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Summary

This report summarizes the results from the researchers/teachers segmentation interviews carried out by Kerstin Siakas in Greece, June 2007.

The results in Greece show that the emphasis of the books is influenced by the background of the authors. Usually information society books are written either from social science or from information systems viewpoint. In the NETIS case the authors seems to be multidisciplinary and multicultural, which is likely to bridge the gap in viewpoints from the different disciplines and cultures. As a result this is likely to embrace a wider target group, including students both from social and economical study programmes to IT students.

The role of the teacher is highlighted by the interviewees. Teacher will start with an overview of the information society and then put emphasis on different issues according to the audience. The blended learning methodology provided by NETIS is likely to give good course outcome, first because the teacher can highlight topics and concern suitable to the targeted students and secondly because the e-learning platform provides hand-on exercises. Simultaneously the e-learning platform is a part of the information society and can be an excellent proactive experience if utilised well in the form of creation of social computing exercises, such as blogs, discussion groups, chats, teleconferencing etc.

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NETIS interview results, Greece

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING TEACHING AND RE- SEARCHING INFORMATION SOCIETY IN GREECE

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Introduction

In total six recorded interviews with duration 1 – 1 ½ hours were undertaken during June 2007 in Greece. Three of the interviewees were in Thessaloniki and three in Athens (where the interviewer had to travel to carry out the interviews). A list of the interviewees can be found in annex. The interviews were transferred to text for easier analysis (in Greek).

The second target group, the teachers and researchers of the information society field, were identified through searches on the internet, announcement to members of the sociology interest group in Greece as well as questioning people involved in teaching of some aspects of the information society.

After identifying the experts, emails were sent to them describing briefly the NETIS project and explaining the aims of the interviews. Also some experts were contacted by phone. In total 50% of the approached experts accepted to take part in the research. The rejections were mainly due to time pressure. In general the experts showed interest in the NETIS project and expressed a positive reaction to our initiative.

The main issues raised in the interviews are summarised in this report.

Content of course book

The course book seems to be a theoretical introduction into the Information Society. As a theoretical base it seems to be a broad social approach covering many issues.

Depending on the target group for a course book in the information society, there seems to be two directions, namely one social, targeting social and economical departments, and one more technical emphasising applications, targeting e.g. Information Technology (IT) departments.

The majority of the interviewees has Information Systems background and considers that the theory part of the book seems to be too much emphasised. However, there were opinions that for social sciences $\frac{3}{4}$ of the book should be theory and $\frac{1}{4}$ applications, while for IT the same structure, but only a fifth of the book should include theories and the biggest part should cover applications and their influences on the society.

The first thing one should investigate is who the stakeholders are in the society. Looking at the society there are stakeholders with different needs. Looking at the stakeholders and their needs we can identify the applications, e.g. government (e-administration, e-government, e-voting, e-health etc.), organisations (e-commerce etc.), educational institutions (e-learning, life long learning, asynchronous learning etc.), citizens (employment, e-inclusion, digital literacy, e-media, social networks etc). Some issues are on a higher level, such as privacy, cyber-rights and security, and cover all applications.

The social impacts have to be spelled out for every application separately. The social impacts will also be the most interesting issue for the students; to reflect on own experiences and to exchange experiences with each other. After finished the course the students' awareness of technology advances and their impacts on the society should be raised. In particular, the aims of the course should emphasise the importance of **social** technology advances, not only technology advances.

Layout of course book

The proposed arrangement of the course book chapters seems to be along the lines of the following order:

1. Introduction: What is (an) “information society”?
2. Discourses of information society:
 - Question: “What are the effects & consequences of the information society?”
3. Information society theories (not in too much detail!)
4. Information society applications and their use (social informatics – a social approach of technology / a technological approach of phenomena in society)
5. Social Impacts (Answer/discourse on question in chapter 2)
 - Negative – information society consequences and concerns
 - Positive – utilisation of the technology for added value in society
6. Conclusions

Or even instead of having chapters there could be three parts, namely:

- Part 1: Introductory discourse in theoretical issues related to information society
- Part 2: Technology (those things that make the Information Society a reality)
- Part 3: Applications – pros & cons

Another view was to organise the chapters as modules to be covered within one week of lectures and exercises.

Country reports

The country reports are seen as case studies in the different countries.

