Traditional Knowledge Forum
and
Participation of Indigenous Peoples in the iSociety

Poster Presentation

Ulia Gosart
UCLA
Department of Information Studies
ugosart@ucla.edu

Abstract

This poster presentation envisions the initial steps in fostering indigenous e-inclusion by proposing the creation of an intercultural, multi-disciplinary dialog between representatives of academia, indigenous communities, and policy makers. This dialog would take the form of a Traditional Knowledge Forum and would be based upon and promote the standards for the fair treatment of indigenous peoples as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The issues that will be addressed in the Forum include the protection and development of indigenous knowledge sources, the creation of a venue for meaningful cooperation and sharing of indigenous knowledge, and the establishment of an ethic for indigenous knowledge management.

The presentation intends to create a productive discussion among representatives of iSchools on practical steps to launch a Traditional Knowledge Forum in the near future.

Keywords

traditional indigenous knowledge, cultural information systems, indigenous peoples, intellectual property, indigenous e-inclusion.

1. Introduction

The iSociety is a creation of Western culture. Yet, its global character requires the commitment of non-Western actors for its growth. Development of relations between those, engaged in the creation of global information environments, and their counterparts from non-Western cultural settings is a challenging issue in the future of the iSociety. One of the aspects of this process is collaboration between indigenous peoples[1] and prospective designers of the information products that are relevant for indigenous cultural settings.

2. The *body* of the paper

In observance of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples[2], and following the standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples[3] the main principles of collaboration with indigenous communities include:

- non-discrimination,
- effective participation,
- respect for cultural diversity;
- emphasis on the women, children, and youth;
- effective monitoring and accountability. (UNFPII, 2004).

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[1] *Indigenous peoples* is a legal category, most broadly referring to "the living descendants of preinvasion inhabitants of lands now dominated by others." (S. James Anaya quoted in Rodríguez-Piñero, L. (2005). *Indigenous peoples, postcolonialism, and international law*, p. 40, note 124). Each member state employs its own standards to define populations as indigenous peoples, while following the principles of fair treatment of indigenous peoples developed by the international community and expressed in a set of human rights documents most prominent being *The Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007).

[2] The United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/59/174 for a Second International Decade on December 22, 2004. The Decade commenced on January 1, 2005.

[3] The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly during the 62-d Assembly session on September 13, 2007.

The central objective behind these principles is to include indigenous peoples in the processes of designing, implementing, and evaluating policies, resources, and programs that directly involve the well-being of indigenous communities. (UNFPII, 2004).

Collaborative efforts between indigenous communities and academia to design information products relevant to indigenous settings began as early as the 1980s. However, the consequences of this collaboration were at times unexpectedly harmful to the indigenous communities. One of the saddest examples of this harm was the creation of indigenous databases. While composed with assistance and help from the indigenous peoples, these information resources often bore little relevance to the needs of the communities from whom the information was taken. (Agrawal, 2002). Further, as these databases entered the public domain, they made the knowledge expressions of indigenous communities vulnerable to copyright infringement (WSIS, 2003, Brown, 2003).

An analysis of these efforts outlined the lack of clear understanding of the crucial issues involved in the process of collaborative work with indigenous peoples. (The Tulalip Tribes, 2003). To clarify the issues and to create solutions to the existing and potential problems related to indigenous traditional knowledge, a dialog among representatives of academia, indigenous communities, and policy makers is needed. As an initial step in the process of engaging indigenous peoples into the iSociety, such a dialog could take a form of a Traditional Knowledge Forum. The Forum will elicit ways in which the principles of the treatment of indigenous peoples as promoted by the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can be implemented within the educational practices of the iSchools.

3. Traditional Knowledge Forum will address the following issues:

Protection of Traditional Knowledge expressions

As the past experience has shown, a leading problem with the growth of information society is insuring the protection of knowledge expressions of non-Western cultures, especially of indigenous peoples.

The following subject areas are related to this protection:
- Mechanisms for the protection of traditional indigenous knowledge: Intellectual Property system and customary laws;
- Traditional indigenous knowledge and the public domain: danger and benefits;
- Internet and traditional indigenous knowledge: the adequacy of digital formats for the content of indingeous knowledge expressions.

Sharing Traditional Knowledge expressions

Another related issue is the question of sharing the expressions of indigenous knowledge on the terms of indigenous peoples. In particular:
- Practicing principles of mutual exchange and reciprocity within the educational endeavors of the iSchools;
- Practicing principles of free and informed consent in the fields of iSchools research and professional engagement.

Development of knowledge management ethics for future cooperative efforts

The next prospective area of development is knowledge management ethics. How can issues of intellectual property rights, privacy, accuracy and accessibility in relation to the ethical management of indigenous knowledge expressions be addressed in collaborative efforts between indigenous and non-indigenous actors within the practices of the iSchools? (Mason, 1995)

Creating novel information products.

Finally, is it possible (or practical) to create information products that would both preserve the traditional core of indigenous knowledge expressions, and provide the benefits of a Western information system for indigenous peoples?

Who are prospective participants?

Indigenous peoples
While indigenous communities differ depending on their geo-political locations, historical backgrounds, economic situations and social structures, representatives of indigenous communities often share a common agenda on national and international forums. These representatives, who include activists, researchers, and members of traditional leadership, are the key links between the communities and the outside social and political structures. Participation of these actors is crucial to the working of the Forum; it would also be useful for creating projects between representatives of the iSchools and indigenous communities.

Academia
Traditional indigenous knowledge is a theme of multi-disciplinary character. The stakeholders involved in this field include researchers from a wide range of disciplines that include natural and social sciences, professional fields of law, business and education. However, only the multi-disciplinary focus of the iSchool can bring these diverse aspects under one umbrella of a common aim: the collaboration with indigenous peoples and the creation of information resources for indigenous communities. The Forum is an opportunity to bring diverse academia members together as a step toward indigenous e-inclusion.

Policy makers
Traditional indigenous knowledge is the focus of work of the World Intellectual Property Organization Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC), among other policy insitutions involved in this field. Participation of the IGC members including representatives to the IGC from indigenous peoples organizations, as well as policy makers and professionals involved in the area of customary laws development will enhance relations among academia and policy making circles with the active involvement of indigenous researchers and activists.

3. Conclusion

The poster presentation intends to create a meaningful discussion among *i*-conference participants on practical steps for launching a Traditional Knowledge Forum within the realm of the iSchools educational practices.

4. Acknowledgements

5. References

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