Statistical indicators on reading and literacy for the “Information Society” versus the ITU’s “technicist” indices¹

Ksibi Ahmed

*Prof. at the Higher Institute
of Documentation of Tunis (and)
University of Manouba
ahmed.ksibi@isd.rnu.tn; aksibi@voila.fr*

Introduction

On the eve of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), measuring progress towards the information society, commonly referred to as “e-readiness”, has become a key issue for governments and communities in a number of countries.

In implementing the WSIS Action Plan, major international UN organizations including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), responsible for organizing the summit, and neo-liberal organizations such as the World Bank,² the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and many others³ were involved in developing instruments and statistical indicators for arranging criteria for measuring the information society that can be compared at the international level. Indicators on the impact of new information and communications technologies (NICTs) are considered essential for action planning and development, including achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Looking closer at these statistical indicators from the neo-liberal international organizations, we see a distorted picture of the information society because it is based essentially on indices emphasizing computer and telecommunication equipment. This is not a complete picture because it overlooks human factors and human resource quality and skills.

My proposal attempts to balance “equipment-oriented” data with data based on variables that bring information literacy into focus. The library use patterns of young people and the development of reading and literacy are presented for taking

into account the driving elements behind the information environments of the countries studied and to encourage debate on the determining human factors.

The initial hypothesis assumes that the information society is not a single picture: it is not determined solely by technology or the interplay of economic forces.

Libraries, the most widely used cultural institution among young people, could top the list of components making up the information society. Thus, the definition of the information society is not determined solely by a predefined infrastructure, but also by “sociocultural” rather than technological aspects.

This hypothesis counters the technician approach adopted by some international organizations, including the ITU. This technician approach does not take into account indicators on reading and literacy, behaviours that are nevertheless necessary for establishing a literate, innovative society.

By challenging this prevailing approach, we place our albeit modest approach in the same category as the IFLA.

By questioning the use of inappropriate statistical indicators, we somewhat support the IFLA's efforts, to ensure recognition of, *among other things, the central role of libraries in the information society*.⁴ This involves arguing for the need to place librarians and libraries, as mediators between information resources and users, among the key players in the establishment of the information society. It could be postulated that literacy and reading and the purposes of these activities, form the bedrock required for establishing the “information society”.

1. Importance of statistical indicators for evaluation and standards

Statistical measurement and evaluation mechanisms, which quantify procedures and the essence of any organization, help improve and develop it. Modern organizational management commonly uses statistical standards and indices.

In the field of library and information service management and marketing, significant work has been done on indicators for evaluation and standards. By way of example, consider the international standards in this field, such as ISO 2789 on statistics and ISO 11620 on library performance indicators.

What are indicators?

Indicators are statistically significant data, either synthetic or analytical, used as standards for measuring or evaluating programs, projects and interventions in terms of resource count and methods. They define concepts and classifications that specify the measurements and data that can be collected and analysed.⁵ The indicators to be used describe what data to collect and at what frequency.

In library management terminology for example, a performance indicator is a [translation] “numerical expression, using symbols or words, derived from library

statistics or other data describing a library's performance" and "includes both raw figures and ratios".

Why are indicators so important?

The descriptive information that indicators provide is useful for every activity and project to justify allocated resources and loads and to identify potential challenges. For a given library, indicators can be used to make comparisons over time for the services it provides. Libraries can also be compared to other libraries, provided that their organizational differences are accounted for, the indicators used are well understood, and the data interpreted with care. Since indicators cannot be taken in isolation from their context, care must be taken not to translate findings into decisions automatically.

Indicators are ways used in evaluation to demonstrate to donors, decision-makers and the public how allocated funds and resources are managed. Public policy is developed primarily from quantitative indicators established by national statistics offices. As such, it is important to mention **Canada's National Core Library Statistics Program**, which provides fundamental data regarding the broad impact of library services on Canadian society.

How are the data collected?

There are various ways of collecting the data based on predetermined indicators. Censuses and surveys are the most widely known data collection methods.

When censuses and surveys are conducted regularly, the indicators can be tracked over time, allowing for evaluation at regular intervals so new strategies can be implemented.

