United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Information cultures and information interests (ICII).
European Perspectives on the Information Society

UNESCO Regional Pre-Conference for the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) (Europe Region)

MAINZ, 27-29 JUNE 2002

Resolution

The participants in the Conference "Information Cultures and Information Interest (ICII). European Perspectives on the Information Society. UNESCO Regional Pre-Conference for the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) 2003 (Europe Region)" Mainz, 27-29 June 2002,

Considering that ensuring access to information and communication resources for all, at any time, from everywhere, and under fair conditions is one of the main challenges for the information society;

Remembering that this vision of the sustainable development of the information society is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly in its Articles 19[1] and 27[2], and many other international and European legal instruments;

Considering that the success of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) will highly depend on this vision and an agreement on common principles that are to guide the construction of the information society, particularly under the perspective of the ongoing globalisation of information and communication networks and services;

Supporting UNESCO´s objectives for WSIS, based on its Medium Term Strategy 2002-2007 (31 C/4), The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by the General Conference on 2nd November 2001 in its 31st session and on the project of a

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[1] **Article 19**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

[2] **Article 27**

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

UNESCO's "Draft Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace", in particular to

- Promote the use of ICTs for capacity-building, empowerment, good governance and social participation
- Strengthen capacities for scientific research, information sharing and cultural creations, performances and exchanges
- Enhance lifelong learning opportunities through access to diversified contents and delivery systems;

Recognizing the heterogeneous interests which influence the development of the information society, and the diversity of the underlying cultures and values of the different societies involved;

Recognizing the special role civil society plays in the information society and supporting the "Recommendations on the Participation of Civil Society" which have been elaborated in UNESCO´s consultation process with professional NGOs (4/02) as part of its preparation for the WSIS;

Convinced that the Europe Region, with its long tradition of recognising and balancing the interests of different cultures and languages and with its network of National Commissions for UNESCO, together with the other regions of the world, can contribute to responding to the global challenge of bridging the digital divide through taking positive actions to create opportunities for the "information poor";

Considering that the evolution of the information society should be embedded in the concept of sustainable development;

Appreciating the ICII Conference as a part of the ongoing debate on the principles and the construction of the information society;

1. Agree on the following principles:

Access

(a) Matters related to access are not limited to technological infrastructure, but concern as well the cognitive, economic, and physical dimensions of the information society.

(b) Access is fundamental in the information society. It is based on universal principles and on commonly agreed values, such as recognition of privacy in the use of information; respect for the right of others to information; willingness to share knowledge as a resource which will not diminish with usage; recognition, promotion and safeguarding of cultural and linguistic diversity in organizing access to information; promotion of empowerment and participation in the information society.

(c) Generally acknowledged commercial interests in exploiting and profiting from knowledge and cultural resources should not compromise the primacy of the public interest.

Intellectual property

(d) The production of knowledge depends greatly on the protection of intellectual property, also in its electronic form, for furthering research and creation. Intellectual property is clearly recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and protected by many international and national legal instruments. But this protection must not be opposed to the general interest, in particular the free flow of information.

(e) The original meaning of intellectual property rights should be reaffirmed in the light of the global tendency to strengthen the owners and exploiters´ rights and in the light of the global development of knowledge and information markets.

(f) Taking into account international conventions (such as those by the WIPO) and the consensus achieved concerning them, governments and intergovernmental organizations should constantly reconsider existing treaties and laws, in order to adjust them to the changing electronic environments and to reflect the growing public concern about the process of the commodification of knowledge and information.

(g) There is an ongoing need to find a balance in which equal respect is paid to both intellectual property and public interest. States and intergovernmental organisations should actively promote the search for this balance and contribute to facilitating access to information and knowledge.

(h) Technical means for the protection of intellectual property in electronic environments, and the usage of filter software, should not restrain in an unjustified manner the public and private usage of information.

Infrastructure

(i) There are two prerequisites for accessing information by ICTs. The first is the physical existence of content in digital form. In view of the enormous wealth of information of educational, scientific, and cultural content created and preserved over the past centuries, and in order to ensure the availability of this multicultural and multilingual content, adequate measures must be taken to ensure its transfer into the digital domain, and to preserve it in order to make it accessible in the future.

(j) The second is the technical basis for accessing information, the existence of powerful networks, the availability of institutional and technical access devices, such as digital gateways, and the provision of end-user friendly, open and inter-operable interfaces in indigenous languages as indispensable prerequisites for access.

(k) Networks are the basis for the participation, in particular of educational and scientific communities, in the increasingly collaborative process of producing and disseminating knowledge at international level.

(l) All individuals must be provided with network access and tools under fair conditions. In the Europe Region, significantly underserved sub-regions such as South-East and Eastern Europe should be given priority in international efforts to bridge the digital divide.

Freedom of expression and Ethics of the Information Society

(m) ICTs provide a tremendous opportunity to expand democratic dialogue and information exchanges.

(n) Freedom of expression, media pluralism and information are fundamental principles, but, like other values in the electronic environment, can be misused. Therefore democratic societies should work cooperatively - e.g. by agreeing on common minimum standards - to prevent potential abuses on the Internet, related inter alia to the protection of children, integrity and confidentiality of personal data, protection of the private life of individuals and the security of states and to ensure that freedom of expression and pluralism of information is preserved.

(o) Due to the limited effectiveness of technical means to protect data, much attention should be paid to self-regulation, national and international legal instruments and codes of ethics. Particular restrictions should be imposed on databases of mandatory service companies (e.g. utility companies) where the citizen does not have any choice but to use those services.

(p) There must be media freedom in cyberspace. New media using ICTs must be afforded the same freedom as traditional broadcast and print media (see UNESCO´s Declaration of Sofia of 1997).

Human capacity building

(q) Acquisition of knowledge-handling skills by everyone is an indispensable condition if the information society is truly to become a knowledge society.

(r) Access will yield its full potential value if individuals are enabled to make full use of existing information resources and to create new ones. Information and media competence is a key to assure access to information in effective, accurate and professional ways.

(s) Information and media competence is based on the general availability of literacy, including reading, writing, numeracy and computing skills which should be an integral part of all curricula in learning, knowledge and information societies. In addition continued effort to develop basic education remains a prerequisite for acquiring information handling skills by everyone.

(t) Empowerment of community-based development should be a major focus of WSIS, stressing a bottom-up, community-led approach that would allow the practical application of technology to provide access to information and knowledge.

(u) Partnerships among governments, civil society and the private sector, integrated within community-led development, should be a principal priority for WSIS.

2. Invite the Director General of UNESCO to include the above principles as the contribution of the National Commissions for UNESCO of the Europe Region to the preparation of the WSIS;

3. Bearing in mind UNESCO´s unique role as a voice of civil society, and the impact of technological change on individual lives, urge the Director-General to facilitate involvement and consultation of individuals from civil society and the private sector, including content creators, at the WSIS;

4. Invite the National Commissions for UNESCO of the Europe Region and all relevant parties, including the European Commission and the Council of Europe, to continue discussion on the above topics in their respective countries, in particular with their representatives to the WSIS process;

5. Express their hope that:

(a) Dialogue and the development of a common vision continue after the ICII Conference and WSIS;

(b) The results achieved during ICII contribute to the ongoing process of empowering individuals to develop a just, democratic and economically flourishing information society, based upon the needs of diversified communities of users.

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