

DEMOCRATIZATION OF INFORMATION: INFORMATION LITERACY

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The theme: Information literacy must be considered as a basic human right for life-long learning. Promoting information literacy means empowering people to reach their potential in information society

1. What is Information Literacy? Definitions and different aspects of the concept.

Information Literacy has been defined as the ability to identify locate evaluate organize and effectively create use and communicate information to address an issue or a problem.

In a recent Information Literacy conference in Prague organized by UNESCO and NCUS the various aspects of the subject were addressed as follows "For all societies Information Literacy is becoming an increasingly important component of not only literacy policies and strategies but also of global policies to promote human development" "Information Literacy is a prerequisite for participating effectively in an Information Society"

The fundamental challenge is how to empower people to benefit from existing information and communications resources and technologies in an Internet Age how to bridge the digital divide and make Information Society to rise to its full potential.

To improve the situation at least three sides of the issue have to be improved: 1. Ready access to information and communication technologies 2. Unrestricted availability of needed information 3. An information literate citizenry to mobilize an effective civil society Information Literacy is a basic right because citizens of today and tomorrow cannot fully use their other rights without it. So when speaking about access to information it should cover not only technical access to it but also the organization of information direct/personal help for finding it and ability to use it.

2. What are the barriers to developing holistic policies for ensuring Information Literacy?

The topic is easily underestimated or passed by Decision-makers cannot often see all the

consequences. It's difficult to count its importance in financial terms since it's so abstract. That's why it should be clearly connected into larger policies of Information Society. Till now there is no balance on any policy making level between the different parts needed to form up a working Information Society. Both technical infrastructure and cognitive skills of people are needed. Very often the technical part is overestimated. Visible and immediate results are appreciated by most politicians. Grassroot-level results are often overlooked.

The shortage of public access points is naturally a barrier even in technically advanced societies. More public access points are needed to meet the needs.

The mentality can tie a barrier. Here we can clearly see the generation gap. Even some elder researchers cannot see the potential offered by new access to electronic material.

The lack of understanding and co-operative habits between different sectors of government is also a barrier to holistic development policy. Business and NGO-sectors may not be enough developed or even interested in co-operation with governmental bodies.

3. What should be done to overcome these barriers? How to promote Information Literacy and capacity building?

First I want to emphasize the need of balanced policy to improve parallelly both the technical infrastructure and the skills of the people. We have to build up bridges between the international and national information policies and literacy and life-long learning policies.

Education, especially of girls and women, is the main key for development. That applies to promoting Information Literacy as well. Educating librarians, teachers and journalists for understanding the meaning of enlarged literacy is of great importance. Capacity-building is depending on the quality of education and media. In the middle of the chaotic jungle of information and disinformation you need the capacity for independent thinking and choosing and participating; controlling your own life.

National and local programs for Information Literacy should be started with resources allocated to them. Support to networks of local people (learning communities), encouraging people to maintain the connections. Public information and public services available via the Internet -and the necessary help to use the new tools.

International workshop on “Democratization of Information: Focus on Libraries”

Producing Internet material in the native language and digitizing the existing cultural heritage; motivating citizens to learn.

Exchange of experiences on a national and international level and encouraging the activities of citizens.

4. The common answer to all the questions connected with Information Literacy: developing Libraries
(As Kay Raseroka has said it "Do not waste resources on reinventing the wheel..")

What is needed now is the political will to deploy the financial resources required for developing the democratic Information Society for all the citizens.

High quality library and information services are the best way to guarantee:

- freedom of access to information, knowledge, culture
- safe environment and professional Guidance for information learning to find the reliable needed information
- unbiased variety of Information sources
- access to local government services
- tools to develop critical thinking
- promoting democracy and active citizenship