"E-readiness" as an indicator of preparedness for the information society

Since 1998, evaluating readiness for the information society has been developed by the Computer Systems Policy Project (CSPP)⁶ guide for assessing e-readiness for a networked world. This self-assessment tool was designed to help individuals and communities determine how prepared they are to participate in the "networked world". The guide measures the predominance and integration of ICTs in homes, schools, businesses, health care services and government offices, with an additional focus on competition among access providers, access speed and government policy.

The purpose of this statistical description approach, adopted by international organizations, is to make intercountry comparisons. It is based on a composite indicator that includes many factors, from infrastructures to use capacity, and encompasses elements from the economic, legal and political environments.

2. Criticism of statistical indicators based on “technicist” and commercial criteria

Statistically measuring the information society based primarily on a list of core NICT indicators⁷ is the prerogative of large neo-liberal structures. It is currently being harmonized internationally. It could very likely be approved by all international and regional organizations and national statistics offices for assessing the development of the information society.

The ITU digital access index (DAI) and the “network readiness of economies” indicator of the World Bank’s Infodev program, established as a benchmark for implementing the information society, are becoming hegemonic. There are an important reference for governments and donors and identify characteristics that help attract investments.

The devotion to NICT indicators among international neo-liberal organizations indicates the technical and commercial tendencies, which ultimately seek only to broaden the computer and telecommunication sector and boost economies in financial crisis.

If we take the ITU’s digital access index (DAI)⁸ as a model, we see that it focuses on connectivity rate and leans too much toward user solvency (affordability)!

The ITU’s technicist tendency is expressed in its most visible form through the choice of indicators favouring measurement of infrastructure development: 5 (the prevalence of the indicators at number 7: telephony services, international Internet bandwidth per inhabitant, for example), to classify countries rather than cultural information behaviours (reflects only 2 indicators: 1) adult literacy 2) combination of Internet access at primary schools, high schools and universities). The ITU’s tendency is also commercial. It reflects the desire to outfit the entire world with computers with the aim of boosting the economic growth of technology-exporting countries. As such, the DAI figures and measurements do not focus solely on connectivity rate, but lean towards economic profit, as indicated by the “bizarre” choice of using the user solvency (affordability) indicator to assess progress towards a knowledge-based society.

The ITU’s measurement of the information society, which is currently limited to digital equipment sectors, is, in many respects only partial.

Criticizing the ITU’s statistical indicators is vital for developing a new comparative framework that reflects reality and within which the world’s countries can measure their progress towards the information society. From this albeit limited questioning of the narrowness of certain government organizations’ indicators would come a strategic focus.

Our vision is based on the need for taking cultural and human resource factors into account for collectively managing the fast-paced progress of new information

and communications technologies (NICTs). The goal is to introduce library and documentation service data into the official statistics so that existing gaps in this area can be identified and filled.

3. Redefining the cultural indicators and behaviours of young people

To build solid theoretical and practical foundations for a cognitive information society, a measurement should be proposed that is based on statistical indicators on changes in the information practices and behaviours of young people.

As such, the information literacy variables pertaining to library use and literacy development should be introduced and considered as benchmarks for measuring progress towards the information society.

The official statistical indicators for measuring the information society should be redefined so they capture the diversity of young people's information behaviours and attitudes and determine their specific use of NICTs and libraries. It is primarily young people who make up the strategic categories of frequent majority users of libraries and have the capability of using NICTs, the basis of an information society.

Statistical data and surveys among frequent majority users of information services:

The official statistics or surveys, whose data validity is not in doubt,⁹ and previous research¹⁰ on this can provide some guidance for identifying the statistical characteristics of the strategic categories for implementing the information society. With a cross-section of information from various sources, it is possible to postulate that the majority users of libraries and NICTs are young people. Young people read and use computers and the Internet more than their elders.

In fact, according to various information sources and numerous studies, one finding emerges: young people (considered to be a socially marginalized and economically passive group), particularly the educated population, appear to be the majority readers who take NICTs on board.

However, this finding is largely tempered by finer analyses showing complex, contradictory trends: reading among young people is dropping overall, with library use on the increase.

The downward trend in book reading, quantitatively and qualitatively, is a general phenomenon.¹¹ Reading is no longer an intense practice among young people. Most of them have a purely utilitarian relationship with books and tend to disfavour the book culture and even replace it with a communication culture¹² (mobile phones and the Internet) and media culture (television and newspapers).

