Digital and Inter-Generational Divide

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ABSTRACT

Digital divide can be considered a macro economical index representing the social differences and the separation between the North and the South of the world. Since the first definition of digital divide, it has been shown that it is also a great and unrecognized problem in the developed countries, especially in the field of education. “Digital disconnection” is a key problem for School and University as institutions. In this article, the above questions are widely analyzed with a special attention on the spreading gap between digital natives (i.e., young students), and digital immigrants (i.e., parents, teachers and policymakers in the school).

Keywords: Digital Divide, Digital Immigrant, Digital Native, ICT, Learning

THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

We are aware that the more developed forms of capitalism are moving towards a new form of social configuration, the “information society” or the “access society” (Castells, 1996, 1997, 2000; Rifkin, 1995, 2000). This change is based on digital communication as “key technology” of the new millennium. G8 countries in the past twenty years have had continuous economic and social growth, despite the Gulf war, September 11 and the “new economy” crash in 2001 and the present Financial Global Crisis. This evidence is surely true for the G8 countries and perhaps for the OECD ones, but is it also true for the remaining 5/6ths of humanity? What about the effects and consequences of this mega change (Ferri, 2004), on this percentage of the population of the world? As Primo Levi said, it is strictly inherent the structure of the world, and represents the line up of the “doomed” but certainly not that of the “saved”, even if it is obviously impossible to give a complete answer to the pressing

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questions posed here. The issue of the
Digital Divide is a worldwide theme and
unfortunately not well known about in
Italy (Zocchi, 2003; Tarallo, 2003).

Through the analysis of Arjun
Appadurai’s ideas we can evoke the
“divergent globalization” concept (Ap-
padurai, 1996), and at the same time
Manuel Castells warns us about: “The
problem of the internal differentiation
of what was once the “third world”, in
the newly industrialized countries (the
Pacific Rim area), relatively self-sus-
taining (China, India) and decomposing
societies (Africa, Sub-Saharan, fourth
world) have a lot to do with the differ-
tent degrees of integration or adaptation
of these societies for the processes of
the information economy” (Castells,
1999, p. 44).

At the same time the phenomenon of
mass migration from countries in “rapid
decomposition” towards rich countries
is correlated to the development of the
information economy, just as the topics
of the intercultural integration, internal
security of developed countries and
even of international terrorism is. For
example, the January 9, 2002 issue of
the Italian newspaper “Corriere della
Sera” published an insightful article
written by the ex US President, Bill
Clinton. The article began: “This new
century poses an important question: is
the era of interdependence (or we could
say of digital globalization) for mankind
good or evil? The answer depends on
several factors: on the fact that we rich
nations today diffuse the advantages
and reduce the tribulations of the world;
on the fact that the poor nations make
the necessary changes for progress to
take place; on the fact that we all are
able to develop a high enough level
of conscience to understand what our
reciprocal obligations and responsibili-
ties are”. Clinton’s reasoning centers
the question of the relationship among
the international crisis, globalization,
security and “access” as the benefits
of the digital revolution, which the at-
tack on the Twin Towers September 11
dramatically showed us.

A few lines later, Clinton writes:
“The terrorist attacks on September 11
were a manifestation of globaliza-
tion and interdependence as much as
the explosion of the economic growth
was. We cannot insist on having all
the advantages without also seeing the
other side of the story. It is very im-
portant therefore, to consider the war
against terror in the broadest context
of the question of how to manage our
worldwide interdependence”.

The question which we should ask
ourselves therefore is the following:
how is it possible to use the new tech-
nologies to decrease and not increase
the divide between rich and poor coun-
tries? How is it possible therefore, to
give to the 5/6ths of humanity access
to the huge quantity of information,
communication and opportunities for
emancipation, which global content pro-
viding has circulated inside the “second
Minneapolis flow economy”. And these
global questions are challenging also for
the second topic we will try to point out
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