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Digital revolution speeds up – How will we meet the challenges? Important European study available

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The Digital Society is introducing radical changes in all areas of societal and human life. In this way the digital avalanche is crucial for the future of our world and deserves more attention than the one given today. Therefore, the authors wish hereinafter to improve public awareness on an important report of the European Internet Foundation (EIF). It is recommended to access the report directly

EIF - The Digital World in 2030: What place for Europe?

<https://www.eifonline.org/digitalworld2030.html>

The authors listed above are members of CECUA (Confederation of European Computer Users Associations). CECUA is a non-profit independent organization working on behalf of users of IT since over 30 years. CECUA's mission is to address and put forward the views and concerns both of personal and professional users of information technology. The expertise takes into account the interests of users vis-à-vis citizens, politics, industry and the diversity of European Countries and Regions. CECUA has two categories of members from several European countries: national associations and selected personal members. ATI (Asociación de Técnicos de Informática) is a Spanish member of CECUA.

History and benefits of the report

Our world will change till the year 2030 to an unbelievable degree. The digital avalanche is a driving power touching and changing nearly all areas of society and private life. Nobody knows the future but for the humanity it is crucial to have some idea in order to be prepared for the challenges and to influence the development. It is impossible to take the driver's seat and to find the ideal route. But it would be reckless to take only a passive role. The report is very helpful on this behalf.

European Internet Foundation (EIF) has to give support to European Parliament, European Commission and a broader audience. Reports on important issues are useful to this end. With respect to our digital future till 2025 EIF published a first report in 2009. Now under the title 'The Digital World in 2030: What place for Europe' (see <https://www.eifonline.org/digitalworld2030.html>) a totally revised follow-up report is available.

The report provides a remarkable document with high quality of content and presentation including a wide range of content. Beyond some technical facts it covers a lot of areas of society and human life. The content is rather fairly balanced and it is suitable as basic information for the above mentioned political and governmental target groups as well as for further groups and interested individuals. The professional presentation is valuable for understanding of the complex content. Though the items are extremely difficult and complex, even people not close to the subject get some fairly easy-to-understand basic information.

Because of the high importance of the subject, CECUA as a member of EIF has devoted particular efforts to this activity including attendance to meetings during preparation and launch as well as detailed commenting of the drafts.

Message and structure of ‘The Digital World in 2030 – What place for Europe’

Given the broad range of the report and the inherent difficulty of the topic it is impossible to summarize the contents in some sentences. Therefore it is strongly recommended to have a look on the report itself although easy reading with regard to a difficult subject is not always an easy task. But the authors of the report did a good job. Even readers without advanced IT skills are able to get the main content.

The report contains several chapters:

- Introduction
- Technologies for a real-world revolution
- Toward the digitally-driven economy 2030
- Social & political features of the digital world in 2030
- Europe’s place in the digital world of 2030

At the end of the one-page introduction there are some remarkable text sentences highlighting the message of the report and underlining its importance for all of us:

“Core digital technologies are evolving and converging rapidly, fueled by real-time, real-world data, driving us toward a Knowing Society and creating the foundation for an avalanche of innovative software platforms and other digital tools available and affordable to anybody and everybody, everywhere for virtually any purpose. In economic terms, we are finally on the cusp of “the real” third industrial revolution. We need to understand and exploit this vast opportunity, while also urgently addressing the intense social and political stresses this revolution will inevitably engender.”

The digital revolution will change our world in an unimaginable dimension. Nobody knows how the future will be but we should be prepared as well as possible. Of course the report is not able to forecast the future and to offer easy recipes for everything. But it outlines the basics and offers a good starting point for further consideration of special concerns. Furthermore, it wakes up and increases the sensibility for the emerging problems. At the moment there is a lack of awareness with regard to the effects of the digital world to our future society. This might be caused by the problems of understanding of the present situation and its direct implications. But as the report says the avalanche will go on and therefore it is necessary to look far beyond the present state.

We ourselves have been rather good informed before reading the report. But nevertheless the report has broadened our views and provided an enormous number of suggestions for further reflection. Furthermore, many of our views have been supplemented and developed further. Even if there is no personal approval to special items it was useful to get other opinions and to think about them.

Further considerations

As explained above, the report pursues a nearly impossible task. Therefore these further considerations should not be understood as critical remarks but rather as further supplementing opinions or as proposals for follow-up activities. One report covering everything would probably unreadable. Therefore, the authors of the EIF-report were well advised to limit themselves. However, our feeling in some cases is that some issues mentioned in the report are not an expected reality for 2030 but much earlier. This makes even more important the prompt reaction of all stakeholders including policy makers and authorities.

There are a number of issues that did not receive sufficient consideration in the report, in particular from the European point of view:

- cultural heritage, effects on cultural diversity
- effects of language translation: see already emerging services in the market
- environment: help for solutions, new and improved products
- family life including considerations for different cultural scenarios

- influence of different societies all over the world: some will try to block some trends or to set specific rules
- outstanding importance of IT security, cyber-crime, data collection including the implications of related concerns and consequences
- social effects in EU and world-wide (gap between rich and poor? will solar powered cheap mobile technology conquer markets without local infrastructures)
- some common consequences of digital world and other technologies: micro mechanics, solar power, etc.

It should be mentioned that all over the world societies have to face the challenges and will try different solutions. This might cause major conflicts or gaps. Is there a choice for the other societies? Will the various trends stabilize our world or make it more vulnerable?

At a high political level there is currently an intense debate on the future structure and management of the Internet. This Internet Governance is extremely important and very difficult. Due to the worldwide political situation there are no easy and simple solutions. On the other hand vulnerability of the internet means a rapidly growing vulnerability of everything. The basic technical structures are fundamental. Internet governance should be seen globally but also specific in the EU arena. CECUA has recently published some comments on this issue (see www.cecua.org).

Recommendations

The report provides a good common starting point for specific and deeper evaluations of a great number of issues. Related groups and stakeholders should be involved. For many aspects it is recommended to consider different scenarios and alternative views. Reliable forecasts are impossible for most of the relevant issues. Nevertheless, it is important to develop and collect views and to create sensibility for concerns and consequences. If appropriate, scenarios for avoiding negative tendencies and for limiting the vulnerability of world-wide, European, national and local societies should be developed.

Behaviour of individuals and behaviour of markets and societies are key factors for the future development. But at the same time with regard to long-term forecasts of our digital future these factors are extremely difficult to predict. Which groups of the world-wide human population will accept digital support and the everywhere presence of digital functions to what extent, from what date and at what cost? Privacy is also an issue with regard to private social communities and between private individuals. What will be offered? What has to be regulated at what time? There is no reliable answer to these crucial questions. Nevertheless further considerations on our digital future should cover this issues much more than the given report does.