Chapter 43

The Potentials and Pitfalls of the Information Society Project in Turkey:
A Critical Assessment of Policy Paradigms Regarding E-Transformation and Digital Divide

M. Selcan Kaynak
Boğaziçi University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to assess policies regarding information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Turkey within the last five years. The focus of the chapter will be on digital divide: Although, ICTs in general, and the Internet in particular, have become an essential part of everyday life in Turkey, access to the opportunities provided by these technologies has not been distributed equally. The divides with respect to social class, geographic location, gender and age cripple the potential benefits of these policies. In addition, the programs implemented so far have been highly influenced by the global policy agenda; in a sense, adapting the "information society" vision advanced globally to the local context. In order to actualize an equitable and sustainable transformation process, there is further need to understand the nuanced picture Turkey's social conditions present. This chapter will examine the ways in which information society project has been modeled in Turkey, the policy paradigms that shaped its direction and finally, where they fell short and where they offer potentials.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey's Information Society Project, launched in 2003, introduced its mission as transforming Turkey "to be a country that has become a focal point in the production of science and technology, that uses information and technology as an effective tool, that produces more value with information-based decision-making processes and that is successful in global competition, with a high level of welfare"[1]. This and similar statements that explained the overall goal of this strategy were marked with confidence and optimism. Within the last six years since its inception and the bureaucratic unit established under the state planning agency to oversee and coordinate all policy initiatives that it involves, two main action plans have been executed; several policy and regulations have been instituted among which the newly opened e-state portal is one of the most comprehensive. Yet at the same time, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Turkey is still not as wide as many other countries, generally located within the middle range of rankings, but more importantly, the use of such technologies is marked with divides—based on age, gender, and education level. Thus, one might ask, in which ways the Information Society Project has been on target and where it remains incomplete. To put it in other words, to what extent the State led initiative to transform Turkey into an information society set realistic, sustainable and efficient goals and along the process what kind of pitfalls it has experienced? The present chapter will address this question through focusing on the Information Society Department of the State Planning Organization, which was found to develop and oversee necessary action plans for the Information Society Project. Admittedly, assessing this Department's initiatives is a formidable task, requiring one to examine each of the new regulations that have been instituted -- covering quite diverse issues such as digital signature law and e-state services. In addition, such a policy assessment would require a test of their effectiveness through observing both executers and users; but the goal of this analysis is rather to focus on the overall framework under which this Unit has been operating; that is, the policy paradigms that appear to be guiding the so far initiated action plans. The reason to focus on the paradigms, instead of, say, how they are put in effect or the users' perspective, is to get at the heart of the transformation process: To understand what might be the motives to target certain policy areas, in which ways the policies here are inspired by global policy processes and how are they adopted at the local context.

The original impetus behind the Information Society Department (ISD) can be traced back to before 2003 when it was first launched. As documented by Christensen (2006), steps for instituting ICT related policies have been in the works for some time thanks to interested parties in the bureaucracy as well as those in the information technologies (IT) sector. But what marks 2003 as a turning point is the realization, on the part of the government, the necessity to systematize ICT related policies to be in alliance with the European Union's eEurope+ Initiative. Thus, it can be argued that, from the start, the e-transformation process to be analyzed in the rest of this chapter has been inspired by the global policy fora, in this specific case, the European Union (EU); and the discourse to promote the technologies themselves coupled with the policies regarding their use have also been stamped by these global trends.

Considering Turkey's quite young population, receptive to new technologies and quick to adopt them into their everyday lives, the use of the Internet and other interactive technologies expanded. Nevertheless, the expansion did not include all sectors of society, discrepancies in terms of basic access, let alone skills in using them, is striking: As will be further elaborated in this chapter, the existing statistics show that more men compared to women, young people compared to the elderly, those in urban areas rather than rural geographies are privileged[2]; a wide segment of society is still not

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/potentials-pitfalls-information-society-project/68484

Related Content

Let It Go: A Journey Toward Elementary Student-Driven Media Production Aligned With the CCSS
Yonty Friesem, Brien J. Jenningsand Carol Prest (2018). *Information and Technology Literacy: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 130-146).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/let-it-go/188940

Using an Edugame to Develop Socio-Emotional and Perspective-Taking Skills at School
Ilaria Viola, Emanuela Zappalàand Maurizio Sibilio (2022). *International Journal of Digital Literacy and Digital Competence (pp. 1-14).*
www.irma-international.org/article/using-an-edugame-to-develop-socio-emotional-and-perspective-taking-skills-at-school/309714

Empowering Transformation: The Intersection of Information Literacy and Social Change in Academic Libraries
Pitshou Moleka Basikabio (2024). *Examining Information Literacy in Academic Libraries (pp. 32-47).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/empowering-transformation/344121

Video Game, Author and Lemming: The Knowledge-Building Process
Maria Annarumma, Riccardo Fragnito, Ines Tedescoand Luigi Vitale (2015). *International Journal of Digital Literacy and Digital Competence (pp. 49-61).*
www.irma-international.org/article/video-game-author-and-lemming/128289

Canvas Basics: A UX Investigation of Novice Learners and Their Learnability of a New Authoring Software
W. Keith Lindsay (2017). *International Journal of Digital Literacy and Digital Competence (pp. 28-38).*
www.irma-international.org/article/canvas-basics/199048