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UNESCO World Report Towards Knowledge Societies

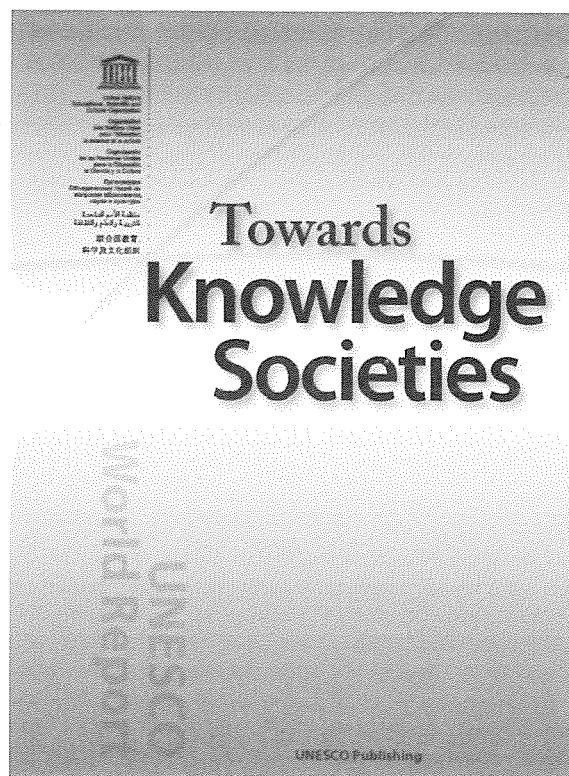
In view of Orbicom's substantial contributions to the international community in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva 2003/Tunis 2005), the attention of readers is attracted to the UNESCO World Report published for the Tunis phase of the Summit. The following quotes are extracted from the publication available in several languages on Orbicom and UNESCO Websites.

Does the aim of building knowledge societies make any sense when history and anthropology teach us that since ancient times, all societies have probably been, each in its own way, knowledge societies?

Today, as in the past, the control of knowledge can go hand in hand with serious inequality, exclusion and social conflict. Knowledge was long the exclusive domain of tight circles of wise men and the initiated few. Secrecy was the organizing principle behind these exclusive knowledge societies.

In the Age of Enlightenment, the demand for democracy, the concept of openness and the gradual emergence of a public forum for knowledge, fostered the spread of the ideas of universality, liberty and equality. The diffusion of knowledge through books and the printing press, as well as the extension of an education for all through schools and universities, accompanied this historical development. But the ideal of a public knowledge forum, which is the basis of UNESCO and of its Constitution, cannot be taken for granted...

The importance of education and critical thinking underscores that, in building real knowledge societies, the new prospects held out by the internet and multimedia tools must not cause us to lose interest in traditional knowledge sources such as the press, radio, television and, above all, the school. Most of the people in the world need books, school textbooks and teachers before comput-



ers and internet access. It is impossible to separate the issue of contents from that of languages and different forms of knowledge. This does not simply mean we should limit our scope to the debates about the growing importance of English in relation to the other major world languages or to the fate of languages threatened with extinction. What is also at stake is the space we should make for local or indigenous forms of knowledge within knowledge societies whose development models highly value the codification forms specific to scientific knowledge.

The increasing importance of cultural and linguistic diversity underscores the extent to which problems of access to knowledge are bound up with the production of knowledge. Fostering diversity also means nurturing the creativity of emerging knowledge societies. Such a prospect fulfils not only an abstract ethical imperative, it above all aims to raise in each society an awareness of the wealth of the forms of knowledge and capacities it possesses, in order to

increase their value and take advantage of what they have to offer. That done, each society will probably be better armed to cope with the ever-increasing pace of change that characterizes today's world...

