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### ***Summary***

This report summarizes the results from the researchers/teachers segmentation interviews carried out by Tarmo Kalvet in Estonia, July-August 2007. The general conclusion regarding the information society research and teaching in Estonia was that it is very limited, occasional and fragmented between different universities and departments. Information society topics, considering their important role, should be given more prominent place in curricula. Although books regarding information society are available in Estonia, more accessible additional materials might be useful. The themes going to be covered by the Course Book were generally welcomed by experts interviewed. Analysis of how some countries are doing better in ICT economy, others in eGovernment, etc. would provide an interesting analysis. Blended learning was suggested as the main teaching method. Moodle as e-learning environment is very popular in Estonia among teachers as well as students (having conventional lectures supported with moodle is currently standard solution at some universities in Estonia).

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# NETIS interview results, Estonia

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## EXPECTATIONS REGARDING INFORMATION SOCIETY TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN ESTONIA

Tarmo Kalvet, PRAXIS Center for Policy Studies

Tallinn, July – November 2007

# Table of Contents

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<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Main issues regarding information society research and teaching.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Reflections regarding the Course Book.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Reflections regarding Country Reports .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Practical suggestions .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Annex – list of experts interviewed.....</b>	<b>12</b>



# Introduction

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The objective of the Network for Teaching Information Society (NETIS, <http://www.netisproject.eu>) is to increase knowledge and competence of students on information society, and also broaden and deepen their understanding on the topic, by introducing a course on information society in tertiary education institutions. According to the mission statement:

*Europe depends on competent and aware people to manage and progress the information society as it develops. NETIS aims to improve the skills and competences of students, teachers, researchers, experts and wider public by developing widely accessible, relevant, innovative and sustainable e-learning course on information society. Through a constructivist approach we use a modular course-design and take advantage of international synergies to produce adaptable, reliable content. By these means NETIS expects to increase the participants' awareness and reflections on the impact of information society on everyday life.*

One of the activities was to carry out interviews with respective teachers and researchers. Those experts were expected to be the information society experts, leader/participants of academic research groups, directors of NGOs and/or think tanks in information society related research and teachers already prepared a book and/or having a class in this topic for a longer period.

In July and August 2007 such interviews (altogether 5) were carried out in Estonia within the NETIS project.

# Main issues regarding information society research and teaching

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The general conclusion regarding the information society research and teaching in Estonia was that it is very limited, occasional and fragmented between different universities and departments (this is also supported by the results of the student questionnaire).

It is mainly taught within social sciences faculties. The strongest tradition is Department of Journalism and Media studies, University of Tartu. Topics related to information society are introduced to second year students as well as to graduate students. Teaching by the staff at other departments is very limited, though.

The department of Public Administration of the University of Tartu has been another stronghold; the perspective taken has been related to governance and public administration (including course on Government and Information, and graduate seminar on eGovernance).

Recently, the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Tallinn University of Technology has started to pay considerable attention to the topic as well; the most prominent professors from the department of Public Administration of the University of Tartu have joined the Institute instead. They have also opened a new MA program in Technology Governance that approaches a set of policies undertaken by the public and private sector and society actors in a given space in time to develop a knowledge base, social cohesion and competitiveness at the same time. Such one-year Masters program in Technology Governance is a technology-focused special graduate degree that could be placed in such areas as Innovation Policy, Industrial Policy and Development Economics. Considerable attention is given to ICT as it is the driving force of economic and social developments today.

ICT education provided by technical faculties has a very limited space for introducing societal issues. In IT College, a vocational higher education organisation, there is a course Social, Ethical and Professional Issues in IT.

A general feeling was that information society topics, considering their important role, should be given more prominent place in curricula.

# Reflections regarding the Course Book

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The opinion that there is a clear need for additional teaching materials was clearly expressed. Although books regarding information society from eminent authors (e.g. Webster, Castells) are available in Estonia, more accessible additional materials might be useful. Also, the availability of materials in Estonian is very limited. And, some materials available in Estonian do departure strongly from techno-deterministic approach.

The themes going to be covered by the Course Book were generally welcomed by experts interviewed. They specifically liked the idea of covering the key fields related to socio-economic development.

Some additional topics popped up as well:

- Digital divide.
- Privacy.
- Cybersecurity.
- Virtual reality.
- eHealth.
- Technology foresight and roadmap i.e. what technological developments are ahead.

Also, it was expressed that societies and economies are different, so are information societies. Analysis of how some countries are doing better in ICT economy, others in eGovernment, etc. would provide an interesting analysis.

One special issue mentioned was related to ICT and economic development and relationships between the „information society” and „knowledge-based economy” discourses.

Instead of Public Administration one should approach a wider – eGovernment – issue.

A more philosophical dimension was proposed by one expert as well: to see what can be learned for technology from dealing with the critique thereof, as a sophisticated understanding of technology – and technology governance – that requires that one look at, and understand, its “dark side” and its existence-changing, epochal power in the modern world. One of the main schools of such critique is from the German Weimar Republic and is associated with the names of Freyer, Heidegger, the Jünger brothers, and Gehlen), as well as one of the main technophobic utopias (the Arts & Crafts movement associated with Ruskin and Morris), but also the Catholic perspective. The idea is to investigate their philosophical arguments, to follow these lines of thought in their theoretical and practical implications to our days, and to discuss them on a culturological level as well.

# Reflections regarding Country Reports

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Although there are many benchmarking reports available (e.g. Global Information Technology Report 2006-2007, Economist Intelligence Unit, UN Global E-government Readiness Report) these remain rather general (and even simplistic). A closer look at the respective countries might be interesting.

Structure of country reports sounded reasonable as it might give a good overview regarding developments in respective countries. However, they should not remain just descriptive, but be analytical as well.

The country report should be accompanied with conclusive chapter, where characteristics of various information societies are drawn. As awareness regarding some specific models (e.g. Korea, Japan) is very low, it might provide an interesting additional teaching material.

# Practical suggestions

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As information society topics are taught on undergraduate level and many of the students might not be fluent in English, a translation of the materials into native language might be highly relevant. Also, this is important for lifelong learning.

Students are very familiar with computers and Internet in Estonia and the latter is considered as important source during studies. Attending of classes is mostly not obligatory.

While text-book would be welcomed by students, they would not be probably willing to pay for it. Considering how Internet-friendly students are, on-line version might be a solution.

Blended learning was suggested as the main teaching method, but piloting of teaching with recorded lectures might be worth of trying as well. Moodle as e-learning environment is very popular in Estonia among teachers as well as students. Actually, having conventional lectures supported with moodle is currently standard solution at the Tallinn University of Technology and students have welcomed this very much.

# Annex – list of experts interviewed

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**Prof. Dr. Rainer Kattel**, Tallinn University of Technology, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Dr. Arvo Ott**, eGovernance Academy

**Dr. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt**, University of Tartu

**Ivar Tallo**, eGovernance Academy

**Marek Tiits**, Institute of Baltic Studies