

# Preface

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The last ten years has seen, in the European Union, a greater focus on the 'information society' than ever before. Besides political programmes and economic development projects, numerous exciting research projects have been conducted and scientific publications have appeared. At the same time, people can increasingly perceive in their everyday lives that they are living in an information society. This is why Information Society Studies has been included in higher education *curricula* in many countries. Despite this, young professionals often find it difficult to fully appreciate the complexities of this field - partly due to deficiencies in higher education programmes and partly to the wide array of issues that Information Society Studies encompasses, from enabling technologies to shifts in the nature of society, its governance, economics and culture. Because the challenges presented by the information society can be felt in every sphere and sub-system of society, including amongst others, culture, education and healthcare, it is necessary to provide all participants in higher education with knowledge about the information society. When they encounter questions and dilemmas relating to the field, they will be able to recognise the applicability of their newly gained knowledge to society, the economy, politics and culture, i.e. to their own lives.

The aim of the NET-IS (Network for Teaching Information Society) consortium, with the support of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme, is to develop a course which can fulfil the above-described role and provide an introduction to information society studies for all those interested. This course book is one result of this initiative and has been published in Hungarian, English and Greek. The course book is supplemented with a separate collection of readings to provide further help to students, and the course will be taught, from the autumn of 2007, in several institutions of higher education in Hungary, England, Greece and Slovakia, both through traditional learning and *e-learning*. We hope that a model course will be designed based not only on the prepared teaching materials but also on the experiences of teachers and students as well as, and that it will stand its ground anywhere in Europe.

Of course it is not only students who can benefit from a course book like this but also teachers, researchers, experts and all those who find this area interesting. Because the book is written in modules with each topic being an independent unit in itself as well as forming part of the larger whole, it is not necessary to read the book in its entirety. The book contains thirteen chapters and covers the following topics:

- the concept, theory and history of the information society,
- the social role of technology,
- network society and economy,
- use of space and changes in social relations pertaining to space,
- the growing significance of innovation in the economy and in society,
- issues of legal regulation,
- the information society strategy of the European Union,
- electronic government and administration,
- the digital divide and e-equal opportunities,
- digital culture, the digitalisation of the cultural heritage, information literacy,
- electronic education, life long learning.

Naturally, a course book of this size cannot address all relevant issues in all areas. The aim of the book is to provide students with a strong theoretical background, placing special emphasis on the possible interpretations of the political applications and approaches taken to the subject. That is why issues relating to information policy, digital equal opportunities, electronic government and digital culture, for example, have

been included. A detailed explanation of what guidelines were followed in narrowing down the broad theme of information society to the topics dealt with in this book can be found in the final, closing chapter.

It is important to emphasize that this course book primarily takes the approach of social sciences since there are other complex and detailed approaches that could be taken to the information society focussing more on economic, political or cultural aspects. We decided to assume a more general approach so that the book could prove useful not only in programmes devoted to economics, political science or culture (e.g. for cultural anthropology, communication science, cultural management) but could also provide a sound foundation for students of almost all courses thus opening the way to more specialised studies on the subject.

Finally, here are some short “instructions” for the book. At the end of each chapter can be found a short summary, accompanied by a set of revision questions aimed at checking factual knowledge and generating new ideas, together with a bibliography whose sources will facilitate a deeper understanding of the chapter’s topic. **Bold and underlined** terms essential to the theme of information society appear in the main body of the text. Their definitions can be found in a separate section at the end of the book as can the References – which form a kind of bibliography for the whole theme.

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On behalf of the members of the consortium:

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