The simultaneous growth of the internet, mobile telephony and digital technologies with the Third Industrial Revolution – which, at first in the developed countries, has seen much of the working population migrate to the service sector – has revolutionized the role of knowledge in our societies. These technologies play an important role not only in economic development (through the spread of innovation and the productivity gains they bring about), but also in human development. For some stagnating developed economies, in the late 1970s, the growth of new technologies seemed like a panacea for many nagging domestic problems, such as education and health care for the most underprivileged

in the United States, the recurring industrial and monetary crises in Japan and structural unemployment in Europe. For the developing countries, the promise of "technological leapfrogging", of being able to skip the stages of industrial development by adopting the most advanced technologies directly and to capitalize on their tremendous potential, held out special appeal. In emerging knowledge societies, there is also a virtuous circle in which the progress of knowledge and technological innovation produces more knowledge in the long term. We are witnessing an acceleration of knowledge production. The new technology revolution marks the entrance of information and knowledge in a cumulative logic, which Manuel Castells describes as "the application of such knowledge to knowledge generation and information / communication devices, in a cumulative feedback loop between innovation and the uses of innovation."

Today, as we are witnessing the advent of a global information society where technology has increased the amount of information available and the speed of its transmission beyond all expectations, there is still a long way to go before we achieve genuine knowledge societies. A piece of information, "enhanced" though it may be (to eliminate noise or transmission errors, for example), does not necessarily make sense. As long as vast swathes of the global population lack equal opportunity in terms of access to education – in order to master the available information with critical judgement and thinking, and to analyse, sort and incorporate the items they consider most interesting in a knowledge base – information will never be anything but a mass of indistinct data. And instead of controlling it, many people will realize that it is controlling them.

An excess of information is not necessarily the source of additional knowledge. What is more, the tools that can be used to "process" that information are not always up to the task. In knowledge societies, everyone must be able to move easily through the flow of information submerging us, and to develop cognitive and critical thinking skills to distinguish between "useful" and "useless" information. Useful knowledge is not simply knowledge that can be immediately turned into profit in a knowledge economy – "humanist" and "scientific" knowledge each obey different information- use strategies...

The successes achieved by a certain number of East and South-east Asian countries in the fight against poverty is largely explained by the massive investments they made in education and research and development (R&D) over several decades. This is a possible example for many developing countries, that would stand to gain from drawing inspiration from experiences that have helped to slash absolute poverty. In this perspective, the idea of knowledge societies cannot be reduced to a vision of the North – it can also constitute a new, relevant development approach for the countries of the South.

In this context, it is important to have a historical perspective. Instead of offering developing countries a "single model" of knowledge societies, it is worth recalling that the breakthroughs achieved in many nations are largely due to patient and concerted efforts in such areas as education at all levels, technological catch-up in strategic areas of scientific research and the implementation of effective innovation systems...

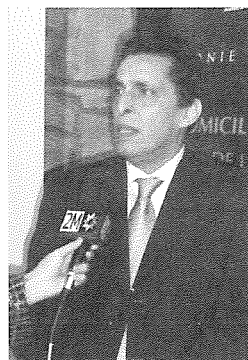
The Editor

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L'échange inégal, via les médias, entre démocrates du Nord et démocrates du Sud

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Le démocrate n'a pas de nationalité. Comme le prolétaire de Karl Marx, en somme : « Démocrates de tous les pays unissez-vous! » serait-il un slogan moins utopiste que l'original du Manifeste communiste? Il semble que non, à regarder de plus près les postures que campent les démocraties du Nord devant les démocrates du Sud. L'union semble même une chimère, non pas parce qu'elle est crainte pour une quelconque portée révolutionnaire qu'elle recèlerait, à l'instar de l'union des prolétaires marxistes (si redoutée au siècle dernier!), mais par simple myopie qui se traduit par une incroyable reddition politique et idéologique des tribunes et de leurs acteurs au Nord, comme dans les rangs des convertis au credo démocratique, chez nous, au Sud. Les deux camps mettent leurs armes à bas, renoncent à entretenir et à renforcer leur choix idéologique, se livrant, par mode de démonisme rampant dans les cultures des deux rives, à une démonologie par médias interposés, sans échange direct, sans échange égal entre camarades d'un même combat qui doit être livré contre les démons fossoyeurs des projets démocratiques, au Nord comme au Sud.

