Alliance for a responsible and united world

"New information and communication technologies" Workshop

Experience sheets

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Presentation

The successful emergence of new information and communication technologies (NICT) is primarily due to its designers and diffusers who have been able to adapt them to every sector and provide a service everywhere where signs are manipulated (i.e. in almost every human activity). The first success of NICTs was to facilitate and accelerate certain previously laborious tasks, but they can also radically change the very nature of work in general, by implementing new methods of processing information. There is no doubt that the originality of these new methods is that by promoting the manipulation and transmission of these signs signs, they substitute centralized management systems by one based on a network using processes of reciprocity and exchange.

Thus NICTs represent a germ of democratization for the whole of society. They go beyond facilitating the reception and transmission of messages and information. On a deeper level, they must constitute an arena for interaction and exchange where all types of players can participate, and provide the skein for a world shared by all, a space for setting up public life on a planetary scale. This is why it is important to encourage the process of socialization at work in the history of these technologies, initially invented for military use then transferred to the public sphere thanks to researchers and computer engineers. However, this social role needs to be asserted in the face of the risks of NICTs being taken over exclusively by financial and commercial interests which can only contribute towards the disappearance of collective use to the profit of private consumption.

It is obvious that NICTs can produce both good and bad. Acting so that the social innovations that these technologies bring take root above all means understanding that they do not create new conditions immediately, but rely initially on those that exist already, reflecting society's areas of cohesion and division, which can be gradually modified and renewed. It is necessary to grasp the way that NICTs are used at different levels in various balances of power (cultural, political, economic, etc.), to know where and how to influence their evolution, and thus the evolution of these balances of power themselves.

Detailed contents

Introduction

1 – Multimedia: the routes to social control

The advent of new communication technologies requires democratic consultation based on highlighting and discussing the different stakes at play and the real needs of society, without which commercial interests alone will dictate their use and finalities.

2 – Multimedia and communication with a human face. Towards the social control of information highways

The appearance of a new tool and a new method of communication contains the potential for democratizing the whole of society. Nonetheless, it is essential to influence this development so as to bring to the fore the social imperatives that it should satisfy, rather than allowing it to conform to existing fractures and social exclusion.

3 – The social control of technologies: working orientations

The Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind proposes to coordinate the compilation of a collective and international work on the social control of information and communication technologies (ICT). Its general theme is that they should not only be seen in the light of the future they portend (and to which we should adapt), but also and above all from the point of view of current problems.

I. How things happen: understanding the different stakes at play

4 – The social control of technologies: the case of high definition TV

The study of the stakes at play in the emergence and diffusion of a technology such as high definition television demonstrate how difficult it is to reconcile the interests and hopes of the different players (companies, diffusers, etc.). Thus the role of the State appears vital in this area, even more so as it is the only means of allowing audiences to have a say in the choices to be made.

5 – Computers, a checkered technological history

The history of computers shows how democratic action can have a decisive influence on the development of a technology once reserved for military use.

6 – Communication as a weapon in the Gulf War

The Gulf War in 1991 brought to light the predominant place that information and communication technologies, most of which were designed in the framework of military research, now occupy in the panoply of weapons.

7 – Utopia and informational counter-revolution

The de facto alliance of liberal movements and the pressure of the market economy have led to making the Internet a legally inviolable medium, unhindered by State intervention and regulations, thereby permitting the triumph of ultra-liberalism.

8 – The American law of 1996 concerning telecommunications

Designed as a means of arbitration between different private corporate interests, the American law of 1996 submits the telecommunication sector to the major companies, leading to increasing control in fewer hands, under the pretext of allowing the market to be the driving force for development.

9 – Computers and democratization: the example of the Urals

Computers have been present in the Urals since the sixties, but their use long remained subject to the dictates of the Soviet regime (political, military and industrial). The change-over to a market economy, coinciding with a new generation of tools, has led to more democratic and decentralized information processing.

10 – Software transfers in Brazil and Cuba

The study of software transfers in Brazil and Cuba at the end of the eighties shows that these new technologies, integrated in existing political and economic systems, have failed to generate new conditions for development.

II. Influence at world level

11 – Information, computers and communication. UNESCO's actions and support received for their implementation

Thanks to the support of UNESCO and other institutions, projects have been launched on every continent, placing computer technology in the service of access to information and knowledge.