This widespread trend would support the hypothesis of a certain homogenization of youth culture. In my view, what characterizes today's generations is the feeling of belonging to a specific culture that is age-related and willingly international. We are not talking of a "young culture". Gilles Pronovost pointed out that,

since 1970, we have not been seeing the disappearance of “classic models” in cultural practices, but that [translation] “a new, more eclectic culture has gradually taken over, which, remember, also includes new information technologies”. To ward off lamentation speeches on the reading “crisis” among young people, the statistics show that other types of reading are emerging and that public library use is on the rise.¹³ The number of educated people and rising education level of the population as a whole (Gagnon et al., 1997) and the influence of the educational environment (Baillargeon, 2000) apparently affect the behaviour of young people with respect to cultural activities.

The offering geared towards young people has diversified. Facilities that have been converted into médiatheques and even cybercentres in some cases are indicative of that.

According to the Médiamétrie surveys in France, the emerging communication models, particularly the Internet, draw young people, again educated, who are familiar with or master the new technologies and want access to user-friendly multimedia locations to communicate, produce and socialize freely.

Why are reading and literacy raised to the level of indicators?

Literacy and reading are required for establishing a thinking, creative nation because all innovation flows from that. These behaviours also enable facility with language and writing, new skills needed. Every individual must be “*Information Literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information.*”¹⁴ This is required for economic survival and defence in a complex, uncertain world. The concept of literacy incorporates socio-political aspects in addition to regular reading. The literate person learns to look at the world and become aware of his/her social standing.

Moreover, information from several studies shows that reading and literacy practices are a criterion for evaluating the quality of human resources.

The skills assessment conducted in 2000 as part of the OECD PISA project that included 32 industrialized countries assessed performance in reading, mathematics and science to determine the quality of human resources. The finding from the data established correlations between the reading performance of young people and a country’s position with reference to human development indicators developed by the UNDP. Countries in the lead economically and socially are those where students have the highest marks in reading (the Scandinavian countries, particularly Finland), mathematics (Japan) and science (South Korea).

The cultural behaviour routes of these young players and their visions redraw the new social and power relationships.¹⁵ Their intellectual paths, the physical and

symbolic ways of subscribing for information services, are the template for the new socialization.

This is apparent in some young people, players in the information society who define their promotion strategies in new opportunities for accessing cognitive information or business and relationship opportunities via the Internet and information systems.

The natural extension of reading is NICT access, which is a necessary complement to literacy. For example, according to a number of sources, Scandinavians, specifically Finns, are also the champions of the Internet world. Reading from traditional media is in conjunction with the use of NICTs and electronic media. Several surveys show that, among those who use their computer almost every day as part of their free time, we find the strongest readers.¹⁶

Gaps in the field of statistics today

The goal is to introduce library and documentation service data into the field of official statistics so that existing gaps in this area can be identified and filled. Barriers to data collection, for example, conceptual difficulties, competing priorities, lack of resources and the need to strengthen skills, should be examined and corrective measures proposed.

The linguistic diversity of the content produced and the ability of a population's young people to take NICTs on board and create this content would also be valuable indicators to capture, e.g., content produced by the under-25 age group. What is needed now is to propose indicators on the quality of this content, ideally through multimedia metadata.

This does not just involve disputing the statistical modelling of neo-liberal organizations, but proposing different measuring tendencies, favouring culture, ways of strengthening identity, that emphasize the specific characteristics of the information society. Instead of, or coupled with, general comparative analyses, it would be preferable to analyse specific cases, within a given society or territory.

Analysing the NICT introduction process and types of use cannot be done following a simple logic of transferring a model in which young people would be merely targets, consumers more than players. It involves understanding whether these technologies bring about real change in their lifestyles and assessing how compatible these technologies are with the specific, concrete ways that a local society or economy operates.

Viewing youth as a strategic partner, an essential pressure group in the design and management of information systems, requires a series of studies. The socio-professional profile of majority users of libraries and information systems warrants special attention. Analysing the socio-economic field, identifying their cul-

tural and information behaviours, and establishing new directions are prerequisites to modelling the systems to be introduced.

