

*imOethics* PROGRAMME  
AND THE ARCHIVES

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*In 1995, UNESCO starts a project on the ethical and socio-cultural challenges of the Information Society. Its fundamental concept is that content of information is what matters most in the globalization of the applications of new information and communication technologies. The content should be accessible to the largest extent possible to all; its quality, diversity and reliability should be safeguarded; its security should be guaranteed. This is opening vast new opportunities and presenting new challenges for libraries and archives which, if not handled in time, can seriously undermine their critical role as a driving force in the advancing Global Information Infrastructure. They should be cautious in overestimating the immediate changes that new technologies will generate and in underestimating its much less understood, profound and long-term effects on social, cultural, educational and behavioural structures. Intellectual reflection among all partners concerned (governments, businesses and civil society) on the ethical, legal and societal aspects of cyberspace is one of UNESCO's (CII/INF) main Unesofaction.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many in this audience know that the topics we are discussing these coming days have been at the core of UNESCO's General Information Programme from its creation in 1978. But like everyone else in the world, we were rapidly challenged by the tremendous development of information and communication technologies and even more so by their impact on our societies. We could expect, as UNESCO has always been strongly committed to equality, justice and mutual respect in the application of human rights.

Hence, UNESCO launched in 1995 the *INFOethics* project. Its concept rests on several observations. The foremost of these is that the globalization of technologies resulted in the globalization of the content of information with all its consequences for which our societies are not ready.

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In his recent work Mr Montviloff has been in charge of UNESCO's programme on the ethical, legal and social aspects of the applications of information technologies. In this context, he organized last March in Monaco *INFOethics - UNESCO's First International Congress on Ethical, Legal and Societal Aspects of Digital Information* and is preparing *INFOethics '98* to be held from 1 to 3 October 1998.

We also note that most of the debates on these consequences are concerned with the economic interests and dangers of this globalization, considering the content of information only as a tradeable commodity. The political, social, cultural and educational changes this globalization brings about receive much less attention, although they will have more lasting effects on the successful establishment of, what we call, an Information Society. We say "yes" to the market economy; but we say "no" to the market society.

It is on these changes that UNESCO is focusing its INFOethics activities. We believe in the quality of the content of information and in its diversity. We also believe that information falling in the public domain will be the motor in achieving this quality and this diversity. Finally, we firmly believe that long established stores of knowledge such as libraries and archives, both in private and public sectors, whose primary vocation has always been to serve the public, will have a predominant role in creating a truly universal environment in cyberspace.

### **WHAT MATTERS IS MATTER**

The new technologies offer us new means to widen access to information. They make the latter far more reachable for all citizens at any time and in any place. They can help enhancing the information quality and diversity. There are many other application possibilities put at our disposal now. Their efficiency will no doubt continue to improve. How they will be used is another question. Advanced technologies alone do not produce wisdom.

Helpful as they may be, they are only tools that still need to be managed. Like "pipes" they carry what they are instructed to carry, and their usefulness depends on what they contain. What is important is not the bottle but the wine it holds. What counts at the end is not the technology used but what it is used for.

The lesson is that we should pay much more attention to developing the content and not let ourselves be carried away by some kind of "technophilia". As a colloquium held at UNESCO in 1995 concluded "the information highways will play a decisive role in human evolution only under the condition that the recipient of information and the content of information are dealt with together".

### **INFORMATION IN PUBLIC DOMAIN**

We consider that one priority in dealing with the content at the global level is to make information belonging to the public domain available on the networks to the largest possible population of users. Let us finally democratize access to information. A great quantity of this rich information is still unknown and, therefore, unutilized all over the world.

We have now the technological means to overcome some of the old barriers. What is still missing is the political vision on the opportunities and dangers of making this information more accessible on a global scale. The INFOethics programme aims at contributing to the reflection on the principles which should guide the development of this vision.

**But UNESCO cannot do it alone. We can do it only if we can count on the civil society, i.e. non-governmental organizations, professionals — librarians, archivists, information specialists, communicators, philosophers, sociologists, educators, etc. INFOethics is addressed to ali of you.**

## **SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Cyberspace, with its present backbone - the Internet, is an open, interactive environment and should remain so if it is to grow. This poses immediately the question of who is responsible for defining its basic principles as no network can exist without commonly accepted norms and protocols?**

**Businesses are saying "we", because governmental and intergovernmental organizations are too slow and are not able to follow the rapid technological advances. Governments are replying "we" on the basis that they are in charge of their community prosperity and well-being. Both have the weakness of imposing principles that tend to control the content although not always with the same objective, businesses being more concerned by rapid commercial returns.**

**We are in favour of the third solution - the civil society. We consider that their professionalism is not sufficiently exploited in dealing with the issues raised by making information available on the global networks. Both businesses and governments will gain by collaborating more with the non-governmental organizations.**

