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Renewing the Knowledge Societies Vision for Peace and Sustainable Development

by Robin Mansell

Professor of New Media and the Internet, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science

and Gaetan Tremblay

Professeur, Ecole des medias, Faculte de communication, Universite du Quebec a Montreal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Any vision of knowledge societies must affirm the core aspirations for peaceful and sustainable knowledge societies in a way that acknowledges the interests of all stakeholders. It is essential to recall that knowledge societies are concerned with human development, not only with technological innovation and its impacts. In this report, we focus on the importance of freedom of expression and information, universal access to knowledge, quality education for all, and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. We underline the key role of learning and training processes, grassroots initiatives and stakeholders' participation, and policies to achieve *a fair balance* between public and private interests.

In the wake of rapid, and sometimes surprising, developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and in the media, information and communication environment, we call for the renewal of UNESCO's knowledge societies vision as a means of highlighting priorities for UNESCO and other stakeholders in a WSIS+10 world. UNESCO played a leading role with the ITU in the planning for the WSIS 2003/2005, setting out its vision for *Knowledge Societies* in its 2005 World Report. It is time for a renewal of that vision in the light of experience.

UNESCO's initial vision of knowledge societies moved beyond a focus on the information and communication infrastructure to human beings and to processes of learning. In 2013, the vision of knowledge societies for peace and sustainable development requires a further move to emphasize the need to rally partners from the private and public sectors and civil society to clarify persistent problems and to create processes and actions that will address them. UNESCO is well-positioned to lead in future work aimed at promoting *knowledge societies that are inclusive and equitable*.

Our starting point is to recall that, if knowledge is valuable economically, it is also the core of culture and human life within peaceful societies. We emphasise that *universal access* to information is a basic requirement to create knowledge societies for peace and sustainable development, but such universal access is not a sufficient requirement. This is because knowledge implies meaning, appropriation and participation. Access to knowledge implies much more than access to ICTs. It involves learning in formal and informal educational settings

and it is partly acquired through experience. Knowledge is a means to achieve social and economic goals. It is essential to cultural socialization, political participation and integration within markets. It is also the path to individual and collective emancipation and should be valued for itself. The full potential of digital networks, media and information applications can only be achieved if there is a fair balance between private and public interests in knowledge.

If the goal of knowledge societies is to foster peace and sustainability, it is imperative that strategies for action ensure that decisions at all levels promote the *integration of knowledge* within people's lives in ways that maximize the benefits and minimize harms. These strategies need to take the goals of economic prosperity, environmental protection, inclusive social equity and justice into account. It is essential to understand, not only what needs to be done to promote knowledge societies, but also to understand how the interests of stakeholders are changing. The renewal of UNESCO's vision of knowledge societies must acknowledge that policy measures are needed to support an open information commons and a market-led approach in a balanced way. The policy environment currently favours market-led strategies and actions often focus principally on technology and digital information, neglecting other issues.

Policy makers need to look *beyond the uses* of networks and ICT applications to the conditions – institutional, regulatory, financial, political, and cultural – that frame these uses, whether the focus is on mobiles, social media or databases.

Learning is at the core of knowledge societies. The expansion of digital networks opens fantastic opportunities to facilitate education and learning at all levels. But this potential can materialize only if basic requirements are satisfied: above all, high quality content and well-trained tutors. High quality education for all, at every level, must be one of the main aims of knowledge societies for peace and sustainable development. This can be achieved only through investment in training educators, whether they facilitate formal or informal learning. An equally important concern for policy is cultural and linguistic diversity which are essential for encouraging participation in knowledge societies. If these are not given sufficient attention, people may gain access to networks and digital information, but not to *education and learning opportunities* that are meaningful to them in their everyday lives.

Distance education is frequently identified as the miracle solution to the lack of educational materials and human resources, including the capabilities for learning such as reflection and making sense of information. Indeed, it can serve as an effective means of giving better access to scarce learning resources. Properly used, it can help to train teachers more rapidly in countries where large numbers of teachers are needed in a short time to meet the needs of primary and secondary schools. But to be effective, distance education must be designed well in advance, rely on high quality content, and qualified technicians, teachers and tutors, and build the capabilities associated with *a sufficient range of literacies* among its learners.

A crucial question is how a society should organize access to information while encouraging the creation and production of knowledge. This question goes to the very heart of how we really value knowledge socially, as well as economically. The challenge is to find a balanced solution that is socially acceptable and economically viable between two contrasting options: (i) copyright which protects intellectual property but restricts access to information in the market; and (ii) the commons approach which favors a public domain and open access to all information. Dogmatic opposition between proprietary market-led approaches and the information commons should be rejected. Adjustments to the policy environment should be encouraged to enable market and commons-based creative activity to proceed in parallel and to foster *hybrid approaches*. Stimulating the production of information in knowledge societies which is relevant for those who apply it remains a major challenge for policy makers in the coming decades.

Access to information and knowledge, together with economic rewards, is crucial for the development of *a creative economy*. Workers in the cultural and creative sectors must be well-trained to master knowledge and skills. The development of the creative industries therefore requires high quality training programmes, in addition to the freedom and encouragement to contribute in innovative and creative ways. In view of the growing contribution of the creative industries to national economic output, most countries seek to adopt policies to develop their creative industries to strengthen their competitiveness in the global economy. However, countries also need to develop policies which foster inclusive participation by citizens through their creative contributions to society.

There needs to be *improved coordination* of measures aimed at building the infrastructure for open information and learning while promoting social networking and the use of open data and information. Efforts also are needed to encourage genuinely participatory practice. Specialized organizations need to work with all the actors involved to understand power relationships, the new means of organizing volunteerism, and how such projects can yield the most useful outcomes for those who hope to benefit from them.

In this report we highlight lessons across several issue areas: formal and informal education, media and mediated content, freedom of expression, freedom of information and political transparency, gender sensitivity, environmental sustainability, and ethics. Knowledge societies are not emerging in isolation from other changes in society like shifts in economic power and major political, social and cultural transitions. The policy environment needs to be *flexible* enough to ensure that stakeholders do not become locked into unsustainable pathways. Many policy initiatives are insufficiently concerned with the potential for the empowerment of local communities and disadvantaged or excluded groups. Greater attention needs to be given to approaches that include bottom-up participation and promote education.