Mais que peuvent partager les « démocrates de tous les pays » pour qu'ils deviennent « compagnons de lutte »? Originellement beaucoup, aujourd'hui davantage... A l'origine, les deux érigèrent un autel pour le « pouvoir au peuple », mais divergèrent sur le modus operandi comme sur le modus vivendi : voie directe ou les multiples voies représentatives possibles...? Quel « moins mauvais » régime démocratique choisir ? La mosaïque des choix est vaste : depuis la Norvège jusqu'à l'Afrique du Sud, entre Moscou, Tokyo, Delhi, Vienne, Athènes, Paris, Londres, Reykjavik, Brasilia, Mexico, Washington, Ottawa, Canberra, Manille... Mais, suite aux barbaries mondiales du siècle dernier, goulag compris, la feuille de route minima de tout chantre du « pouvoir au peuple » prit définitivement le pli de la déclaration universelle des droits de la personne... Et ce pli devint plus net avec les derniers génocides de fin de siècle, en Europe centrale (Kosovo), en Afrique centrale (Grands Lacs) et ailleurs... Des drames dans lesquels les Médias ont eu leur lot de responsabilité, parfois directe (Rwanda/Burundi)... Maintenant, et plus que jamais, l'utopie de la démocratie, de l'union de tous les démocrates du monde, passe pour être la seule voie pratique et réaliste si on veut préserver ce qui pourrait encore résister à la barbarie comme résiduel essentiel de l'humanité du genre humain...

Texte complet sur le site d'Orbicom, section "chroniques"

La democratización de la información y la realidad puertorriqueña

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Intervención del autor en la mesa-debate "Sociedad de la información: la sociedad de las brechas", en el marco del II Congreso Mundial de Periodismo y Comunicación, realizado en Buenos Aires el 17 y 18 de noviembre de 2005.

La posibilidad de que los pueblos tuvieran acceso real a los medios de comunicación se tornó por mucho tiempo, décadas, en una aspiración permanente de aquellos que buscaban un auténtico proceso democratizador en el manejo de la información periodística, en el sentido de atender las necesidades de las mayorías. Centrados en los entramados del poder político y económico, aquellos periódicos caracterizados de importantes desecharon generalmente de sus páginas los conflictos sociales, laborales y comunitarios para centrarse en los debates politiqueros cotidianos que en nada contribuyen a la solución de los problemas, sino a mantenerlos solapados. Solo cuando los conflictos sociales o los reclamos de los trabajadores desbordaban las posibilidades del control gubernamental-empresarial-policial saltaban a las páginas de los diarios, que posiblemente observaron indiferentes el proceso de incubación de esas luchas.

Naturalmente, no todo lo que viene de las capas sociales menos afortunadas es ignorado por los diarios. Hay algunos periódicos cuya especialidad es alimentarse de la carroña social que genera la denominada crónica roja o las rencillas pasionales sin poner en perspectiva la precariedad económica, el hacinamiento, el alcoholismo o las carencias laborales como generadoras de tales males. De alguna manera esa indiferencia hacia los problemas reales de nuestros pueblos, ese distanciamiento entre la información periodística y la agonía cotidiana, ha provocado que muchos hayan dado la espalda a los periódicos impresos, que en naciones como Estados Unidos o Francia han sufrido caídas estrepitosas en sus circulaciones.

En el ámbito latinoamericano somos conscientes de que, en términos generales, los periódicos llegan a un porcentaje minoritario de la población, producto del analfabetismo y de la imposibilidad de invertir en un ejemplar de un diario unas monedas que probablemente resulten suficientes para llevarse un bocado de pan que ayude a paliar el hambre prevaleciente...

Continuación en el sitio de Orbicom, sección "crónicas"

Internet Aids Education

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Computer has emerged as a powerful educational medium that incorporates virtual, audio/video and print media to enhance both learning and instruction. It is a dynamic force in education providing a new and interactive means of overcoming time and distance to reach the learners. Internet facilities have made the world a lot smaller. Everything is now available online, be it chatting to an expert in California or downloading important information from universities abroad, internet has brought the entire world at your doorstep.

The value of education has increased in the society as the necessity is being realized by the society. The technologies have made it possible to spread quality education hence learners will have ample choice available. The Indian students have started using Internet for various purposes. UGC has taken initiative in developing UGC network of Indian universities and colleges and has entrusted creation and delivery of content in e-format to Consortium of Education Communication (CEC) and its network of Educational Multimedia Research Centres. In this context it is important to know how the students of higher education will receive e-content and integrate it in the learning process. The Internet use by these students provides insight and guidance for shaping up the system of e-content generation and dissemination and also management of the facility.

