventures within the community, aiming to strengthen the service use and widening its offering of resources
- Promoter of a strategy of economic and social sustainability for the Telecenter.

b) From the point of view of his/her relationship with the community:

- Knowledged about local area networks, communitarian organization and organic structure of them, aiming to apply technology to the problems they confront.

- Capability to handle public relation between the community and the Telecenter

c) From the point of view of the production of local contents:

- Ability to highlight themes dear and pertinent to the community
- Capability to foster the conditions that allow to know and to systematize information requirements coming from the community
- Skilled for making available the local contents on the technological platform for diffusion[13]

Having said that, it turns out important to reveal the characteristics of the group of operators of the Communitarian Information Network, because that, configures the setup on which it has been worked in developing the training processes for operators of Telecenters.

From the point of view of gender, there exists a tiny majority of women that work as operators (52%), something that could be explained by the more often placing of Communitarian Telecenters in Libraries, spaces traditionally associated with female staff.

From the point of view of age, the ages go from 21 to 50 years old, the majority being concentrated between 21 and 30 years old (66%).

As far as educational level is concerned, the greatest percentage of operators is concentrated in the Secondary level (65%) and partially completed Higher educational level (26%). It is worth mentioning that it is mainly due to the geographic origin location where operators come from meaning to be far from the higher educational centers in the Region and the lack of economic resources to carry on studies are situations that explain the concentration of people into the above mentioned educational levels.

2.2 Training Model for Operators of Telecenters

The methodological design elaborated for the training process of operators has as central axis the concepts of: confidence, collaborative learning, ludic pedagogy and development of critical attitude. This definition encompasses the training experience of the Red Educacional Enlaces ("Educational Network LINKS"), since it assigns the ICT the role of technological resource for enabling learning[14].

For all that, the establishment of a ludic environment to promote confidence among the training team and the future operators, was defined as a necessary condition in order to enable interaction between trainees and educators. This situation is even more relevant for the training process, given that the majority of future operators has not ended their schooling and/or have been several years out of the formal educational system.

The educational modality defined to implement the teaching-learning process has a double character: in person and virtual, associating to each of these modalities, actions, strategies of pedagogical intervention and technological resources.

The training sessions are developed at the computer lab of the Instituto de Informática Educativa, through a pedagogical dynamic characterized by three stages: presentation, pedagogical action and evaluation.

At the presentation stage it is presented the concept or ability that it is to be developed throughout the training session. During the pedagogical action, the central role is performed by the operators, which take actions aimed at the empowerment of concepts, for example: analysis of the concept of navigation. Finally, at the valuation stage, one goes from the co evaluative modality to the self evaluation, being a base principle of this design, the generation of an environment that allows both feedback to the each operator, as well as the strengthening of the collective spirit for criticism.

In this aspect of the in person modality, the occurrence of key concepts is structured in several ways throughout the stages in the training process,

without detriment to it,15 there exist some characteristics that have a character transversal to the training: the confidence, how critical, collaboration and how ludic. All that is relevant, considering that due to the characteristics of the operators, the most important is to generate an atmosphere of confidence, grounding in it the pedagogical process.

The virtual modality limit itself to a couple of objectives: generating greater empowerment, of those contents and capabilities presented during the in-person sessions and strengthening the social network [3] structured between operators and members of the coordination of the Communitarian Information Network. In order to fulfill these objectives some actions

13. Portal Red de Información Comunitaria

14. It is to be pointed out that the educators team of the Communitarian Information Network has designed both the pedagogical model and the training materials of the "*Red Enlaces Abierta a la Comunidad: 2002 - 2005*" capacitation programs, which allowed the training, during 2002, of 15000 parents related to Chilean educational in basic uses of the ICT. These materials are the base of the National Digital Literacy Campaign promoted by the Government of Chile.

Management	• Public Relations • Conflicts Solving • Accountability • User Register
Technical	• Equipment Assembling • Use of Antivirus • Hardware Configuring • Typical Problems Telecenters
Software	• Use of Office Suite • Use of Star Office • Use of Internet Services • Use of Portals • Selecting Software
Evaluation	• Procedures • Report Writing • Council Meeting Preparation
Cmmunitarian	• Self Care • Networking Generation • Design of a Strategic Plan • Group Animation

have been elaborated to which are associated a series of technological resources.

2.3 Fields of training and contents of the training program for operators of Telecenters

The are five fields in the training process of operators: Management, Technical, Software and Information System, Evaluation and Communitarian.

The establishment of these five fields is based upon the analysis of those key dimensions defined as such to the development of the activity as operator.

3. Results

The most relevant results are in keeping with two situations: firstly, the increment in the level of technological empowerment that is observed in the operators as a result of the training process and secondly the increasing autonomy of the operators, related to the coordination of the Communitarian Information network, to execute training programs on the basic use of the ICT, in their own communities.

During an annual training program, it is possible to notice an important increment in the levels of technological empowerment of the operators, characterized by the getting off ICT knowledge and skills, which redounds to their promotion to the next superior empowerment level (Null – Low and Low - Medium). The process of promotion from the Medium and High level, requires a deeper training process and hence, from a temporal point of view it is reached in general term, only after some twenty-four months of participation in the program, assuming full compromise from the operator.

The second relevant result, is in keeping with the autonomy reached by the operator for implementing habilitating processes in their communities, which start to be operational by the second semester of the process of performing as operator, following a routine that considers the accompaniment of the training actions of the coordination, assuming later greater protagonism "pedagogical facilitator", which finally ends with the execution of a full session of habilitation, process that is monitored and evaluated by the people in charge of the training from the Communitarian Information Network.

The processes oh habilitation are mainly aimed at organized groups of the communities, for example: Local Leaders, Small business-men, Labor Workshops and Senior Citizens, hence it becomes indispensable, for the success of processes of habilitation, the existence of common cultural codes among the participants of the habilitation sessions, as well as the necessary pertinence that must exist within the curricular design.

Having been assumed the challenge of providing for technical skills in people that administer Communitarian Telecenters, the result have been the development of a network of operators, highly motivated, aware of their limitations and their capabilities, but holding the necessary skills to perform with efficacy within a technological environment as a Telecenter. The value that this training has for people of diverse schooling and deficient initial level of technological empowerment, shows how effective is a training model that centers its design and implementation around the collective work, that combines pedagogical tradition with current trends and that is been mediatized by the ICT.

Currently, a refined version of this model, is part of the technological package of the Communitarian Telecenters managed by the Instituto de Informática Educativo. Also, some components of the technological package, have been transferred to public institutions in the country, for the design and implementation of national policies for training human resources in ICT and overcoming the digital divide: Subsecretaría of Telecomunicaciones[16] and Red Educacional Enlaces[17].

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