

Executive Summary

“e-Business Forum”

3rd work cycle

C1 Working Group “The Information Society: Sociology and IT”

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The introduction of new technologies into different societies has brought about very different results. Each society welcomes new traditions in accordance with its own customs and traditions. The dialectic relationship between technology and society, and in our case with new information and communication technologies shapes the Information Society. The Information Society relates to private enterprises, enterprises in the information technology sector and information technology networks, the public sector, various social institutions, and the population in general.

In the past Greek society had shown that it was in a position to monitor major economic and technical transformations that primarily came from the West, albeit with a certain lag, in other words it was receptive to modernization. The introduction of older technologies into Greece was characterized by the phenomenon of rapid absorption during the first stage and difficulty in consolidating and disseminating them during later stages.

Similar phenomena have also been observed in the study of the relationship between the present-day Greek society and new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The main force promoting the introduction of ICTs in Greece to date has been the private sector while the public sector is lagging behind. However, at the same time, the efforts to disseminate ICTs in public administration and education is continuing at an extensive rate. ICTs are being promoted by consumption, more so in the communication sector and less so in the information technology sector.

Today the dynamic to introduce ICTs is to a large extent due to the older public policy of subsidizing ICT enterprises and the award of public projects to the information technology sector in Greece has been somewhat stemmed. Major private sector enterprises as well as enterprises in the information technology sector are the main channel for disseminating ICTs. Moreover, the business benefits from dissemination of ICTs have not become clear to traditional enterprises. The latter have not increased their demand for ICT services to the extent that information technology enterprises expected. Information technology enterprises offer products which are more complex than those which traditional enterprises wish for. Traditional enterprises are satisfied with computerizing their accounts office or warehouses. At the same time, they have not overcome the lack of specialized training in ICTs, ignorance and fear of technology which are characteristic marks of large sections of the population. In other words, part of the problem lies in the fact that relations between information technology enterprises, traditional enterprises and the State are not complementary. There are no positive synergies between them.

As far as the development of ICT network is concerned, needs are not adequately defined, while the direction and intensity of development is subject to differences based on pressures and interests at a sectoral and local level. The relationship between the public and private sector has not reached a balance point. There is a need to upgrade the regulatory and supervisory role of the State, via the context of ongoing privatizations in various sectors of the economy. This regulatory and supervisory role does not only relate to shaping a national strategy on information and communication technologies. It also relates to reducing regional imbalances since demand for access to networks seems to be focused on larger cities. It also relates to guaranteeing the right of access to these networks. Access to ICTs is the new, major public good.

As far as enterprises are concerned, trends towards restructuring have been identified. This is mainly introverted, in other words it has to do with internal organization of enterprises and labour relations. In Greece, the relationship between the information technology sector and other productive sectors in the private sphere and with the public sector is problematic. Enterprises in the information technology sector have not acquired critical mass, nor do they have the necessary dynamism which would allow them to engage in maximum possible collaborations at international level. Enterprises in the sector are developing, adapting to delays and deformities in Greek society and public administration. The limited dynamic of the sector is tending to reproduce the traditional characteristic of Greek industry, the dependence of enterprises on the state.

At the level of society, there are technological modernization intermediaries, in other words a few collective agencies, technocratic business executives and public sector officials and informal networks which operate in an effort to overcome the aforementioned problems, develop new policy measures and establish a suitable awareness at the level of state and population, in other words awareness of the compatibility between requirements of the age and new information and communication technologies. In the space between the state and the market there are however traditional Greek institutions also at work such as the family. There are two constants in this respect: the traditional relationship between family and small or medium-size business activity and the well known over investment of the Greek family in educating its children. Both these constants can constitute a pole around which a strategy for further dissemination and assimilation of ICTs could be designed so as to increase demand for the relevant services in the long-term and to increase the productivity of the economy overall. The reduction in technological illiteracy (the digital gap between users of ICTs and others) and the change in the position of women in the labour market and society are medium-term challenges.

However, none of the above has significant hopes of being implemented without changing the relationship between public administration and ICTs. New forms governing relations between administration and enterprises are required which will permit the latter greater use of ICTs and change the attitude of many civil servants to ICTs. Changes are necessary too in the private sector both in terms of relations between traditional enterprises and ICTs and in terms of enterprises which have not integrated ICTs except in a few isolated aspects of their operations. This is associated with technophobia among owners, executives and employees, and the slow introduction of ICTs into the public sector, a fact which stems their dissemination into private sector enterprises. Ignorance, lack of an appropriate modern technical culture, inadequate knowledge of the English language, inertia and old habits as well as

doubts about the economic benefits from introducing ICTs into certain small and medium-sized enterprises contributes to the same result.

In summary, in Greece there has been no widespread awareness that the Information Society is a major social transformation which is rapidly underway. In order to develop the Information Society more extensive central planning is required and an improvement in the regulatory role of the State, involvement of Greek political leadership and the academic community, raising awareness in relation to ICTs, the creation of joint codes of communication between policymakers, businessmen and academics, and further research into the economic and social dimensions of the dialectic relations between ICTs and Greek society.