4. Reaffirming the central role of libraries in the information society

Why should libraries be put forth as a benchmark for assessing progress towards the information society?

Libraries herald social perspectives. Describing a library's objectives and evaluating its services and funds give us an image of an entire society.

The mission of Singapore's libraries is remarkable in this respect in its alignment with socio-economic objectives: [translation] "To improve the nation's ability to learn for the purpose of increasing national competitiveness and promoting a harmonious society."¹⁷

Measuring progress towards a library or service objective requires quantification (either in percentages, time frames or ratios) or a scale, potentially numeric, for assessing an information system's operation.

Evaluating a country's libraries can give us a sense of its readiness for the information society.

Indicators on library use habits and behaviours (no. of registered library users, no. of document loans, document use rate, percentage of titles in the collection requested, average search time for direct access documents, search success rate by catalogue subject) and availability of computerized systems, as expressed by the ISO 11620 performance indicators, Europe's LIBECON system¹⁸ of library service statistics, are references that introduce indicators for objectively capturing the information conditions of each country.

Performance indicators and the ISO 11620 standard mark a new stage in the meaningful development of service evaluation. It is user-focused, and the selected indicators are meaningful with respect to level or quality of user services.

Finally, the key to this performance evaluation lies in the availability of the data required for the indicators: this approach goes hand in hand with implementing an information system.

In using this standard, a library's development policy should be relied on (its missions, its general and operating objectives), and discussion around selecting and implementing these indicators – such as interpreting the results – may clarify or modify those missions and objectives. During this era of crisis and budget cuts when libraries are threatened, using the strategic categories of disadvantaged young people can positively reposition libraries in society and make them indispensable, which they often are not, in the minds of decision-makers and politicians.

In library science, we often refer to under-exploitation of library potential, particularly public libraries.

Fighting the digital divide is the new mission of libraries

This under-exploitation is glaring in disadvantaged communities. Democratization of information is central to a library's mission. As such, it is an opportunity to fulfil its potential and mission.

As to the divide, this is an enormous challenge because it involves not quantifying a status or visible action, but rather measuring the absence of a practice.

Instead, they are processes excluding information access services and systems, referred to by several terms "illiteracy, weak readers, learning disorders, semi-literacy, under-education" that arise under various conditions and must be taken into consideration.

Regardless of the living conditions of disadvantaged populations or the driver behind the inequalities and injustices, learning disability issues and disorders hinder access to information services and prevent the exercise of full citizenship.

The conditions that allow illiteracy to be established as a priority and made into a social problem do not involve just educational and cultural institutions. A cross-sectoral approach is required for acting on society as a whole for creating conditions conducive to the development and strengthening of reading skills. The "weak reader" issue must be analysed as a process in which the players promote a system of meaning and actions that encode this situation based on local interests.

Individuals having difficulties with reading and writing are not a homogenous group. They are subject to socio-economic circumstances and their means are limited to the most frequent physical and psychological difficulties. Their lives follow different paths: their cultural and information behaviours through social or family disruptions, professional disconnect, are represented through their discourse. They are the ones that prerequisite studies for statistical system modelling should capture.

As with libraries in the 1950s and 1960s, which were one of the most important factors in the democratization of learning and the dissemination of culture, NICT access centres will be a springboard for progress towards the information society.

Having NICTs in libraries is the best solution for breaking away from the classic forms of isolation and exclusion by proposing alternative models for the cultural development of the egalitarian information society.

In a context of library virtualization, in which applying Internet technologies to resource and service accessibility seems more satisfactory, virtual libraries allow tremendous flexibility: reference services will be decentralized, interactive, and available on an extended schedule. Once the geographic criterion is no longer a factor, northern and southern young people will be able to benefit from libraries' expertise and vast digital collections, for example as part of distance learning projects. We cannot aspire to equality until young users have taken on board the new technologies in their quest for knowledge.

The important thing is for virtual libraries to meet the objectives of the communities they serve, where applicable, by getting involved in the education and learning process.

Nevertheless, developing documentary communication organizations (virtual reference services) requires redefining information access services and re-inventing multilateral cooperation formulae. This presupposes altering concepts and investigation techniques (for making progress in harmonizing research indicators on reading behaviours) in library and information science.

