Preface

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Preface

This year the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society is taking place in Geneva, and UNESCO is proud to present the book brazil@digitaldivide.com. This book brings forth a comprehensive reflection on the meaning of information society and that of digital exclusion and the way the latter relates to other forms of social inequality. It also analyzes Brazilian experiences in these areas.

I would like to highlight two aspects which are present in Bernardo Sorj's book that strike me as being very important as the World Summit on the Information Society is taking place. The first aspect is related to a mature view in regards to recent globalization processes, which are the backdrop for the progress of the information society. The second aspect is the opportunity the author offers us to ponder the contribution social to the understanding of processes related to creative social use of new information and communication technologies.

Using the concrete experience of a non-governmental organization that works with underprivileged populations in Rio de Janeiro, Bernardo Sorj leads us into a reflection on a type of action based on solidarity advanced by NGOs. It is truly important for us to be aware that, although it has negative effects, globalization is the origin of what the author calls "a unified space for expectations related to equality". The basis for this is the acknowledgement of the fact that "humanity has a right to equal civilization standards". These standards consist of a set of material and cultural resources which, when attained by richer nations, become "basic resources". This side of globalization is not given much thought, but it is an opportunity for the interpretation of movements such as the one that led to the World Summit on the Information Society. In relation to this matter, the spectacle that will be seen in Geneva in December 2003 will be a new step in the global discussion on the principles and actions that will allow the greatest possible expansion of these new civilization standards. This is the condition for the development of the Information Society.

Bernardo Sorj's book redeems the discussion on digital exclusion, a social analysis based on the dialectics between equality and inequality. His reflections on the continuity of social inequality point out the simultaneous existence of aspects that encourage inequality and aspects that lead to greater justice in terms of distribution. The latter are processes that "strengthen the values of liberty, solidarity and social justice". Through this reflection, the book, written in Portuguese, presents readers with the fundamentals of an active strategy for the construction of an Information Society according to the principles of equality and solidarity. Two facts should be stressed: the fact that there is space for creative intervention in the area of social development and the fact while new information and communication technologies may potentially increase levels of inequality; there is the possibility that they might improve the lives of people in less favored sectors. The examples analyzed in the book demonstrate that "each technology is appropriated by social groups, and the impact of these technologies on society is not linear; they may generate new forms of social stratification and fragmentation."

UNESCO's support in publishing this book demonstrates that the Organization takes part in the collective effort that leads to the World Summit. UNESCO contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Summit through its vision and specific areas of expertise, in accordance

with the Organization's three strategic commitments. The first of these commitments is related to the establishment of universal principles and regulations based on shared values. This will allow for the protection and strengthening of the "common good" when emerging challenges are faced on a global scale in the areas of education, science, culture and communication. Secondly, UNESCO has a commitment to the promotion of pluralism through the acknowledgment and stimulation of diversity and respect to human rights. Finally, UNESCO brings to the World Summit its commitment to equal Access, training and sharing knowledge as ways to promote empowerment and participation in the Information Society.

For UNESCO, an increase in the number of networks and applications of technologies and communication is not enough to guarantee the fundamentals of knowledge societies. In order to construct a knowledge society, it is necessary to make a political choice regarding desirable goals to be achieved. This is true especially in terms of increasing equal access to education and knowledge. This is a task everyone should take on, as it is a part of the collective process of overcoming digital exclusion, a form of social inequality. Let us celebrate the World Summit on the Information Society as its first phase is carried out in Geneva, and let us prepare for the next phase, which is to take place in Tunis in 2005.

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