**They are the closest partners to the users of information and know best their needs; they often possess the international perspective as their members come from different parts of the world; they don't put the financial returns in front of ali the other issues dealing with the content; they have a much deeper understanding of these "other issues" that are numerous and complex and that governments are slow to deal with and businesses are seldom interested.**

**What are these issues? How do they relate to INFOethics? How do they concern you? Those are the three questions I wish to reply to.**

## **ECONOMIC ISSUES**

**These issues are debated almost in every fórum, be it at the national or international level. Even more so, every meeting on the impacts of digital information on our societies automatically concentrates its attention mainly on electronic commerce and the intellectual property rights with a closely related question of copyright. Understandable, as they lead at the end to economic development Without going into the details of these highly important and complex issues let us examine two main aspects.**

**First, one notes that debates on these issues are often one-sided. Even if one limits oneself to the consideration of financial remuneration without looking into the moral implications, one observes that emphasis is often laid on the rights of producers of information and intermediaries in its circulation to the detriment of the rights of users. Hence, the importance**

of developing our understanding of the latter. Users' rights to have access to accurate, reliable public information and to be protected from violent information are basic human rights.

(UNESCO recognizes the rights of cultural industries as generators of cultural creativity and also defends the rights of the consumers of information so that they are not kept away from information for someone's mercantile reasons).

Secondly, debates on these issues do not consider that the universality of the so-called information society is still a fiction. 75% of humanity is living below the level of poverty and has little or no chance at all to have access to information in the near future not only for financial reasons, but also for educational, cultural, social and behavioural ones. In this reside the other ethical, legal and societal challenges of cyberspace - the INFOethics programme.

To what extent the INFOethics programme deals with the electronic commerce? We consider that electronic commerce will play a key role in the economic development in the future. But it will also be a new source of political and social tensions if it is handled the way commerce has always been handled - to the benefit of the rich. The gap between rich and poor continues to deepen.

We consider that in view of the globalization of the electronic commerce, global principles need to be formulated to ensure that most of the excluded get a chance to participate in this commerce. Unfortunately, it does not seem to take this direction at present. Information in poor communities, communities without defense, is becoming increasingly the major source of revenues for big businesses.

UNESCO also believes that by encouraging the availability of information in the public domain, i.e. information that in most cases is free of IPR constraints and that abounds in every corner of the earth, we increase the chances of everyone to participate in the global Information Society. But, here again, the use and circulation of this information should be defined by global principles that in some cases might have to be embodied in treaties or international law. For what purpose? In what form? Under what conditions? Questions that still need to be elucidated.

Libraries and archival institutions have also reasons to be cautious about the electronic commerce. The richness of their collections is the "want" of many (individuals or companies), for quick profit making. Moreover, this information may be changed and manipulated without their knowledge. There were already many widely publicized cases of big businesses exploiting huge public stores of information for their markets not giving sufficient legal guarantees to libraries, archives or museums.

## **DIVERSITY ISSUES**

The second set of important issues that we are concerned with in the INFOethics programme arises from the challenge of ensuring diversity of information accessible on the Internet. A true information society will exist only when every person will be able to express him or herself on this medium; when everyone will be able to participate in his/her own language; when every person will be able to voice his/her cultural and traditional values.

We all know that the Internet is now largely dominated by the English-speaking world and therefore by their culture. There is nothing wrong about it and they might be proud of it.

Again, many will reply that everyone is already free to do so. The question is then, why don't they do it? The reason is that the statement is only a wishful thinking. Matters are different in the real world.

Let us observe what is happening in a highly technologically developed country like Japan where access to computers is relatively common, the level of training is high, and traditions seem to live pretty well in harmony with technological innovations. Nevertheless, their communication with the rest of the world is extremely limited because of a language barrier. What purpose does it serve to have 2/3 of the information available on the Internet in English when it is out of reach for them?

The issue is not the language itself. It is rather the limit it puts on your capacity to communicate in an environment that claims to be universal. You cannot participate in on-line discussion groups. You cannot share knowledge about your culture. You cannot get information from other sources. Your economic progress is slowed down. Your culture is misinterpreted. Your children, forced to use a foreign language on the Net, are at risk, as some studies have shown, of losing their mother tongue. It is even realistic to foresee that entire languages will disappear. Where is then the diversity of the content on the Web?

We believe that the approach of promoting electronic translation is worth considering; but it is only one approach. With INFOethics we wish to encourage nations to develop norms, standards, legal instruments, principles and codes of conduct which will permit their citizens to have access to a much broader scope of knowledge. To achieve this they might have to overcome some political, social and educational barriers.