Conclusion

In this time of globalization, which is accompanied by network expansion and proliferation and the sharing of cognitive and cultural resources, it is crucial that we eliminate boundaries and integrate into the new knowledge society the information disadvantaged who feel out of place there so that everyone can aspire to the same information and education level.

Integrating disadvantaged communities into the information society through public libraries is an opportunity for integrating public libraries into the social landscape and gives them their due place. In fact, the information disadvantaged client base is likely to become more significant. If libraries do not commit to getting actively involved among disadvantaged communities, they will no longer be overlooking a minority, but rather a significant share of their potential client base.

Redefining the characteristics of the information society is a new challenge that could encourage us to use our imagination, which would lead to new research and develop new social integration models. Conceptual difficulties, lack of resources and the need for strengthening skills should be examined and corrective action to reduce the digital divide should be proposed.

Notes

- 1 Indicateurs statistiques de la lecture et de la littérature pour « la société de l'information » face aux indices « technicistes » de l'UIT,
- 2 Guide to Measuring the Information Society, OECD Working Party
- 3 See the WSIS thematic meeting "Measuring the Information Society" Geneva, February 7-9, 2005, which included the World Bank, the OECD, and most of the technical organizations: ITU, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UN Regional Commissions (ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA) and the UN ICT Task Force. The meeting was attended by more than 270 delegates from 85 United Nations member countries, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and civil society.

- 4 See the resolution in the Proceedings from "Libraries @ the Heart of the Information Society": - Proceedings of the IFLA Pre-World Summit Conference, Geneva, 3-4 Nov. 2003, The Hague, IFLA, 2003, 142 p.-
- 5 Adapted from UNESCO
www.unesco.org/bangkok/education/ict/indicators/introduction.htm
- 6 CSPP's Readiness Guide for Living in the Networked World.
<http://www.cspp.org/projects/readiness/>
- 7 See the annex to the report "Measuring the Information Society": Core List of ICT Indicators: Access and Infrastructure Core Indicators.
- 8 The ITU's upcoming 2003 edition of the World Telecommunication Development Report (WTDR) ITU Digital Access Index: World's First Global ICT Ranking
- 9 The three sources used are references whose data collection and processing methods were monitored by an institution specialising in this:
 - A skills assessment, conducted in 2000 as part of the OECD PISA project that included 32 industrialized countries, assessed performance in reading, mathematics and science.
 - International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
 - Surveys entitled *Les pratiques culturelles des Français*/ Ministère de la culture, in 1974, 1982, 1990 and 1998.
- 10 IFLA - Global Library Statistics 1990-2000. September 2003 (DRAFT)
 - Eberhart, George M. *The Whole Library Handbook 3: Current Data, Professional Advice and Curiosa about Libraries and Library Sciences*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2000.
- 11 Olivier Donnat. *Les pratiques culturelles des Français // Les pratiques culturelles en méditerranée*. Tunis: CEDODEC, 1991. P.104. See also Olivier Donnat and Denis Cogneau, *Les pratiques culturelles des Français 1973-1989*, Paris, La Découverte/La Documentation française, 1990, ch. 4 "Le livre")
- 12 See the works of François de Singly on young people and reading. -*Les Dossiers Education et Formation*, No. 24, January 1993, Ministère de l'Education nationale et de la Culture, Direction de l'Evaluation et de la Prospective.
- 13 Monique Lebrun. *The Evolution of Library Use and the Development of Literacy in Adolescence*. - in: 70th IFLA Conference in Buenos Aires, 2004.
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/prog04.htm>
- 14 Sandy Campbell. - *Defining Information Literacy in the 21st Century*. - in: 70th IFLA Conference in Buenos Aires, 2004:
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/papers/059e-Campbell.pdf>. Division VII.
 - Education and Research

- 15 Momar Coumba Diop (dir.), *Le Sénégal à l'heure de l'information*, Paris, Karthala, 2002
- 16 Charles Steinfield. - Changing relationships in the information society: The effect of information infrastructures on relations among business users. - Published in French in: *Réseau: communication technologie société*, No. 84 (July/August 1997).- (Dossier les coûts de transaction)
- 17 Girard-Billon Aline. Les bibliothèques publiques des grandes villes françaises et étrangères. - in: *BBF 2002 - Paris*, t. 47, No. 4, p. 70-83
- 18 David Fuegi. - Recent developments in the application of statistics, standards and performance indicators in public libraries in England.- in: 70th IFLA Conference in Buenos Aires, 2004

Abstract

This essay is a synthesis of statistical data and of a set of surveys among young people, the frequent majority users in developing countries.

