

## **Short note on the information society and the public sector**

In order to enable the public sector to be the main promoter of the Information Society development, it is necessary to step down from the declamation of principles, to abandon the contemplation of theoretical potentialities and not to be satisfied by the few successes gained through UE-financed projects. On the contrary: We need more objective analyses regarding the political and economical obstacles, the lobbies and those factors of resistance which, anyhow, limit the development of the Information Society in Europe, and, consequently, to suggest solutions. Taking into account the Italian reality only, in the following, I shall try to make a short exercise, pointing in this direction.

### **1. Problem:**

The production of official information by the public sector (the “Official Journal”, statistics, public procurement opportunities and calls for tenders, data bases and main public registers, such as: land register, registered mobile goods, enterprises, e.t.a.), is still considered to be a by-product of the administration action and not a product worth of strategic market proposals by the Government.

Not only: Living the governmental agencies, charged by the production of public information, sheltered from the market, in lack of a public Official Journal for public procurement, they are forced to rely on expensive announcements on national newspapers (for an amount of c.a. 1 billion of Lit every year).

### **Solution:**

*To define, not only what has to be published, but also, “how” to publish. In this regard, official journals, designed on a common European bases, integrated with electronic information services, can be useful (TED is a good model).*

### **2. Problem:**

The resistance of public officers to use electronic information tools as daily work instruments and the consequent difficulty for innovative projects to step out of their prototypal phases. This is particularly true for those projects, which do foresee the interconnection of more agencies (all municipalities, all provinces, e.t.a.), or the rationalisation of databases.

### **Solution:**

*To switch from a incentive systems based on theoretical “should be” terms of being up-to-date, to concrete incentives for single officers in the public administration, who do adopt the innovative tools, emphasising “out-*

*door” the change of behaviour of the public administration in which they work. To define a European-wide incentive action-plan for public officers and managers based on precise results to be achieved.*

### **3. Problem:**

The reluctance of public sector trade unions, who do fear strong staff cut back by wide application of the ICT (in the USA, in a few years time, the Information Society has achieved to reduce the number – some hundreds of thousands - of employees of the public sector).

### **Solution:**

*To seriously face the problem of the public sector cost impact on the European economy, compared to other economies, and to define a progressive plan of reduction of public employees by measures consistent with the necessity, not to irritate the social atmosphere: Block of the turnover, progressive integration by outsourcing, introduction of ICT for publicly promoted functions and delivered services (counters), simplification of bureaucracy, smart card application, e.t.a.*

### **4. Problem:**

The lack of preparation regarding ICT, of a large number of young people.

### **Solution:**

*To introduce tax reductions for families, equivalent to the amounts spent for PC's and Internet connection. Give supplement award in occasion of secondary-school-leaving examination to those students, able to demonstrate sufficient knowledge in PC-use, web-navigation and able to applicate such knowledge within a more traditional scholastic knowledge-frame.*

### **5. Problem:**

The lack of preparation of a large number of enterprises, which, as partners, support the activities of the public administration.

### **Solution:**

*To establish, at European level, that demands of goods and services by the public sector, when carried out through application of up-dated ICT tools (for example: management of catalogues via Internet, mailing of offers, distant assistance, e-commerce, e.t.a.), do represent concrete and immediate advantage for the administration, who manages them. For*

*example: The possibility to employ specialists on European Union pay-role for one year, scholarships for employees, e.t.a.*

*Similarly, those enterprises, which do elaborate offers, making extensive use of ITC, have to be given special credit and “score” (a European short-list for the public administration).*

## **6. Problem:**

The European funds for innovation and the European Social Fund finalised to develop the Information Society, are not always spent with due efficiency. Often they limit themselves to finance second-rate and enduring resistance against innovation, instead of financing the I.S.

## **Solution:**

*To enable experimentation with effective potential to change the behaviour of public administrations. The European Union, rather than to support innovation at a merely technological level, should give a major chance to initiatives, that invest organisation and normative law contexts, facilitated by technology.*

*As far as the countless (and often useless) training courses for the public administration financed through the Social Fund are concerned, it is to propose that these should be effectively financed only in case they have to accompany a real and verifiable process of change in technology, organisation and procedure.*

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I am fully aware, not to have touched important items such as “electronical Government”, “digital democracy” or “new citizens rights”. This partly because items of such nature have to be taken in account within different and wider contexts, and partly because European people (Italians in particular) love to design contexts, which, for being credible, have to be “global” and “absolute”.

Speaking from an experience won over the last twenty years (with changing fortune), in contributing to what we could define the italic version of the information society (without capital letter!), I tend to distrust big scenarios and to rather believe in the “creative” power of single initiatives, whose capacity of impact on reality, is often much superior to the intents, for which they originally have been developed. As to say, that the most efficient strategies are those, which can be defined, only ex-post. Not that I would not feel the bewitching power of big schemes myself. But such schemes often tend to obstacle the evolution in thinking and action.

The big technological-political architectures of Europe, always end up to be old (not exactly obsolete, but simply overwhelmed and ignored by time, as if history would amuse itself by using unforeseen paths) and by-passed by a vitalisme, whose genuine promoter can be identified in the USA. We are not the USA, but we want to compete with the USA. The question is, in which competition?

I therefore feel essential, to realign the discussion on the real interests:

Who is interested in the I.S.?

Where are those persons interested in developing the I.S. and to play an essential role in this process, in view of their cultural, entrepreneurial and political destiny?

How to individuate them and how to help them to play a key-role?

Who among the European politicians, is able to define the concrete ways, through which the I.S. has to be implemented?

How can “normal” citizens like myself gain familiarity with and confidence in the I.S.?

We are still awaiting, answers to such questions, to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

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