

Knowledge societies: from cinderella to a new perspective of development

Europe. *Knowledge Society, Knowledge-Based Development, Knowledge Cities (KCs) are mainstream terms that frequently used recently. Many cities globally are claiming to be or are planning to be transformed into KCs. But what is a KC really?*

(Doukas Haris, Ergazakis Kostas) How does such a KC offer a new perspective of development in the today's world of the global financial crisis? And how can the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) contribute in this respect.

Development policies, mainly based on knowledge as a primary source of wealth and growth of jobs, are increasingly adopted by cities. This tendency has become stronger recently also due to the global financial crisis. The crisis has clearly placed innovation and knowledge in the core competitive advantages not only for enterprises and businesses but also for societies.

The crisis is confirming that at local level, cities need a clear strategy – and consequent implementation mechanisms – regarding their “productive model”, through the integration of drivers such as creativity & innovation, tech-based activities, greening economies and networking.

In addition, early evidence suggests that such knowledge societies will emerge stronger out of the crisis. ICT tools for effective partnerships are a key driver for encouraging and structuring community engagement at a variety of levels.

Knowledge Societies and ICT

Many cities globally are now considered as successful KCs. However, only very few of them such as Barcelona, Melbourne and Montréal have managed to formulate integrated strategic approaches. The initiatives and approaches of the rest are rather ad-hoc and sporadic.

Despite the tremendous transformation potential, local authorities in EU and worldwide seem to be unable to formulate integrated KC development strategies, in terms of:

- Promoting collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors;
- Achieving agreed objectives related to the twin goals sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness.

ICT tools can act as a catalyst, fostering:

- Collaboration: Cities/ member workspaces, Events Calendar (Conferences/ Meeting/ Workshops), Announcements and Alerts, Virtual Communities (Areas of common interest, discussion groups).
- Dialogue/ Networking: Message exchange, Direct Voice and Video, Calls, eConferences, Virtual Events/ Meeting, Discussion Rooms/ Forums, List of Contacts/ Institutions.
- Knowledge Management: Articles with rating voting, Wikis, Document library, Content Editing/ Submission, Information Feeds/ Information Push, Surveys/ Questionnaires.

Fairy Tale or Challenging Opportunity?

Knowledge is currently placed in the local communi-

ties' context and the the potential role of cities is important in this respect. “Linked learning cities around the globe, each one using powerful ICT tools, having a direct collaboration with each other”.

Such a concept has considerable power to engage all potential stakeholders in collaborative activity based on partnership and active citizenship. It has also the capacity to:

- Foster flexible learning local environments;
- Put on the map human values as forces in knowledge development;
- Promote active citizenship for enhancing democracy and fighting exclusion.

EU project

A related effort is currently being applied in the context of the EU project “A network for rapid and sustainable ICT regional adoption”. The vision is to improve regional and local policies by adopting broadly ICT services, also contributing to lowering the cost of local administrations' services to citizens.

A number of cities are participating in this initiative, namely Trikala (GR), Almere (NL), Malta (MT), Manchester (UK), Xanthi (GR), Jeseník (CZ) and Paralimni (CY), with the coordination of the National Technical University of Athens.

The project has conceptualized the G-B-C (Government - Business – Citizen) framework of a KC as a “vibrant” virtual space where local government authorities, citizens and business interact and collaborate. A knowledge portal is also available providing easy guidelines for local or regional authorities to adopt the framework. History teaches us that crisis times can result in salutary reforms. Local Authorities can, and should, face current challenges by turning them into an opportunity to kick-start the long revolution towards knowledge societies. And ICT tools can enhance such efforts.

Full story in database ►

“Proletarianisation of universities”?

Portugal. *This is a genuinely novel development in Portugal. In addition to adapting the courses they offer to satisfy the requirements of the Bologna accords, Portuguese universities have also opened their doors to professional areas which were until recently regarded as “incompatible” with the university status.*

(Carlos Rebiero) The result was a relative “proletarianisation of universities”, i.e. a more practical perspective, more focussed on professional performance, with a professionalising approach gained increased currency and expression in the country's many universities. As in many European countries which built higher education on a strong elitist academic tradition, in Portugal this universe was placed on a more or less inaccessible level, closely linked to social privilege. The massification which occurred following the revolution of 25 April 1974, with the democratisation of education, did not resolve this cultural problem of the university.

Full story in database ►

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Seniors go net native

Finland. Liberal adult education supports the involvement of the increasing ageing population in the information society through learning initiatives and by developing the skills of educators. ►

The science of adult education struggles against takeover by the English language

Finland. Science is becoming increasingly internationalised in Finland, and the science of adult education is no exception. ►

Why do adults take courses in Lithuania?

Lithuania. A willingness to learn, communicate and broaden one's world outlook are the most important factors motivating adults to participate in various courses of developing general competencies. The research was aimed at identifying the above mentioned and other trends of adult learning motivation. ►

PRACTICE

A European citizenship school to promote participation

Italy. Breaking down the barriers between citizens and institutions and promoting real participation in socio-political life: are these objectives attainable in an Italy beleaguered by political crisis? We asked this question to the secretary of the “Citizenship” movement for the Emilia-Romagna Region. ►

Learn about Europe!

Hungary. Simon Wintermans, a Dutch citizen living in Hungary, has decided that he would „connect” the three Capitals of Culture on a bicycle, according to the traditions of his nation. ►