

Information Society Discourse

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INTRODUCTION

Coined as a term in the 1960s, information society is just emerging nowadays mostly in developed countries. As a result of the effect of present technological, economic and political globalization processes, the whole world is being impacted and transformed by ICTs. IS can be *per se* perceived as the intellectual (scientific) model or ideal type having a set of specific characteristics and assigned interpretations. IS is always a subject of theorizing efforts, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary (see e.g. Dearnley, 2001; Cawkell, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2002; Burrows, 2005; Fine, 2006; Webster, 2005; Mansell, 2009; Fuchs, 2008; Floridi, 2009; Jaeger, 2010; Duff, 2012). In the social sciences there are some indicators enabling measurement of these advancements and their consequences (see e.g. Hilbert, 2010).

The aforementioned societal advancements, initially always pre-informational or not yet informational, are constantly emerging from some “embryos” – often scientific and technological – and are progressing *via* multidimensional processes of organizational, social, economic, political, cultural innovations, and by their diffusion. In fact, all segments and features of society are heavily affected by them. These impacts are rather difficult to measure and evaluate. Quite often, they are treated generally as ICTs’ impact on a society (see e.g. Follman, 2001; Lyon 2001; Shaviro, 2003; Wyatt, 2000; Crumlish, 2004; Keen, 2007, 2012; Targowski, 2008; Druica, 2012).

There are many publications about the *digital divide* and knowledge gap (see e.g. Wresch, 1996; Heywood, 1995; Rosen, 1998; van Dijk, 2005; James, 2008; Maskery, 2010).

BACKGROUND

New Language for New Realities

Some popular terms concern general issues as information *per se* and as a qualification to characterize novelty or radical change. Several examples include *info age*, *network age*, *connected world*, *info world*, *info war*, *disinformation world*, *info revolution*, *cyber revolutions*, *cyberspace*, *ambient intelligence*, *date smog*, *info glut*, *open source*, and *cyber culture*.

The adjective *digital* is widely used to express – also metaphorically – a new level of technology or its distinctness and progressiveness. For example, *digital* is not linked only to technology but also to *planet*, *frontier*, *revolution*, *big bang*, *economy*, *consumption*, *governance*, *literacy*, *competence*, *life*, *culture*, *future*, *divide*, *citizenship*, *nation*, and to *shock*, *delirium*, *nirvana*, and *sublime* as well.

Virtual can be *reality*, *society*, *community*, *organization*, *publics*, *globalization*, and *colonization*. Virtualization means a passage of a process (e.g., production) to cyberspace.

Next, *cyber* can be ascribed to *life*, *activism*, *society*, *culture*, *art*, *ideology*, *future*, *utopia*, *sociology*, *cities* and the like.

A really technological characteristic is marked by the letter *e* (electronic). So we have *e-societies*, *business*, *banking*, *education*, *learning*, *government*, *governance*, *democracy*, *participation*, *future*, and *world*.

Other frequently used terms include *media*, *new media*, *social media*, *the Internet*, *Internet society*, *Internet politics*, *ideology*, and *future* (the Internet and beyond).

Global dimensions and impacts of ICT can be illustrated by such terms or phrases as *global flow of information*, *global IT*, *global information society*, *global web*, *global information assurance*, and *new global information economy*.

There are many labels ascribed to societies that can be investigated, such as *information(al)*, *cyber*, *technological*, *e(lectronic)*, *Internet*, *digital*, *virtual*, *wired*, *broadband*, *media*, *interaction*, *global information*, *postinformation*, and *hybrid*. Sometimes societies were named as *information-rich* (access), *ICT equipment societies*, and *informed* (info processed and used). The latter happens to be etiquetted as *knowledge society* or *knowledge-based*. Alternatively, the knowledge society can be treated as the next stage after the information society.

Information Society: Definitions and Discussions

There are many terms or qualifications directly or indirectly connected with broadly understood IS. To name several examples: *information society*, *information rich society*, *cyber-society*, *computer society*, *telematic society*, *network society*, *virtual society*, *e-society* and the like. All are relevant and in fact complementary. However, various authors tend to support their own interpretation concerning the most important features. The long list includes examples such as Masuda (1981a, 1981b), Negroponte (1996), Dertouzos (1998), Castells (2000, 2004), Wellman (1999), Bangemann (1994), Virilio (1998). Many authors add such qualifications as digitalization – referring to the advances of information technology (e.g. Tapscott, 1998) and mediatization referring to the overwhelming role of mass media (e.g. Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2000; Downing, 2000; Mansell, 2009; McKenna, 2011; Morr & Maret, 2012; Baker, 2013).

However, there have been many efforts in the past to describe, analyze and evaluate ongoing technological, socioeconomic and cultural changes connected with new ICTs. For example, Bezold and Olson (1986) reviewed first the specific *societal impacts* – past, present and probable – of *the information revolution*. Subsequently, they discussed different *whole-system* images of how an information society may evolve. They contrasted images of the civilizational and societal transformations of leading future-oriented thinkers

of that time, such as Bell (1973), Toffler (1980, 1990, 1995), Naisbitt (1983), Harman and Markley (1985), and Masuda (1981a, 1981b), who believed that a new stage of civilization is emerging, with information and ICT playing a pivotal role in the social transformation. However, they differ on such matters as the *key driving forces* for societal change, the *main features*, and *overall pattern* of change. Bell (1973) announced the emergence of post-industrial society in which the critical driving force for change is the codification of theoretical knowledge generating the exponential growth of science, systematic R&D and new intellectual technologies. Toffler (1980, 1990, 1995) developed the theory of a third wave driven by growing socio-economic complexity, diversity, heterogeneity and connected with demassification of production, media, lifestyles, and so forth. The newly emerging social order demanded higher levels of information flow.

Naisbitt (1982) believed social development rather than technological change leads to information society, although technology greatly stimulates the transformations. He stressed the changing structure of the economy (rising dominance of the information sector) and the role of information (including new information competences and jobs) as the key strategic resources.

Masuda (1981a, 1981b) elaborated “The Plan for an Information Society: Japan’s National Goal Toward the Year 2000” in which he set out the most radical vision of development based on three stages: automation, knowledge creation, system innovation, with the computer as a key driving force.

All authors mentioned above appreciated the great transformational role of information and information technologies for social change. All except Bell (1973) envisioned a *multi-optional future* – not necessarily positive and democratic. However, all authors assumed some *possibility and social ability* to steer change by decisions, strategies, policies, business behavior, education, citizen participation, and so forth.

A more recent approach was presented within the ESRC Research Programme, “Virtual society?” subtitled “The social science of electronic technologies.” The Programme “was set up to research the implications of the continued massive growth in new electronic technologies” (ESRC, 2000, p. 3).

It had to serve the *policy agenda* and contribute to *business success*, to the *quality of life* and to the *better future of society* (see also Woolgar & Ingram, 2000). The program formulated the rules of virtuality

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