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Summary

This report summarizes the results from the researchers/teachers segmentation interviews carried out by ISRI team between May and August 2007 in Hungary. Summing up the results in Hungary, it can be claimed that those teaching and researching information society generally like the Course Book in progress, although, similarly to other fundamental issues in the discipline, emphasis falls on different areas according to individual interest. It draws attention to the fact that researching information society is in the early stages; while the Course Book serves as an important initiative.

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NETIS interview results, Hungary

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING TEACHING AND RESEARCHING INFORMATION SOCIETY IN HUNGARY

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Introduction

As part of the NETIS project, in addition to online survey research among university students, it was also our objective to introduce the viewpoints of professors and researchers well versed in the topic of information society. We held in-depth interviews to gain the information we required. The guidelines of the in-depth interviews were the same as those carried out in the other countries participating in the NETIS project.

Summing up the results in Hungary, it can be claimed that those teaching and researching information society generally like the Course Book in progress, although, similarly to other fundamental issues in the discipline, emphasis falls on different areas according to individual interest. It draws attention to the fact that researching information society is in the early stages; while the Course Book itself serves as an important initiative.

The interviewees' relation to information society

The main criterium when choosing the interviewees was that the dimension of teaching/researching information society in Hungary would be covered. Our colleagues made a total of seven interviews with prominent representatives in the field (see Annex).

One group of the interviewees consisted of enthusiastic and energetic young people teaching and researching information society, most of whom were PhD students with a degree in sociology. Their most important research area was information society or one of its sub-areas. The other group consisted of older interviewees who did not start their careers by researching information society. Although they were originally researchers in different fields and approached information society from their own fields at a time when information society as such was still not fully developed, they are now regarded as the pioneers of the special literature in regard to information society in Hungary.

Personal milestones differ from person to person; some have been studying information society from the outset and some have delved deeper into the use of computers and the Internet. Many have mentioned the role of T-group (Matáv at that time), facilitating their being able to study this area before the turn of the millennium.

Vital issues in regard to the information society

In regard to the information society studies, the individual interest of interviewees varied from person to person, as a consequence of which they all regarded the important issues differently. One of them even claimed to be able to give only subjective answers. Some interviewees emphasized a paradigm shift, while one was interested in the question of integration in the information society. Another interviewee was rather interested in jurisdiction and other things beyond the question of technology.

In addition to their personal views we also asked the interviewees about the most vital issues effecting Hungary and the discipline itself.

According to the interviewees, the following topics are important as regard to their effect on Hungary:

- Evangelisation – bridge-building: professional basics should be forwarded to decision makers, and the overwhelming majority of people should be informed through propagation of general knowledge
- How the existing technologies in our own society can be utilised
- Making the very best out of the intellectual capacity available
- Discovering how the information society in the area of education and adult education can be transmitted

In regard to information society as a discipline, the following topics play a major role:

- Evangelisation is to be found here as well: information society should be made comprehensible and tangible to the economic and political decision-makers
- Information literacy: it is no longer an issue whether there is any information, but rather how that information can be obtained and what intelligible consequence can be drawn from it
- It is important not to cultivate science for its own sake, research should have tangible benefits
- Instead of the superiority of the private level, the superiority of the community level should be emphasized
- Networking – content and knowledge sharing

Comments on the content of the Course Book

We received elaborate answers to the most important issue in the series of interviews. The interviewees liked the holistic approach of the Course Book. Since the interviewees are practicing professors and researchers, they all have their own particular approach, which of course sometimes differs from the approach of the Course Book.

Instead of highlighting and repeating the opinions that agree with the concept of the Course Book, in the following paragraph we will rather concentrate on pointing out the differences in the opinions concentrating on the three topics below:

Topics that the interviewees believe are lacking

- A separate unit on technology would be essential. The influence of technical conditions is greater than the way it appears in the Course Book.¹
- The description of telework is lacking.
- One of the interviewees cites the lack of *attention economy*.

Topics that are overemphasized according to the interviewees:

- E-learning and life-long learning are too detailed, and introducing the approach to this would be enough. Moreover, one of the interviewees disagrees with the unity of these two topics.

Topics that, according to the interviewees, receive either too much or too little attention in comparison to their degree of importance:

- The Course Book describes the present situation and the future trends of information society; however, one of the interviewees preferred to emphasise the history, the evolution and the philosophic-historic perspectives.²
- The topics of the labour market and mobility could have been explained in more detail.

The issue of whether the authenticity of certain definitions and topics remains valid for a longer period raises an important problem and several interviewees expressed their concerns in regard to it; the terminology and focus of the European Union change quite frequently, as does the controversial topic of teaching information society. This change is faster and more frequent in the case of historical science for example. Keeping up with these changes and remaining up-to-date both argue in favour of online course books and their yearly review. Several interviewees claim that online course books are better to use in the case of information society because of cross-linking.

