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GLOBETHICS.NET PRINCIPLES ON ETHICS IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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GLOBETHICS.NET PRINCIPLES ON ETHICS IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Christoph Stückelberger

2.1 Librarians, Archivists and WSIS

Librarians and Archivists are worldwide key professionals of collecting, selecting, organizing, promoting and making available information and documentation. They are the key players for the access to information as a human right, but can also be players for hiding and censoring information.

They are confronted with manifold ethical dilemmas. Professional ethics codes for individuals and for institutions give orientation and guidelines for sensitive decisions.

The global ethics network, Globethics.net (GE), based in Geneva, together with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the IFLA Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) and supported by the Association of Swiss Archives (VSA-AAS) and Library Information Switzerland (BIS) are happy to contribute with this conference – a satellite meeting of the international IFLA conference in Lyon – to exchange of experience, to information about tools such as professional codes for librarians and archivists and to solutions for dealing with ethical dilemmas.

The “World Summit for Information Society” – WSIS – is the broadest platform for work on these issues. The “First WSIS+10 Review Event” on 25-27 February 2013 in Paris in its final statement “invites all Stakeholders to ... encourage international and interdisciplinary reflection and debate on the ethical challenges of emerging technologies and the information society.” Globethics.net as a global network of persons and specialists engaged on ethics contributes to this reflection with this discussion paper.

Ten years after more than 11,000 participants gathered in Geneva in 2003 for the opening session of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), a UNESCO meeting in Paris at the end of February 2013 met to take stock of what has been achieved since then and to set out challenges for the future.

The recommendations from this first WSIS +10 review meeting had an influence on further United Nations deliberations and into the review of the Millennium Development Goals.

WSIS – which met in two sessions in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) – aimed to promote access to information and knowledge through new communications technologies and to tackle the global digital divide separating the northern hemisphere from the global South. At the same time it highlighted the ethical dimensions of the Information Society, and underlined the need for measures to safeguard cultural and linguistic diversity and identity, to avoid local content being overshadowed by vested global interests.

A decade later, as UNESCO has noted, there is intense public debate over the future development of the Internet, shaped by the defense of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information online, the growth of multilingualism on the net and the ever-increasing influence and impact of communications technologies on all aspects of people's lives. Such issues are too

important to be left to governments alone. Civil society is an indispensable part of the "ethical space" within which a global communication ethic needs to be elaborated, alongside the institutional political system of government and the institutionally orientated political society. At the same time, research commissioned for the UNESCO meeting in Paris underlines that information ethics needs to address the challenges and implications of the information society in developing regions, particularly in terms of inter-cultural information ethics.

Globethics.net emphasizes that most of the "Final Recommendations" of the first WSIS+10 Review Event in Paris on 25-27 February 2013 are relevant for the implementation of ethical values.

2.2 The Nine 'P's of Globethics.net

Globethics.net published in 2013 a discussion paper on "Ethics in the Information Society: the Nine 'P's". We present it at the beginning of this conference as an input for discussion and general guidance before we then look mainly at the two professions of librarians and archivists. I refer especially to the preface, the introduction and the nine P's of the paper¹ The Globethics.net Board of Foundation acknowledged the issue paper on 5 May 2013 and invites all interested and concerned persons and institutions to discuss it and send their feedback and proposals for improvement.

This text on the ethics of information and knowledge societies calls for value-based decisions and actions for the development of information, communication and knowledge. It is based on seven *core*

¹ Ethics in the Information Society: The Nine 'P's. A Discussion Paper for the WSIS+10 Process 2013-2015, Globethics.net Texts 4, Geneva 2013, 32pp. Download for free: www.globethics.net/publications.

values: equity, freedom, care and compassion, participation, sharing, sustainability and responsibility.

These values are exemplified on nine core topics of the information society, the “Nine P’s”: *principles, participation, people, profession, privacy, piracy, protection, power and policy.* The summary of each ‘P’ are as follows:

Ethics in the Information Society: The Nine ‘P’s

1 Principles: Ethical Values: Knowledge societies can be sustainable, coherent, innovative and integrative if they are based not only on pragmatic opportunities or political or financial interests, but on ethical values. In a globalized multicultural world these values have to be global values while at the same time respecting the diversity of contextual values.