Many of the students cannot afford to have their own computer and only a small fraction can have Internet connection on their PC. Similarly the colleges and the universities so far not capable of meeting the needs of the students and the students have to look outside for such facilities. The cyber café opened up the possibility of popularising computer and Internet among the common mass. This fact has landed them an important position in the education system of the country.

Hence the cyber café provides the place where one can study the behaviour and need of the student and also get important clues for shaping up future e-content for the students. The owner is the person who can throw light on habits of the young cyber café users as they have a chance to observe them day and night at café. The cyber cafés are found in every nook and corner of the cities where the Internet connection is available and these cafes thrive on the student clientele. Therefore here there is an attempt to study the cafes selected from different areas covering Residential, Educational and Business areas...

Full text on Orbicom's Web site, "columns" section

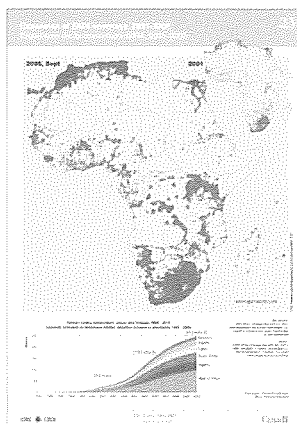
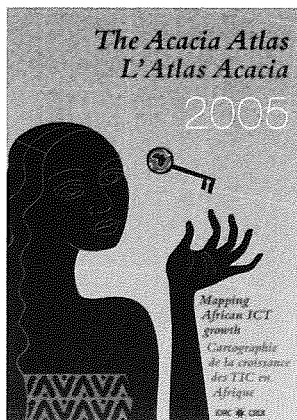
Publications

L'Atlas Acacia

Cartographie de la croissance des TIC en Afrique
CRDI 2005

Comprendre le rôle des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) dans le développement africain est une tâche difficile, en particulier du fait du rythme rapide des évolutions des technologies l'information et de la communication. Souvent, ce qui n'était qu'un rêve hier est devenu une réalité quotidienne. Il y a eu une multiplication de satellites, la téléphonie mobile a poursuivi sa croissance fulgurante, et même la fibre optique a enregistré une croissance qui dépasse toute attente. Des modifications importantes se sont produites dans la politique des pays africains qui ont senti venir le vent du changement et ont adapté leurs systèmes de réglementation pour profiter des TIC et les utiliser comme levier du développement. Certains pays ont également fait preuve d'une grande inertie face aux changements. Acacia a présenté plusieurs cartes des TIC depuis la première carte "Out of Africa". Ces cartes ont été utilisées pour l'enseignement, la communication et pour influencer les politiques. Elles sont devenues des instruments indispensables de sensibilisation aux perspectives numériques et aux déficits des TIC en Afrique.

Le réseau Orbicom est fier d'avoir contribué à l'Atlas Acacia 2005 à partir de ses travaux de "l'Observatoire des info-états pour le développement".



The Editor <http://www.idrc.ca/>



À lire dans le Bulletin Echoweb du CIFDI - 23 février 2006

Sommaire:

- Quel avenir pour la gouvernance d'internet ?
- Les indicateurs de la société de l'information
- Les tics pour l'égalité de genre
- Les bons blogs de l'Afrique
- La saga d'Ubuntu
- Richesse et diversité culturelles

<http://www.cifdi.francophonie.org/>

Conferences

International Symposium on Online Journalism 2006

7-8 April 2006
University of Texas, Austin, Texas
<http://journalism.utexas.edu/onlinejournalism>

IST-Africa 2006

3-5 May 2006
Pretoria, South Africa
<http://www.ist-africa.org>

GKP International Forum

8-9 May 2006
Colombo, Sri Lanka
<http://www.globalknowledge.org/internationalforum>

Le Sommet mondial sur « la société de l'information » et après?

18-19 mai 2006
Université Robert Schuman,
Strasbourg
cerime@urs.u-strasbg.fr
<http://www-urs.u-strasbg.fr>

Balkan Image: Historical and Communicational Approaches

19-20 May 2006
Sofia, Bulgaria
<http://www.aubg.edu>

Mapping the New Field of Communication for Development and Social Change

July 5-8, 2006
Brisbane, Australia
<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au:9999>

First Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum

24-26 October 2006
<http://www.igfgreece2006.gr>

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