

THE SAKHALIN DECLARATION ON INTERNET AND SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Final document

International Conference

“Internet and Socio-Cultural Transformations in the Information Society”

Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Russian Federation, 8-12 September 2013

The International Conference “Internet and Socio-Cultural Transformations in the Information Society” was convened under UNESCO’s Information for All Programme (IFAP) auspices in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Russian Federation, from September 8 to September 12, 2013. This Conference is part of the activities of the Information for All Programme in the framework of the Russian Federation Chairmanship of the IFAP Intergovernmental Council and is an important contribution to the implementation of the decisions of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003, and Tunis, 2005). The Conference also contributes to the international review of this implementation (WSIS + 10 process), which was initiated at the beginning of 2013, in Paris.

The Conference was organized in cooperation with UNESCO by the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre and the Government of the Sakhalin Region with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation and the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO.

The interdisciplinary Conference was attended by leading experts from 46 countries covering the fields of science, culture, education, communication and information, from international and national governmental and nongovernmental organizations, researchers on philosophical, sociological and anthropological issues emerging from the growing use of Internet and other ICTs, governmental policy makers in the development of knowledge societies, managers of ICTs and media programmes from the private sector and civil society institutions, as well as executives from the Sakhalin political administration.

To accomplish their work the participants held four plenary sessions, five sessions of three specific thematic sections:

Section 1. Internet as a Socio-Cultural Phenomenon

Section 2. Contemporary Socio-Cultural Processes

Section 3. On the Road to Knowledge Societies

as well as two roundtables – on Multilingualism in the Digital World and on Libraries in the Digital World.

The participants focused their debates on the worldwide socio-cultural changes in their educational, linguistic, legal and ethical aspects, within a nation as well as between nations, emerging from the rapidly spreading use of ICTs, Internet and communication services such as social networks and their impact and implications on individuals, communities and the society as a whole.

In conclusion of its work, the Conference adopted the following Declaration:

During the last decades humanity has experienced a true revolution in the ways and means of communication unknown before. Internet and other information and communication technologies are evolving and penetrating all realms of our life ever more intensely. These advances generate new skills, ways of thinking and behavioural attitudes among individuals, especially among the young generations, which are leading to constantly deeper, beneficial or disruptive, changes in society. However, research on these socio-cultural phenomena and their possible impact on societies in the future is lagging behind this rapid technological development.

Internet has become a global, system-wide self-developing phenomenon, rather than a narrow functional technology, breeding a broad range of socio-cultural effects.

Discourses related to concepts and policies of information and knowledge societies should take into account: ICTs are but one of the components of converging nano-, bio-, cognitive and other emerging technologies, which determine contemporary technological development and have an impact on global socio-cultural processes.

Internet and other contemporary information and communication platforms determine more and more the process and forms in which culture is mediatized, and are increasingly becoming the most important media for group-based and individual interactions of an ever-growing number of people, especially among the young generations.

This has a deep effect, not only on the ways to create, use, consume and share information/content but also on citizens, especially on youth education and social life as well, offering new opportunities but widening the cultural gap and increasing an apparent loss of interconnection with traditional lines of conduct, moral and cultural values and ethical principles between generations.

Access to and use of ICTs, Internet and communication services among generations and countries are also challenging the value orientations and behaviour of individuals, the social fabric of societies and even national integrity in much of the world, particularly in developing countries, with far reaching, not yet fully understood impacts and consequences, which will increasingly require deeper interdisciplinary and inter-institutional public debates, research and studies.

The absence of full and conceptual understanding of the specificities of the virtual world, leading to a direct transfer of organizational models of interaction and governance established in the pre-digital era into a virtual environment, creates a constantly widening range of problems. Ethical and legal bases for existence in cyberspace are not sufficiently analyzed and studied, thus, creating room for abuses

of technological capacities, which threaten the existing systems of social relations, in particular basic human rights and universal values.

The described above situation steadily increases the importance of promoting competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes), encompassed by the term “media and information literacy”, which guarantee safe and responsible use of networks, based on critical thinking, for free access to, production and exchange of information and knowledge across all linguistic, cultural and social groups. The necessity of developing these competencies becomes even more significant in today’s environment of information networks polluted with unreliable, unsafe and sometimes harmful content.

