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An analysis of how the participatory culture through the Internet is fostered in policies directed towards non-formal educational contexts

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Abstract

The work we present here is part of the analyses we carried out within the framework of the thesis project: Analysis of the didactic model of the Museos Vivos project: a case study in new media literacy. At its core, Museos Vivos (Living Museums) was about developing proposals that allowed for collaboration and social participation in the construction of shared multimedia narratives, material and immaterial goods that were collected and given meaning. When the time came to situate these experiences and understand what the real situation of those contexts was, we believed it was necessary to analyze how public policies viewed the implementation of technology and the development of new media literacy in citizens in formal and non-formal settings. In the present paper, we focus on the analysis of the latter.

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Keywords: ICT policies; non formal education; participatory culture; media literacies

1. Introduction

The work we present here is part of the analyses we carried out within the framework of the thesis project: Analysis of the didactic model of the Museos Vivos project: a case study in new media literacy. At its core, Museos Vivos (Living Museums) was about developing proposals that allowed for collaboration and social participation in the construction of shared multimedia narratives, material and immaterial goods that were collected and given meaning. This mission of these living museums was to collect fragments from both the past and the present (which was understood to be the immediate past) and digitalize them, allowing for the recovery of historical memory (spoken, written, photographed, filmed) and look for the patrimonial meaning of these interpretive communities. In the course of the project, we tried to use technology as a medium for carrying out the project rather than as an end in itself.

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During this process, we sought to use these new technologies and the possibilities they offered for communication and expression in order to foster paths to literacy in participants and to build up an online learning community where the various creations as well as the interaction between peers and with the content could be in one place. During the initial phase of designing and implementing the didactic model, we focused on exploring online collaborative spaces and social networks and experimenting with the dynamics of participation, both in formal (secondary school, university) and informal (groups of neighbours from different towns) learning contexts.

When the time came to situate these experiences and understand what the real situation of those contexts was, we believed it was necessary to analyze how public policies viewed the implementation of technology and the development of new media literacy in citizens in formal and non-formal settings. In the present paper, we focus on the analysis of the latter.

2. Approach to the policies and their development

In this approach to public policy related to information society, we see that its general framework is established from Europe through the eEurope initiative (1999). From eEurope states and regions of the union began to develop their own plans for the promotion of Information Society and Knowledge. These plans will also be unique, tailored to the specific case mix of each site, covering different areas (infrastructure, economic development, education, employment, public service management), and are directed either to the whole society in general, as various groups or social sectors (youth, unemployed, etc.).

In the specific context of Euskadi, following the recommendations of the European Union, designed strategies and actions included a variety of actors in development. The initiatives carried out to promote public access to ICT services and content, they relied primarily on KZGunea program. This involved the creation of a network of ICT access, targeting the sectors of the population at risk of digital literacy. The villages are responsible of providing local and from the Basque Government for providing the equipment, and trainers, responsible for teaching courses and meet the needs of people who come to these centers. At this moment, there are deployed in the Basque Country enough technological infrastructures as to guarantee the citizens access to Internet, and other ICT resources, through KZguneak, and initiatives carried out to spread the connectivity from homes and the establishment of WiFi points in public spaces.

Once we realized that issues related to technological infrastructures are in the way of being absolutely solved, our focus has been put on the qualitative aspects of the use planned to them.

With that purpose, on the one hand, we have analyzed the main texts related to the promotion of the ICT in the Basque territory in order to identify the way it is understood (participation, literacies, etc). And on the other hand, we have interviewed some non-formal education agents, which gave us their vision of the application of the ITC policies in their activity environments.

In the analysis of the texts, we have used two matrix levels (1st matrix level: textual description of the statements in the documents and identification of the categories that emerge from them; 2nd matrix level: identification of the functions ascribed to the different educational contexts).

According to the first matrix level, we have realized that once and again is mentioned the promotion of citizen participation as a goal for content and policies development. The texts recognize the need of improve ICT literacies among citizens as the way to achieve this active participation, and to build an ideal technological scenario for the Basque Country.

Through the second matrix level, we have had the chance to define with more deep the understanding of different educative contexts, and how the initiatives promoted by the institutions are configuration the functions of these spaces. While the lifelong learning is underlined as an important actuation line, and according to the texts the policies are directed to all everyday situations, in their practical application, we have seen that no formal educative contexts which are not part of KZgune network, is still far from get serious intervention on them. In short, we can
say that when we started to analyze the type of training that is offered by these centers, we saw that it is highly targeted to empower citizens in the use of specific software tools, browse the Internet, use of office suites, etc., which as a first approach to ICT is very valuable, but totally distorts the relationship, since ICT is treated as an end, and not as means.

In this regard, and always looking at how institutions are understood from the issue of digital literacy of its citizens, we saw that initiatives such as Living Museums now hardly fit into the current supply of KZgunes. In this sense, we believe that since public policy should go a step further and help the creation of learning environments focused on the use of the ICT, focusing on topics most related to the promotion of culture and active leisure, in order to offer learning spaces which could contribute to naturalize the use of ICT, and the presence of these in the everyday life of citizens.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

There is a significant deviation between the theoretical framework of the policies and their real materialization in the practice.

The vision guiding the activity of KZgunes is next to the understanding of digital literacy based on the instrumental aspects of technology, and quite far from the current educational field, aimed toward citizens must develop the skills needed to function in the culture of Internet participation. This implies that literacy work need not be exclusively focused on developing individual skills, understood as isolated subject, but it should allow the group and the interactions that generate it as twigs for citizens to acquire the skills. Nevertheless, they have been carried out some parallel initiatives that are contributing to the development of digital participatory skills among citizens through public discussions of future policies (e.g. Gipuzkoa 2.0, http://www.gipuzkoa2.net/index.php/es), etc.

We believe that next steps in the promotion of Information Society in the Basque Country should be attend the development of online interests communities where citizens could assist each other and could share ideas, contents, etc. in order to offer spaces that fit to people’s cultural interests, as well as geographical, historic, etc. aspects of their natural environments.

References

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