The civil society has a great responsibility in persuading governments and businesses alike to encourage the diffusion of information in many languages, especially in their own mother tongue. The approach is not to protect the language but to promote its usage in cyberspace. Libraries and archival institutions have a leading role in developing Websites with national content and making these sites accessible worldwide; it is, in addition, a way of ensuring the authenticity of the content diffused in cyberspace.

## SECURITY ISSUES

This brings us to the third set of issues linked to the problem of security. Which institution or organization is not concerned with this problem? A great deal has been said about the various technological means of ensuring security on the Internet. Cryptography and norms are being developed in all major nations of the world to protect classified information in the public as well as private sectors.

Nevertheless, data-mining is flourishing and with all evidence will continue to do so. Cases of piracy and malicious manipulations of information are reported to the amazement of everyone

with an increased frequency. Technological solutions appear to be extremely unreliable because they are ephemeral.

Should we then turn to legal solutions? There is no doubt that they are needed, at least in broad terms. Although the largely accepted approach of self-regulation seems to win more and more followers, some regulatory mechanism will increasingly be needed to define the limits of this self-regulation. Confidence in the electronic environment will be at that price.

This might be one of the reasons why both governments and businesses are very hesitant in using the global networks. The system is too permeable and does not provide security of data. In this regard, libraries and archives have a particular problem to resolve. As they store and receive information that can be easily retrieved, manipulated and circulated with the new technologies, they have to pay special attention to the authenticity of information they process and the authenticity of its source. This is the whole question of accountability through space and time, an uneasy task in the electronic environment where information is highly volatile and diffused in no time throughout the globe.

UNESCO is strongly committed to the issue of security. We believe that regulation systems are needed not only to protect commercial interests of businesses, but also to protect governments, institutions and individuals from undesired intrusion in their information, its unauthorized diffusion worldwide and its falsification. We defend the moral right for privacy and confidentiality.

## **PRIVACY ISSUES**

Finally, we come to the question of privacy - issue under review of this session. There is no privacy on the Internet. The moment someone decides to circulate information via the electronic media he/she should know that someone else could use this information. All personal details are immediately around the globe when you communicate through electronic means. Thus, the European Union recently admitted that within Europe the US routinely intercepts all e-mail, telephone and fax Communications.

Government agencies and companies are steadily amassing more and more data on individuals. This data can be monitored by a long list of people: banks, shops, employers, servers, etc; every new piece of technology brings a new threat to privacy; our habits, interests and lifestyle are under close scrutiny when we surf on the Web. The increased number of "cookies" that track our every movement on the Web helps this. (I recently read that Spain issued in 1996 a new social security card, a "smartcard" which has the fingerprints on it). This personal data can be sold - a dangerous area called "function creep" where data collected for one purpose is used for another.

In our age even organizations that are set up to protect our privacy cannot guarantee our privacy. By the end of the year the European countries are expected to comply with the European Union directives on the protection of individuals with regard to processing personal data. But will it change anything? Those who are doing it already will continue. Others will probably comply with the minimum requirements of the directives.

The US network called "Echelon" illustrates dramatically what can happen. A former member of the Canadian Security Establishment (CSE) is convinced that 99.99% of all Communications throughout the world are intercepted by a network of English-speaking countries and it keeps improving. The data thus collected can be used for any purpose.

This is to say that the question of privacy and confidentiality goes well beyond our imagination. There is no doubt, as the European Parliament indicates, that a control organization has to be established. Its function will be to define who, where and when can be watched or listened to and under which conditions the information can be used so as to limit the malicious practice.

Libraries and archival institutions are particularly vulnerable to this type of practices, whether they are located in companies or in public institutions; many questions come to our mind: what institutions can decide on the legal value of public or industrial archives, their nature and the time of their conservation? How do we guarantee the safety of electronic documents over time? What norms should be applied to the processing of electronic archives? Who should maintain them?

These questions merit our attention; we have no answer at this time. Through INFOethics we endeavour to make every government aware of the necessity to reflect on them and to take measures for the protection of their citizens.

It is with this objective in mind that UNESCO launched a series of International Congresses on the ethical, legal and societal challenges of cyberspace. The first of these took place in March 1997 and the second - INFOethics'98 - is forthcoming, from 1 to 3 October. Prior to the Congress we will hold a two-day expert meeting on the principles for a framework for cyberlaw.

I wish to conclude by re-emphasizing that libraries and archives by entering the age of globalization will have to have a vision of their role in the Information Society and how they can contribute to make it more fair, secure and liveable than it is now.

In our opinion, the challenges they will have to tackle will certainly include enhancing accessibility to information, installing confidence in electronic information, securing privacy and confidentiality, guarantying its authenticity through time and defining the roles of everyone for its accountability.

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Portugal