The traditionally established institutions and existing copyright laws guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights require major reappraisal with consideration for the specifics of using, consuming, sharing and creating works and services in the digital environment in order to provide free access to information essential for survival, quality education, social participation and the development of research.

The conference agrees on the following recommendations:

1. All stakeholders should seek to facilitate the emergence of knowledge societies respecting human values and in line with the terms of the UNESCO Constitution based on four principles: promoting freedom of expression in traditional and new forms of media, including the Internet; access to quality education for all; respect of cultural and linguistic diversity; and universal access to information and knowledge, especially in the public domain;
2. UNESCO, especially through the Information for All Programme (IFAP), should pursue in cooperation with relevant UN agencies, IGOs and NGOs the efforts for the elaboration and promotion of ethical, legal and societal principles and norms of conduct;
3. Member States and international organizations should follow up to this end on the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations of all international and regional meetings of the post-WSIS period related to the ethical and socio-cultural changes and transformations in the emerging Global Information Society;
4. All stakeholders should encourage governments to enact and implement more effective national information society policies in support to inclusive social development and promotion of intercultural dialogue, especially by reinforcing the rights to use information and new means of communication (hardware and software) and by empowering citizens through the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that would allow them to fully exercise those rights;
5. Member States should consider, and concerned international organizations should advocate for, updating national and international copyright and related rights legislation to operate better within the digital environment, adequately taking into account new ways to create, use, re-use and share contents and works. Amendments to copyright laws should facilitate non-commercial use of works; guarantee reasonable copyright terms; ensure the right to fully participate in culture; take into account new forms of expression; provide exceptions for libraries, museums, educational institutions and other public non-profit organizations to facilitate access to and preservation of works in the public interest. Member States

should also adopt policies mandating the availability of works created with the support of public funding in the public domain;

6. UNESCO and its Member States should continue to develop with the relevant IGOs and NGOs policies to enhance the presence (localization and content) of all languages in cyberspace, based on digital literacy, access to resources and promotion of participation, developing programmes of inclusion of knowledge from languages unrepresented on the Internet, creating a comprehensive and sustainable set of indicators, and promoting a comprehensive view of the digital divide which encompasses the content and linguistic divide;
7. All stakeholders in cooperation with relevant IGOs, NGOs and UN agencies should undertake the creation of a global framework agreement of Internet principles (including mechanisms for ensuring appropriate levels of freedom of expression, transparency and democratic accountability in the governance of the Internet in the multi-stakeholder approach) as the basis for rebuilding the trust on which the Internet necessarily rests;
8. All concerned stakeholders should engage with relevant information service providers in the development of decentralized, distributed socio-cultural network infrastructure and communication services which will respect the authenticity and reliability of the content, guarantee citizens' privacy, better quality/cost offers and provide alternative solutions to current centralized and controlled services;
9. Member States should strengthen existing discussion platforms involving all concerned stakeholders in a continuous interdisciplinary debate on socio-cultural transformations in knowledge societies. In particular, UNESCO/IFAP should examine the possibility of creating an open forum to facilitate this global public discussion;
10. UNESCO and its Member States, in cooperation with relevant IGOs, NGOs, sister UN agencies and other stakeholders, should endorse the establishment of a permanent observatory on socio-cultural transformations due to the implementation of new technologies in order to monitor them and provide a picture of future changes and developments;
11. All stakeholders, especially in academia, and including students, should continue, starting from the full awareness of the state of the art, to engage in the development of interdisciplinary research and comprehensive study on the various socio-cultural challenges especially in education that are currently arising from technological progress and the development of a global information society, its new institutions and social processes at local, national and international levels;
12. All stakeholders, especially governments, scholars and experts in academia, should strengthen the initiation of educational and awareness-raising programmes, especially among the youth, on the socio-cultural transformations (ethical, legal, cultural and societal aspects of digital communication and media) caused by the use of ICTs and the Internet and on the definition of new terms linked to the emergence of information society and knowledge societies, in order to raise citizens' capacities and competences in areas such as media and information literacy for using ICTs and the Internet effectively, safely and responsibly.