Variables pertaining to their use of new information and communication technologies (NICTs) and information sources allow us to put forth several significant hypotheses regarding the information society and the digital divide.

We intend to suggest statistical indicators on the evolution of library use and the development of literacy as well as the ability to use NICTs and the information behaviours of young people as benchmarks for measuring the progress made by developing countries to reduce the digital divide and establish solid foundations for a cognitive information society.

This hypothesis counters the prevailing “technicist” approach adopted by the International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) digital access index (DAI), which does not take into account indicators on reading and literacy, though they are significant behaviours necessary for establishing a literate, innovative society,

The DAI community connectivity indicators were developed by the ITU to follow the objectives of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS, Geneva 2003) Action Plan, which advocates a composite index for measuring the information society.

The ITU, the United Nations institution organizing the WSIS instead of UNESCO, is an expression of the “technico-economic” tendency for facilitating the integration of NICTs into our societies and highlights the desire to outfit the entire world with computers to enable economic growth by opening new markets.

This prevailing technicist tendency (see the official literature on the information society) is expressed in its most visible form by the ITU indicators, which favour measuring infrastructure development (telephony services, number of PCs, number of Internet users) to classify countries rather than cultural information behaviours.

This quantitative DAI index, as designed by the ITU, leans more towards economic profit, user solvency and return on investment. Consequently, the digital divide between industrialized countries and developing countries, particularly the marginalized ones (Africa and the Middle East), is imperfectly measured by the ITU's index. Outside the anti-globalization movement, the prevailing approach is rarely challenged and even less so are the quantitative indicators. By questioning the DAI, my proposal attempts to go beyond "equipment-oriented" data and encourage debate on the determining human factors to take into account the basic elements of the information environment of the country under study.

Indicators on library resource use behaviours and habits (registered users, documents loans, etc.) and minimal action for information mastery, as expressed by UNESCO statistics, ISO 11620 library performance indicators and Europe's LIBECON system on library service statistics, include indicators on the information conditions specific to each country.

It is primarily young people who are the strategic categories of frequent majority users of libraries and who are capable of using NICTs, the basis of an information society in developing countries. Comparable statistical indicators of these user categories must be introduced in order to develop a realistic international system for monitoring and evaluating (both qualitative and quantitative) of changes in information behaviour.

This involves disputing hasty statistical modelling by emphasizing the variety of the information behaviours and attitudes of young people and determining their specific use of NICTs and libraries. The proposed approach involves different measurement trends, favouring usage and "e-readiness" developed by several research centers, emphasizing specific characteristics of the information society.

From this albeit limited questioning of the narrowness of certain indicators could come a strategic focus by redefining the indicators of a knowledge-based society, which should be multiple and focused on socio-cultural rather than technological aspects.

In-depth knowledge of strategic categories of users forms the basis of designing and creating virtual libraries. The development of documentary communication organizations and information retrieval systems presupposes a revision of concepts and investigation techniques in library and information science, where theoretical effort is still insufficient.

Résumé

Cet essai est une synthèse des données statistiques et d'une panoplie d'enquêtes auprès des jeunes, usagers fréquemment majoritaires dans les pays en développement. Les variables concernant leurs usages des Nouvelles Technologies de

l'Information et de la Communication (NTICs) et leurs utilisations des sources d'information nous permettent d'émettre quelques hypothèses significatives concernant la société de l'information et la fracture numérique.

Il s'agit de proposer des indicateurs statistiques concernant l'évolution des pratiques de fréquentation des bibliothèques et du développement de la littératie et les capacités d'usage des Nouvelles Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication (NTICs), des comportements informationnels des jeunes, comme critères de référence pour mesurer les progrès réalisés par les pays en développement pour réduire la fracture numérique et établir les meilleurs soubassements d'une société de l'information cognitive.