12 – Declaration of the New Delhi symposium on new technologies and the democratization of audiovisual communication

The emergence of new technologies in the area of communication and information is an opportunity to set in motion democracy that meets the challenge of globalization. Therefore it is important to free them from the exclusive control of government, military and commercial interests, which can only strengthen current imbalances.

13 – Towards a global framework for democratic media

Based on the idea that the media in general constitutes a public and social resource that cannot be entirely handed over to industry and commerce, action at every level of legislation (local, national, global) can have a democratizing influence on the progression of the international media system.

14 – Communication networks – a right for all

In order to avoid the acquisition of telecommunications networks by corporations and the military, and put forward the idea around the world that these channels constitute the essential vector for democratization, it is vital to overhaul and strengthen international regulations and supervisory institutions to ensure they are shared equitably.

15 – An international right ... to communicate

Establishing an international law, which can only be effective if communication is designed as a reciprocal process (therefore involving not only freedom of choice and access but also that of participation at individual and collective level), must inevitably conflict with government and commercial interests.

16 – Communication and democracy: emergency and duration

In contrast with the discourse that assures us that new technologies will solve their problems themselves if only they are allowed to develop in the framework of the market, democratic action in the area of communication, must also learn how it can progress through time without neglecting the need to act now to ensure participation and the right of access.

III. Integrating technologies, democratising communication

17 – What concept of communication? Politics and not telematics

The emergence of new communication and information tools can be harmful for democracy if, under cover of greater immediacy, they take over the areas in which collective interactions and speech take place.

18 – IBM France and "technological" sponsorship

Concerned with its labor relations, IBM France has developed different types of sponsorship in particular by providing equipment and know-how. This has sometimes led to longer-term technical and economic partnerships.

19 – Microcomputers and local democracy in France

Computers can be a powerful tool for promoting popular participation in decision-making, through improving information and dialog with the decision-makers themselves, provided the latter accept to play the game.

20 – Online districts: a civic information network on the Net at Philadelphia

A Philadelphia organization has installed a server dedicated to promoting civic values (particularly the participation of citizens at district level), with emphasis on making available information on all aspects of social life and on working in a network at local and national levels.

21 – New technologies as local development tools in the United States

Setting up a center dedicated to new communication technologies permits mobilizing a small rural community by promoting a large number of learning and consolidation processes and renewing links between inhabitants.

22 – Analysis and reflections on computing in rural France

The integration of computers in French rural and farming communities emphasizes both the successes (due to the simplicity of many operations) and limits of this technology, especially in a context where it is unable to replace in-the-field experience.

23 – Electronic communication methods in Hong Kong

An attempt to launch a TV channel accessible to the public in Hong Kong has come up against lack of interest by the population and the reluctance of the powers, on the brink of the territory's retrocession to China, to allow participatory communication.

24 – Internet: free access to information? Restriction and control in southern Africa

Concerned with keeping control over information flows, certain African governments tend to restrain Internet's potential for developing the exchange of information in their countries, by taking advantage, among other things, of the lack of an appropriate legal framework.

25 – Is democratization a business in Brazil?

The reorganization (at legislative and infrastructural levels) of Brazil's information and communications systems should give the opportunity for civil society to intervene to ensure that the advent of new technologies does not yet further strengthen monopolies and private interests to the detriment of the democratic role of communication.

IV. Working in networks

26 – Central memory: computers and development work

Although players in Latin American development have started to use computers for ordinary and external tasks, they often neglect their potentialities for managing information, i.e. their capacity to centralize and redistribute information make them the ideal medium for a dynamic memory.

27 – The APC, an electronic network for NGOs in the North and South

The Association for Progressive Communications intends promoting the use of computers in NGOs around the world to improve the exploitation of information by working in a network. To this end, it ensures logistic support and above all attempts to facilitate access to telecommunications in places where this is difficult.

28 –Internet workshop in Peru : Net Worth

Organizations of Latin American fishermen have got together to familiarize themselves with the Internet and discover its potential for coordinating dialog at regional level and with other fishermen's movement around the world.

29 – Computer-mediated communication and civil society. NGOs and the global civil society

The study of Latin American NGOs' use of Email illustrates how it can help to strengthen existing links and expand perspectives for action. However, progress remains to be made, particularly in gaining access to technology so that this new method of communication can be the basis of a global civil society.

Recueil de fiches DPH, Olivier Petitjean (ed.)