Four Fallacies of the Information Society

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Guest Lecture

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Information Society Discourse

- ☐ IS Discourse often based on growth of Internet
  - ○ Enormous explosion of Internet use in 1990s
  - ○ New medium with enormous potentials
    - ☐ Decentralized: No (or little) central control
    - ☐ Participatory: Every Reciever is also a Sender
    - ☐ Non-commercial: at least at early stages carried by scientific community

- ☐ As with every new media discourse of emancipation
- ☐ Internet walhalla of free information
- ☐ high hopes for educational and social use
- ☐ in Europe e.g. hope that Internet leads to social cohesion
  - ○ Closing the digital divide is closing knowledge divide

- ☐ Access to internet in developing countries
  - ○ lowers the barriers for access to information
    - ☐ contributing to enhanced performance in all sectors
    - ☐ contributing to individual empowerment
  - ○ new opportunities for development (catching up)
    - ☐ supported by many examples of promising applications
      - ○ e.g. farmers know prices at the market
      - ○ e.g. doctors in London help doctors in Lusaka
    - ☐ very powerful images because some truth in them
    - ☐ question whether can be implemented on large scale

The four fallacies

- ☐ Guided discussion on four fallacies of the IS
  - ○ assumptions underlying much of the discourse of Internet and developmental impact
  - ○ which can be questioned from the point of view of developmental countries
- ☑ Information is available
- ☑ Information is for free
- ☑ Information is knowledge
- ☑ Knowledge is social change

Discussion

- ☐ On each point group discussion
  - ○ Start with an open discussion
  - ○ Would like you to reflect on basis of what you have seen in the course and you have been reading

Information is available

- [ ] **Assumption**: The Internet is a sea of information where individual and institutions have access to information for empowerment and development.
- [ ] What information is available, what information not?
  - Information predominantly from the West
  - e.g. production of scientific material about DC
    - [ ] Internet changes the possibilities of access
    - [ ] Internet does not change the fact that production largely Western
    - [ ] commodification of research in the West

☐ What factors inhibit access?

  ○ Language: mainly English

  ○ Overload: selection more important
    (costs time and money)

Information is free

- ☐ **Assumption**: The Internet and the enormous amount of information available will drive the cost of information down.
- ☐ Paradox:
  - ○ Commodification of content formally in public service? (Education, BBC)
  - ○ Large quantaties of information indeed free
  - ○ Question is what information is for free and what information is not for free

- ☐ Scientific production (think of its role in R&D)
  - O Knightrider:
    - ☐ database on medical and technical research
    - ☐ up to 6.000 rand for half an hour (only if you have subscription)

Information is Knowledge

- **Assumption**: Access to the information on the internet leads to knowledge generation.
- What is the difference between information and knowledge.

Knowledge is social change

- **Assumption**: Knowledge is sufficient for social change.
  - Arrogant position
  - A lot of people know what their situation is and know what the solution is
  - Other more structural barriers can hamper them from acting
    - resources needed to put knowledge into practice