



Information
for All
Programme

UNESCO IFAP Intergovernmental Council Working Group on Information Ethics

**Report for the 19th Meeting of the IFAP Bureau
January 17, 2012**

Preparation of the Code of Ethics for the Information Society

The major focus of the Working Group on Information Ethics was to finalize the work on the Code of Ethics for the Information Society and to submit it to the 36th General Conference.

Basing on the discussions at the 6th Session of the IFAP Council and extensive consultations with Member States, WG prepared a revised version of the draft Code of Ethics which was adapted at the 18th meeting of IFAP Bureau. This version was submitted to the members of the IFAP Council and received a tacit agreement with an exception of valuable comments and suggestions provided by France which helped in preparation of the final version of the document.

The Code balances the concerns of different Member States and is not of binding nature. It was developed through a vast consultation process involving Member States, intergovernmental organizations, experts, academics and NGOs.

Debate on the Code of Ethics for the Information Society at the General Conference

UNESCO engagement with the ethical dimension of the information society was highly appreciated at the 36th General Conference, particularly considering the ethical aspects in the Internet usage.

Code of Ethics for the Information Society was submitted by the IFAP to the General Conference for endorsement. Number of Member States expressed their unreserved support for the General Conference's endorsement of the Code, commending it for its contribution towards addressing critical challenges, the flexibility that its nonbinding nature allows for, and the significant consultative work behind it.

Some Member States raised concerns relating to the Code's dispersed target group. They underscored the relevance of ensuring sufficiently inclusive discussions, noting that an inter-governmental forum might not be the most appropriate context for

endorsement of the Code. Some found that certain aspects were sensitive and could conflict with national legal interpretations and policies. They therefore believed it would be difficult to reach a consensus. There were recommendations to refer to “guidelines” or a “set of principles” rather than to a code. While taking note of IFAP’s efforts to address the pressing ethical issues related to the information society, a number of delegates felt they could not adopt the draft resolution contained in 36 C/49, lending support to the amendment introduced by Denmark through DR 3 on this item.

After extensive discussions, including a special informal meeting, an amended draft resolution was adopted, taking note of the Code and inviting the Director-General to suggest, at the 189th Session of the Executive Board, possible ways in which UNESCO could address ethical issues linked to the information society.¹

Working Group supports activities of Secretariat in setting up a series of informal meetings with small groups of member states to discuss the possible next steps.

Possible further actions proposed for a discussion at the Bureau meeting could be:

1. to adopt the suggestion from some Member States and to refer the document as Guidelines or Principles instead of a Code;
2. to submit the adopted document for endorsement at the IFAP Council;
3. if endorsed by IFAP Council, to submit IFAP Guidelines (or Principles) document for further endorsement by the General Conference.

Activities Promoting the Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society

This section is based on the information provided by the Secretariat and briefly describes the activities in 2011 focused on advancing the global debate on ethical dimensions of the information society.

On 18 May 2011 in Geneva at the WSIS Forum, UNESCO held a facilitation meeting for the C10 Action line, “The Ethical dimensions of the information society”. It was jointly organized by UNESCO’s CI and SHS Sectors. The session was held under the theme “Cyber and Information Ethics: freedom & Security, Privacy, Malice & Harm, Property”, with an expert panel from academia, civil society and the intergovernmental sector. The session facilitated a debate on the ways in which evolutions in the field of technology was contributing to dynamic societal changes not yet well understood. During the debate several areas were identified for further investigation, such as, understanding what constitutes informed consent in the virtual environment, understanding the ethical responsibility of corporate actors marketing to youth and children in virtual spaces, establishing guidelines for the use of user-generated/provided data, establishing relevant indicators and others.

On September 30, 2011, UNESCO and UNECA successfully organized a workshop on the unintended consequences of participation in the digital environment held within the framework of the Internet Governance Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. The session examined challenges around diversion of resources, trust and safety, e-waste

¹ See: Oral Reports of the Chairperson and Rapporteur // 36C, *Communication and Information Commission, 1-3 Nov., 2011*

and linguistic diversity and survival. The panel drawn from academia, civil society and the policy-making community offered insights into the challenges and their implications for the African information society. A lively interactive session following the presentations allowed deeper exploration of the session topics and drew on the audience's diverse experience in addressing similar challenges in other developing regions. Of the 4 topics, e-waste and the role of ICT in supporting the survival of African languages captured the greatest attention. The session reaffirmed the importance of continuing efforts in Africa to reduce digital divides and expand opportunities and participation in the digital spaces. Measures identified to mitigate adverse effects included awareness rising of policy-makers and civil society, including information on adverse consequences in information and digital literacy programmes and stimulating local content creation.

An academic workshop on information ethics took place on 4 and 5 July 2011 at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. It brought together representatives of African universities (Central African Republic, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe), Europe and the United States of America to advance the development of a curriculum for teaching information ethics in Africa. The workshop was organized by the Africa Network for Information Ethics (ANIE) with the support of UNESCO, the University of Pretoria, the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and the South African Department of Communications. The workshop in Pretoria was the fourth event dealing with ethical challenges posed by modern information technology in the African continent. Past events have been held in 2007 (South Africa), 2009 (South Africa), 2010 (Botswana) and South Africa (2011).

Building links between COMEST and IFAP

The shared interest between UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Science and Technology (COMEST) and IFAP in the ethical aspects of the information society presents an opportunity to join forces and to leverage the respective networks and complementary perspectives that is mutually beneficial to these bodies and the communities served by their work. To explore these opportunities Secretariat joined by teleconference a session on information ethics during COMEST last meeting in Doha.

Some potential collaboration areas with COMEST identified by the Secretariat are:

- Exploring and understanding what constitutes informed consent in the virtual environment;
- Examining the ethical issues and responsibility of content providers who cater to youth and children in virtual spaces and developing guidelines for these interactions;
- Development of indicators in the field of information ethics;
- Raising awareness around the design of human machine interfaces and developing relevant guidelines to reduce the potential for harm;
- Establishing guidelines for the use of user-generated/provided data;

- Development of tools such as case studies to enhance policy makers awareness of info ethics issues and in better addressing potential ethical dilemmas;
- Using foresight and scenario modeling in identifying emerging technological trends and their potential ethical implications;
- Research around the role of IPR and other property issues and impact on freedom of expression and access to information particularly in public access centers such as libraries and community telecentres;
- Online situational analysis and assessment of the interplay between technology/technological standards/use of technology and privacy and the ethical implications – with a view to better understanding the current situation, developing recommendations, best practices or other tools/standards;
- Raising awareness of on-line user's (particularly youths and Internet-neophytes) of their rights and responsibilities.

We propose to include a presentation on the work of COMEST at the upcoming session of the IFAP Council and/or Bureau and to develop collaborative actions between these bodies.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrejs Vasiljevs', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail.

Andrejs Vasiljevs

WG Chair