

The challenging walk to digitization

Descrizione

The massive use of digital tools and technological devices requests a serious reflection upon the role played by culture in our society. Obviously, the black and white scheme does not work any more in a context where the long-established opposition between the comfort of the well-known processes and the uncertainty of the future scenarios has been knocked down by the notion of complexity.

The so-called “digital revolution” represents a multi faceted phenomenon that has enemies and supporters who fight a daily battle over culture’s value. The former is used to predict the end of traditional newspapers, books, movies, music and so on, describing a desolate landscape of ignorance with no space for cultural and creative products and practitioners. The latter imagines the coming of the golden age of cultural contents which finally will be open and accessible to all for free. In between these two extremes, a wide range of intermediate points of view make possible those small and big changes that – considered as a whole – contribute to the contemporary structure of our analogical and virtual communities.

As stated by the World Economic Forum in the “Global Information Technology Report 2013”, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) represent a strategic asset for economic growth, social well-being and job creation. Such a research study analyses the spread of “digitization” over the world by using the Networked Readiness Index (NRI), which evaluates ICT access and impacts through a holistic approach. In order to obtain a realistic measure of ICTs added value, the NRI is composed of 54 individual indicators – comprising four sub-indexes: environment, readiness, usage and impact – and it is based on five main principles: the importance of measuring the economic and social impacts of ICTs; the ability of an enabling environment to determine the capacity of an economy and society to benefit from the use of ICTs; the ICT readiness and usage as key drivers and preconditions for obtaining any impacts; the interaction and co-evolution of all factors within an ICT ecosystem; the set-up of clear policy orientations and opportunities for stimulating public-private collaboration.

With no surprise, it is possible to find out that our country is not one of the top players of the NRI, resulting in 50th position. Focusing on regional distribution of the NRI, the World Economic Forum's Report argues that in Italy "the persistent weaknesses in the innovation system and in the quality of education, are hindering the country's capacity to leverage ICTs better and obtain higher economic and social impacts". These aspects, together with "a deterioration of the political and regulatory environment, a relative stagnation in our progress toward improving our ICT infrastructure, the perception of a lack of coherent government vision to boost ICTs and the limited role that ICTs play in organizing economic transactions between businesses", reduce our international competitiveness and limit our possibilities to create a fertile ground for creativity and innovation.

Also in the European context, Italy continues to be at the bottom of the list concerning the broadband access. A recent study by the European Commission – Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology – has found that in the broadband markets there are significant differences among Member States. Unfortunately, our country is extremely distant from the high performances recorded by Nordic nations such as Finland (which is also the first of the NRI rankings), Sweden and Denmark. For example, taking into consideration the fixed broadband penetration, Italy (23.3%) is below the EU average (29.4%⁹). Moreover, Italy – together with Greece and Cyprus – is one of the three Member States that have less than one fast broadband subscription per hundred people. Even if the take-up of Next Generation Access technologies increased sharply by 42% during the last twelve months in Europe, it remains marginal in Greece, Croatia, Cyprus and Italy.

In a society deeply interconnected and with no physical boundaries, digitization is transforming not only the manufacturing system but also "the way creative works are generated, disseminated and used", as pointed out by Christian Handle and Ruth Towse in their introduction to the "Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy" (published by Edward Elgar in 2013). Consequently, being unable to guarantee a wide access to new technologies means to undermine the capacity of a country to be the place where people choose to live because they feel better living in their country and do not want to leave it.

So the question is: does Italy still represent a good place for its people? Is Italy still able to spread around the creative atmosphere and to get new ideas and emerging cultural phenomena germinated? Elisa Barbierato suggests that cities as Venice have the power to re-start from their cultural resources if they have time and willingness to listen to grass-roots movements and put people at the centre of the scene. In this respect, the sense of belonging seems to be a crucial aspect for success initiatives as Eugenia Morato tells us in her contribution about the use of social media strategies by Italian museums and cultural organisations as tools which could make cultural products and services closer to people.

We are strongly aware that the way is long and not easy at all, but we are ready to battle against the agony of the human capital. Paraphrasing a famous quotation, give us culture or give us death!

References

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