Issues missing in both the course book and the country reports seem to be the following (ordered by importance according to interviewees):

1. e-business / e-commerce
2. employment issues (tele-working / tele (virtual)community / outsourcing)
3. e-health (considered to be important for Greece)

The most important issue is maybe information (digital) literacy, which should be emphasised in particular by analysing the underlying reasons and some initiatives for overcoming the obstacles. Information literacy is much more than knowledge of the use of some software tools, such as an internet browser or MS Office. The content of the information is maybe even more important. Are we critical to what we read, or do we accept everything on e.g. Internet? These are dimensions of information literacy that should be emphasised and could be called content-literacy.

The next step is innovation. Knowing the tools and having a critical eye should bring about innovative ideas. The ultimate aims of teaching/learning should be to create active, self-motivated and innovative citizens and thus these issues need to be highlighted.

Also the social networks need to be clarified. There are different interpretations depending on the borders of the phenomenon. For example, MySpace etc. are networks mainly outside the organisation, intranets are networks for use within the organisation and finally we can have virtual teams and outsourcing partnerships which span different organisations and cultures and usually collaborate with different networking tools, such as chat, teleconferencing, common internet platforms, etc.

Some comments were made regarding the use of the word e-government. It is preferable to use the plural form or the word (e-governments) or e-governance to emphasise a two-way decision making which allows citizens to take part in final decisions within an e-administration, e-democracy and e-communication system.

Teaching methodology

The blended learning methodology seems to be the methodology that is most popular preference among the experts. Nobody of the experts affirmed for a pure e-learning environment. The human aspect, the contact between the student and the teacher, was considered important in order to allow the teacher to adapt the material and emphasise different issues according to the field and the interest of the students. Traditional lectures, printed books and the e-learning platform is considered to provide the students flexibility to choose learning material depending on preferences, pace, space and time issues. The students in Greece were considered to like innovative teaching approaches on one hand, but on the other hand they also need to feel the security of the traditional teaching methodology they are used with. Also the expected amount of participants in the course in Greece in autumn and spring semester (around 100 students each semester) and how to practically arrange the course was discussed and advices were given by the interviewees.

However, opinions were stated that the development of e-learning depends on the development of lifelong learning. The e-learning in Greece, where face to face teaching/learning is mainly the case, started from corporate learning within organisations, such as banks and insurance organisations. However, the progress is very slow. As long as other professional groups in society, such as teaching staff and health staff are not provided lifelong learning the progress of e-learning will continue to be slow.

The initial idea of separating the students in two groups (one: students, who will be active Moodle users and will do different tasks to pass the course; two: traditional learners, who will read the book and give exams) was considered the only possibility in order to be in control of the administration of the Moodle users progress. It was emphasised that the e-learning platform will require a lot of more work from the teachers' side than traditional teaching and a second tutor could be very helpful.

Conclusions

The emphasis of the books is influenced by the background of the authors. Usually information society books are written either from social science or from information systems viewpoint. In the NETIS case the authors seem to be multidisciplinary and multicultural, which is likely to bridge the gap in viewpoints from the different disciplines and cultures. As a result this is likely to embrace a wider target group, including students both from social and economical study programmes to IT students.

The role of the teacher is important. He/she will start with an overview of the information society and then put emphasis on different issues according to the audience. The blended learning methodology provided by NETIS is likely to give good course outcome, first because the teacher can highlight topics and concern suitable to the targeted students and secondly because the e-learning platform provides hand-on exercises. Simultaneously the e-learning platform is a part of the information society and can be an excellent proactive experience if utilised well in the form of creation of social computing exercises, such as blogs, discussion groups, chats, teleconferencing etc.

Annex – list of experts interviewed

Panagiotis Anastasiadis – assistant professor, University of Crete, Pedagogical Department

Georgos Aygeris – teacher in different Private Colleges in Thessaloniki, preparing students for University exams in National Governance

Dimitrios Gouskos – lecturer, University of Athens, Dept of Communication and Media Studies

Vassilis Kostogolou – assistant professor, ATEI of Thessaloniki, Department of Informatics

Gregoris Mentzas – professor, National Technical University of Athens, Information Management School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Director of Information Management Unit (NTUA)

Georgia Zafeiriou – part time lecturer, Aristotle University & ATEI Thessaloniki