Cette hypothèse relativise l'approche techniciste dominante adoptée par l'index sur l'accès numérique (DAI Digital Access Index) de l'UIT l'Union Internationale des Télécommunications qui omet les indicateurs sur la lecture et la littératie qui sont pourtant les comportements nécessaires pour former une société cultivée et innovante.

Les indicateurs de connectivité communautaire DAI sont élaborés par l'UIT en application des dispositions du plan d'action du Sommet mondial de la société de l'information (SMSI Genève 2003) qui préconise d'instituer un indice composite de « Mesure de la société de l'information ».

D'ailleurs le choix de l'UIT l'institution onusienne organisatrice du SMSI au détriment de l'UNESCO traduit la tendance « technico-économique » devant faciliter l'intégration des NTICs dans toutes nos sociétés et souligne par la même la volonté d'équiper d'ordinateurs la planète toute entière afin de permettre la croissance économique par l'ouverture de nouveaux marchés.

Cette tendance techniciste dominante (voir la littérature officielle sur la société de l'information) s'exprime dans sa forme la plus manifeste par les indicateurs de l'UIT qui privilégient la mesure du développement des infrastructures (les services de la téléphonie, le nombre de PC pour, le nombre des utilisateurs d'Internet) pour classer les pays au dépens de la dimension des pratiques culturelles de l'information.

Cet indice quantitatif DAI tel qu'il est conçu par l'UIT est trop orienté vers la rentabilité économique, la solvabilité des usagers et les retours sur investissements. Par conséquent, la fracture numérique entre les pays industrialisés et les pays en développement, surtout les plus marginalisés (Afrique et Moyen-Orient), est imparfaitement mesurée par l'indice de l'UIT. En dehors des cercles alter-mondialistes, il existe très peu de contestation de l'approche dominante et encore moins, bien sûr, de remise en cause de ces indicateurs quantitatifs. Par la remise en cause du DAI, ma proposition tente de dépasser les données orientées « équipement » et ainsi de susciter le débat sur les facteurs humains déterminants pour prendre en compte des éléments fondateurs de l'environnement informationnel du pays observé. Les indicateurs des habitudes et les comportements d'utilisations des sources et des

ressources de bibliothèques (Nbre d'inscrits à la bibliothèque, Nbre d'ouvrages empruntés) et des actions minimales autour de la maîtrise de l'informatique, tels qu'ils sont exprimés par les statistiques de l'UNESCO, les indicateurs de performance dans la norme ISO 11620 et par le système européen LIBECON des statistiques des services de bibliothèques, comportent des indicateurs pour des conditions informationnelles propres à chaque pays.

Ce sont surtout les jeunes, qui sont les catégories stratégiques des usagers fréquemment majoritaires des bibliothèques et qui possèdent les capacités d'usage des NTICs, la base de la réalisation d'une société de l'information dans les pays en développement. Des indicateurs statistiques comparables de ces catégories d'usagers doivent être introduits pour élaborer un système international réaliste de suivi et d'évaluation (à la fois qualitative et quantitative), des changements du comportement informationnel.

Il s'agit de réfuter une modélisation statistique hâtive en mettant en exergue la diversité des comportements et des attitudes informationnelles des jeunes et de connaître leurs usages spécifiques aussi bien des (NTIC) que des bibliothèques. L'approche proposée est celle des différentes tendances de mesures, privilégiant les usages et la « e-readiness », développées par plusieurs centres de recherches mettant en exergue les spécificités dans la société d'information.

A travers ces remises en cause, même limitées, de l'étroitesse de certains indicateurs, on aurait alors une visée stratégique dans la redéfinition des indicateurs de la société de la connaissance qui devrait être multiple plurielle et se concentrer plutôt sur les aspects « socioculturels » que sur les aspects technologiques.

La base de la conception et de la réalisation des bibliothèques virtuelles est une connaissance approfondie des catégories stratégiques des usagers. Le développement d'organisations documentaires communicationnelles et de systèmes de repérage de l'information présuppose une réadaptation des concepts, des techniques d'investigation dans les disciplines bibliothéconomiques et des sciences de l'information, où l'effort théorique reste encore insuffisant.