The fact that each interviewee found a different focus or topic (the most) important, is typical of the discipline of researching information society. Although it is said to be a common phenomenon and can be observed in the case of all disciplines, no general conclusions can be drawn from the current analysis.

¹ N.B. There is a chapter on the relation of technology and society in the Course Book.

² N.B. There is a chapter on the history and roots of information society in the Course Book.

The results show a stronger uniformity in the case of forming opinions about teaching information society. Since the interviewees talked about their personal experiences in their jobs, this part of the survey painted a positive picture. Concerning the general situation of teaching information society in Hungary, the results are rather graded. In an indirect way every interviewee expressed their opinion in regard to the jobs of the other interviewees; the edification of this level is to be found below.

Teaching/researching information society in Hungary

It is of utmost importance that information society as such should appear both in education and in adult education in Hungary. At the moment, one can find only rare examples; standardized, high quality and conscious education seems to be very far away. Similarly to the business sphere, evangelists are needed here as well, and it is surely no exaggeration to say that teaching information society should be a part of primary school education. It should not appear in the timetable as computer studies but as an independent, diversified field that also has its place in literature, mathematics etc..

The interviewees also emphasized that teaching and researching information society should have tangible benefits. Instead of staying on a theoretical level, the discipline of information society should help in an understanding of the overall coherence of our everyday lives. It is also important that instead of teaching how to use certain software or how to deal with a temporary phenomenon, teachers and professors should focus on the on-going changes.

Developing and teaching information society enjoys a special place in Hungary, since its proliferation was organized top-down. The imported scientific discourse was not tailored to the prevalent conditions in Hungary, although there is no such thing as a general development model of information society. Designing the discipline to fit in with the Hungarian situation should also appear in the education.

Information society should be taught as a compulsory subject for students participating in higher education in Hungary. There are several ways how teaching information society could be integrated into the current educational system. It is already integrated in education in some areas, but is always present in a narrow interpretation and through a special approach.

While some of the interviewees are in favour of establishing information society as a separate branch of study, others think that it would be better to link it with an already existing discipline. According to the latter group, the existing disciplines should be extended: it is not necessarily the best solution if the subject of information society is taught at every university. There is no doubt that information society should be integrated into the educational system. Students should learn what kind of innovation information society has brought in certain areas. Each area has found something useful and important regarding information society and technology and established its own discourses. However, this should not be approached from information society, because in this case it might remain an outsider. The concept above, however, does not require the establishment of a new subject, but the review of the educational material coming under the scope of different areas of science as does teacher training in this area.

In Hungary, the national network of Information Society Education and Research Groups (ISERGs), which is also a unique network on an international level, serves as the basis for teaching information society. Some of the interviewees have expressed their wish that this network take on a greater role.

Country reports

We asked the interviewees to name the aspects that they would like to see as part of an international comparison. They interpreted the question in different ways; some thought of a purely theoretical topic, such as the “*the researchers’ different approaches to the topic*”, others had special “wishes”, such as the segmentation of the traffic quantity in different countries, or the amount of the download through the illegal peer-to-peer system compared to conventional cultural consumption.

The interviewees often mentioned the basic data regarding development and preparedness, which are important because “*much can be concluded from these data. Not everything can be explained with them, but along these lines the countries can be compared with each other.*”

Introducing the evolutionary progress of the individual countries might be of importance, since “*there is no identical information society*”. It is also important to understand, what kind of prohibitive circumstances render development difficult, and which development trend certain countries use as a method of prevention. Many interviewees have mentioned best practices, in other words, examples that can really be applied.

The possibility of measuring cultural changes would be a stopgap in addition to the indices describing access technology.

Annex – list of experts interviewed

Klára Benda – Digital Secondary School (http://www.digitaliskozepiskola.hu/dk/index_en.html)

Dániel Füleki – assistant teacher, E-Business Research Centre, Corvinus University of Budapest (<http://web.uni-corvinus.hu/ebk/en/index.html#>)

Anna Galács – researcher, Research Centre of Information Society and Network (ITHAKA) (<http://www.ithaka.hu/>), assistant teacher, Information Society Education and Research Group at Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences

Gergely Kis – research director, GKIE.NET (<http://www.gkienet.hu/>); assistant teacher E-business Research Centre, Corvinus University of Budapest (<http://web.uni-corvinus.hu/ebk/en/index.html#>)

Bertalan Komenczi – professor, Information Society Education and Research Group at Eszterházy Károly College

Bence Ságvári researcher, Research Centre of Information Society and Network (ITHAKA) (<http://www.ithaka.hu/>), assistant teacher, Information Society Education and Research Group at Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences

István Szakadát – mathematician-sociologist, professor, Media Research Center at the Department of Sociology and Communications of Budapest University of Technology and Economics (<http://mokk.bme.hu/>)