

GLOBAL INFORMATIONAL FLUXES AND NATIONAL CULTURAL VALUES

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Summary

The new information and communication technologies (ICT) paved the way for the advent of the information society. Its main constitutional concept is information understood as a major factor of economic growth. Together with knowledge, information becomes an immanent part of production, thus replacing the traditional capital and labour. The global character of ICT and the qualitatively different functions of information originate a new universal cultural paradigm - the one of contemporary telecommunication. It results in new forms of sociability and social relations, which correspond to the changed cultural episteme. The alterations at the level of sociability have a global character, being caused by the influence of the universal telecommunication culture.

At the same time, the globalization of information confronts national cultures, the global information fluxes presenting a challenge to the preservation of local traditions and values. The relation 'global - local' reveals itself as a relation between information-rich countries, on the one hand, and information-poor ones, on the other. The dichotomy

‘global information - local culture’ should be defined not as a contradiction but rather as two sides of a whole.

1. Introduction

The shortest possible way to define life is perhaps as information processing. Perception, decoding, codification (on a new level), and further transmission of information is simultaneously mode of existence, contents of existence, and sustenance of existence. These procedures are essential characteristics of each living being.

In the course of evolution humans have acquired a new perspective of information, which makes out the qualitative difference between them and rest of the living world. Information has ‘stopped’ being structurally significant only as a degree and particular way of order (in the form of genes, electro-chemical processes, etc.), but, rather, it has been consciously perceived as a message with an inherent meaning. The specifically human capability of rational activity has turned information from a mere non-randomness into knowledge. As a result, information has been given a new application - it is used not only to sustain existence, but also to modify and change it along intentionally chosen lines. Humans, however, have not stopped there. They have moved further in the invention and construction of artifacts to apply them actively in this process of modification and change of their existence. The history of humankind is the history of the development of devices and techniques for ever better and more effective information processing and application.

Functionally seen, humans are the prototypes of the technological devices and machines. To remember Marx, human technological inventions are a supplementation and continuation of the human organs. The First Industrial Revolution came with the invention of machines which took the place of handicraft. The Second Industrial Revolution was brought about by, among others, electronic technologies which were able to replace man in his intellectual functions.

Along the way of human and technological evolution, time and space have proved to be a constant challenge. Their physical limits have always impaired the communication function of man - the reception and transmission of information. The development of communication technique has practically eliminated these limits: the telephone for the spoken word, the TV for the image, and the computer - for the written word.

The existence of humankind as an information society has begun.
(See *Environment and communication*)

2. The Information Society

The concept of the information society is connected with the works of various sociologists and politologists like Alvin Toffler, Daniel Bell, Alain Touraine, and others. In the meantime it has transgressed the borders of the scientific domain and has become one of the favorite words for politicians and journalists, thus conveying the feeling of something familiar. Nevertheless, the differences in the theories referring to

the information society pinpoint the fact that this phenomenon, although recognized, is far from being unanimously conceptualized. All theorists, however, unite in the fact that the advent of information society has been prepared for by the development and application of highly sophisticated and revolutionary information and communication technologies (ICT). The latter lead to particular qualitative changes in both the method of production and the functions of information itself. Thus, information and knowledge replace labor and capital as major productive forces and factors of economic growth, pronouncing the end of the industrial society. This, on its behalf, requires reformulation of market, investment, and employment policy. The changes to take place, however, do not limit themselves to the spheres of finance, business, production, and trade. The ICT paradigm will affect and already affects literally all sectors of human life.

2.1. Time and Space in the Context of ICT

The understanding of time and space was one of the first to be revised. The collapse of time and the compression of space through world-wide networks of high technologies brought new quality into the practice of communication, facilitating the processes of globalization. Corresponding terms have been coined to reflect adequately the current developments: ‘global village’ (McLuhan), metaphorically describing the shrinking of distances, ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey), ‘lost dimension’ (Virilio) among others.

With the establishment of the Internet, humankind definitely won the battle, at least this round against time and space. The foundations of the Internet were laid down in 1969 with the transregional network ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) of the US Ministry of Defense encompassing only four computers. In 1994 - in that year the USA announced the beginning of the Information-Super-Highway construction - the number of the computers ‘on-line’ had passed one million.

All these developments caused changes in human expectations, attitudes, and conduct. Today one speaks about (and does!) teleworking, telebanking, teleshopping in virtual firms, banks, and shops, while the slogans of the contemporary information society read: ‘as quickly as possible’ and ‘more information, more knowledge’!

2.2. Universal Cultural Paradigm

As a way to approach culture and cultural phenomena universality is based on the presupposition of universal characteristics common to all human beings. These universals are responsible for a relatively high degree of uniformity in the patterns of man’s thinking and acting. Universality, born in Europe, is rooted in the concepts of reason and rationality as immanent features of humans. These concepts work as organizing principles of the universal system of culture and represent the dominant epistemes of our epoch, marked by the reign of science and technology. Specific for the organizing principles is that they ‘require’ adequate, compatible forms of social structuring, i.e., the change of the epistemes inevitably leads to a respective change in the forms of social co-existence. (See *Diversity and unity in the cultural heritage of peoples, states and humanity*)

In the age of ICT and information society the dominant epistemes are information and

knowledge. Thanks to the existing sophisticated technology and global networks of telecommunications, these epistemes do not function only as ideological paradigms. Rather they have invaded everyday life, defining human interrelations and interactions on a new level, thus generating new forms of sociality and revising traditional cultural and socio-political values. Actually, there are enough arguments to speak of a new culture in the process of its origination - the telecommunication culture. The prognoses about the future development of human beings with respect to cultural, sociopolitical, and economic structures and action are to be argued from the perspective of two major characteristics of telecommunication culture: machine-mediated communication and globalization of information.

3. Telecommunication Culture and Its Impact on Society

It is a platitude to state that an objective and precise analysis and definition of a particular object of study is hardly possible when attempted at the moment of its origination. The conceptualizing of the phenomenon of the information society with its developing telecommunication culture is not an exception. The task is additionally complicated by the scope and complexity of the involved problem-areas. It is, then, a small wonder that the theorists of information society and information and communication technologies significantly differ from one another in their respective contributions to the subject-matter in question. All of them, however, unanimously share the opinion that modern machine-mediated communications and the new quality of information will inevitably lead to changes in the forms of sociality and the corresponding social structures.

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Biographical Sketch

Maria Wuketits, born July 30, 1955 in Kuonino (Bulgaria). She studied philosophy and languages (English, Russian) at the University of Sofia (Bulgaria), where she received her Ph.D. in 1982. She worked at the Department of Philosophy at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and at the University of Sofia, and was fellow student at the Russian Academy of Sciences. She also lectured at the Interuniversity Center in Dubrovnik. Since 1990 she has lived in Austria and worked at the Institut für Sprachwissenschaft as well as at the Karl Popper Institut at the University of Vienna. She has published numerous articles on topics in philosophy of technology, social philosophy, and political philosophy, and is also working as translator and interpreter.