2 Participation: Access to Knowledge for All: Access to information, communication, education and knowledge is a basic right and public good. Open access for free or for affordable costs enables participation of all in the development of societies. It has to be further promoted by the WSIS+10 processes.

3 People: Community, Identity, Gender, Generation, Education: People, human beings, as senders and receivers are the key actors of information, communication and knowledge. How to filter, digest and assimilate information and knowledge? How to use them for enrichment and not confusion, for identity building and not identity-loss, for respect of diversity and not increase of uniformity, for more equality instead of more inequality? Is knowledge primarily used to win over others in very competitive markets, to oppress others or for building communities?

4 Profession: Ethics of Information Professions: Professions in the fields of information, communication and knowledge creation, processing, dissemination, control, renewal, preservation, archiving and policy-making have a special ethical responsibility in implementing core values.

5 Privacy: Dignity, Data mining, Security: Privacy is a human right, not a commercial concession. Views on privacy rights differ between the US, UK, Continental Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and political structures. Threats to privacy are constantly arising - especially from the commercial and security sectors and social networks. Reasonable balance needs to be struck between privacy and security needs. The

WSIS process should support the safeguarding of privacy, in coherence with open access to information.

6 Piracy: Intellectual Property, Cybercrime: Piracy is an old problem, with a new electronic face. Piracy can be an existential threat to existing business models for innovative content creation and use. Piracy may occur because potential users see content as too expensive and rights protection as excluding the poor. Compromises are needed to take account of all stakeholder interests.

7 Protection: Children and Young People: Through access to the Internet on computers, smartphones and tablets, young people are connecting with each other and wider society in ways that were previously unimaginable. A generation of children and young people has grown up for whom the digital world is taken for granted. Nevertheless, there are concerns that children, young people and young adults may face specific risks and hazards, including sexual exploitation, a lack of anonymity and potential addiction to online networks.

8 Power: Economic Power, Power of Technology, Media and Consumers: The production, processing, dissemination, control and archiving of information, communication and knowledge need political power to set the legal frame and economic power to provide the necessary investment capital. Political and economic power should not be power over others, but sharing power with others and using it for others as a service to human beings, the whole society and public governance.

9 Policy: Ethics of Regulation and Freedom: Parliaments, governments, civil society and educated citizens are needed to ensure that regulatory measures support freedom of expression, freedom of association in information and communication technologies and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Fast technological development, ethical standards and regulatory framework have to be more synchronized.

Ethics in the Information Society: The Nine 'P's. A Discussion Paper for the WSIS+10 Process 2013-2015, Globethics.net Texts 4, Geneva 2013.

Each of the nine topics starting with a 'P' is explained on two pages followed by few recommendations and questions for considerations. The discussion paper therefore can be used e.g. also for discussions or trainings of librarians and archivists.

2.3 Ethical Dilemmas

The nine topics (which represent also objectives) are often in tension to each other or exclude each other. This then represents a dilemma. An ethical dilemma is a situation where a person or institution has to decide between two good or two bad solutions. A decision between an ethical and an unethical solution is not a dilemma, but ethically clear. But if somebody has to decide in favor of one value or objective while neglecting another one which is also important, it becomes an ethical dilemma. Examples:

- Participation as access to information (P 2) can be in tension with protecting intellectual property from piracy (P 6).
- The people-centered approach (P 3) with respect of cultural dignity can be in tension with the privacy of persons (P 5) which is perceived differently in the different cultures.
- The access to knowledge for all (P 2) may find its limit in protecting weaker parts of society, e.g. children (P7). For librarians it is the dilemma if documents should be made available for all people or restricted by age or other criteria.
- The freedom of open access (P 2) may have to be limited by regulatory frameworks (P 9) in order to enable fair play in the playing field of communication and driving rules on the data highways of the information societies.
- The economic power (P 8) of media conglomerates and companies in the sector of information and

communication technologies ICTs may limit the freedom of access to multiple information e.g. of minorities (P 3).

We will discuss extensively such professional dilemmas and possible solutions. Globethics network with its 120'000 registered participants from 200 countries and territories can make a contribution for the WSIS+10 process 2013-2015. Globethics.net seeks to promote a truly global conversation on the Ethics in the Information Society.