TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL SUMMARY IN SPANISH

Seminar 'Digital Footprint: Servitude or Service?'

The digital divide in Northern and Southern populations

Summary of the session of December 10, 2020

The committee of experts of the Seminar 'Digital Footprint: Servitude or Service?' held its eighth session on December 10, once again by videoconference. Continuing to examine critical issues of digital ethics, the December session broadened its geographic scope by debating the "digital divide" in peoples of the North and South of the world.

The session began with a presentation by Raúl González Fabre, professor at the Comillas Pontifical University. It continued with comments from Raúl Flores Martos, Coordinator of the Cáritas Española research team, and Álex Rayón Jerez, Vice-Rector for International Relations and Digital Transformation of the University of Deusto. All those present participated in the subsequent debate (list attached).

Southern populations and the "culture of poverty"

In Raúl González Fabre's presentation, the expression 'Southern population' refers to poor populations of the least developed or middle-income countries, and not to those countries' entire population. In a general sense, this idea encompasses groups of people who have not engaged as productive subjects within economic modernity.

In countries where the poor constitute an electoral majority (or almost), they influence socio-political dynamics so that poverty is a critical element of the country's public culture. The Southern peoples have specific characteristics: not having engaged in productive modernity, these population groups are characterized by their informal participation in the economic organization and low direct income; they suffer from poor quality public services, starting with deficiencies in their civil registry.

Under these conditions, the so-called "culture of poverty" arises, an anthropological concept proposed by Oscar Lewis, that designates a way of life. In this culture, it often happens that

those strategies necessary to survive in poverty are the same ones that make it impossible to get out of it. Within the "culture of poverty", two typical survival strategies are developed: "familism" and clientelism. "Familism" means that there can be no individual capital accumulation because each person has to share with her family, the same group that she relies on to get ahead. Social mechanisms do not provide necessary help for individual improvement, so membership groups generate informal mutual assurance schemes. Clientelism refers to the use of resources from the State through personal connections with mediators; the price for these resources is political fidelity. In Southern populations, large numbers of people depend on favors from political power, and in return, they give their allegiance to that power.

The sum of these two mechanisms creates a huge obstacle to modernization. "Familism" is a difficulty on a micro-scale, complicating individual capitalization; clientelism does it on a macro level since it affects electoral and legal mechanisms that are interfered with by client dependency relationships. This sum constitutes the so-called "poverty trap," a set that helps survive but prevents people from getting out of poverty, both individually and socially.

Digital divide and Southern population

The technological possibilities of the ongoing digital revolution modify the relative positions of different people and social groups. In this scenario, Raúl González Fabre wonders, will ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) alter the situation of the peoples of the South? Will technology promote their development or not?

There are divergent answers to these questions. On the one hand, there is the opinion that, with digitization, as happened in previous industrial revolutions, those who will remain in the highest economic strata will not be the same as those who were there before. The idea is that as the old system breaks down, there will be new opportunities to move up the social ladder. This is where the concept of "leapfrogging" appears, a leap that allows shortening or eliminating routes of the previous modernization process. On the other hand, the opposite position holds that digitization will intensify socioeconomic differences. In this perspective, those who start further back, even if they advance, will be in worse conditions than those who begin from a better starting point, and could even see their situation worsened.

Both positions identify the reduction of the "digital divide," that is, the generalized access to communications and their use, as a key to economic growth. However, it emerges from the debate that the development process is complex: reducing the "digital divide" is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the inclusion of Southern populations in modernity.

Generalized access to digitization is insufficient to eliminate or significantly reduce social inequalities between Northern and Southern populations insofar as it ignores social

subjectivity's essential components. The purely techno-economic analysis that is usually proposed by Northern people is not realistic. According to the Northern population's view, digital technologies will provide a solution for developing Southern populations. However, even if the digital divide were eliminated (in a hypothetical case), the problem of appropriating technologies would remain: i.e. the adoption and modification of technologies to suit the populations' personal and social subjectivity.

To believe that the "digital divide" is the main problem of the Southern populations with technologies shows a lack of understanding of their real development scheme, a scenario in which the aforementioned "culture of poverty" comes into play. There are undoubtedly external limits to the inclusion of the populations of the South in modernity through technology: these can be physical (lack of devices or networks) or characteristic of the political system, which has no interest in changing the swarm of clientelistic connections that a higher degree of formality would imply in legal practice. However, the internal limits that have their origin in life (often survival) of poor people in developing countries are also critical. Poor people may view imposed digitization with suspicion and mistrust if it changes their survival habits and threatens their way of life, based on interpersonal relationships. Informality often gives the poor a chance to survive; they use the cracks in the modern system to their advantage, while digitization tends to close those cracks, both in the market and vis-à-vis the State.

The appropriation of digitization is more difficult for the poor in the Southern countries since it does not require only access, networks, and devices, but a series of appropriation stages. First, learning, which includes aspects such as language and other essential knowledge of modernity. Second, the appropriation of digitization requires the integration of technologies into ways of life. For the populations of the South to enter modernity, technologies should not be used to enhance the "culture of poverty," but to get out of it. A third stage is that of creation, a scenario in which populations start creating their own technological uses responding to their specific needs.

Technological appropriation and design

People adapt technologies in the process of making them their own. In both Northern and Southern populations, individuals and the dynamics of competition shape technology's use according to each one's reality, for specific objectives, sometimes different from those intended by those who designed them. Hence cases in which applications such as TikTok or Instagram are used for commercial purposes in some places, in spite of having been designed for social interaction.

The "digital divide" may arise from the very design of the technologies, which do not consider the different societies in which they are based. The technological design should aim to be more

inclusive with diverse populations: this is not an easy thing to do, but it could become an aspiration towards improving social inclusion. When adopting new technological tools, societies should consider what representation they want for social and political dialogue.

In the opinion of several participants in the debate, digital service companies such as Amazon, Facebook, Instagram, among others, introduce themselves and get made to adopt without considering how the design of the tools will affect each particular social structure. Their design does not respond to the needs and desires of the populations they enter though eventually, they do change that population's social dynamics. For example, the so-called platformization of work (work throughout digital apps), which comes from the hand of Uber or Amazon: it is well known that adopting the proposals of these platforms in the labor structure of a society can have relevant and unwanted consequences. According to one of the participants, our communities do not have the necessary maturity for a full ethical use of applications and their social immersion.

The digital divide in Spain: a cause of social exclusion

Digital inequality is also present in our immediate environment. Here in Spain, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a substantial effect on the inequalities brought about by the digital revolution. Confinement measures and restrictions have indirectly imposed the need for digital mediation in life. With this, the digital revolution has accelerated, leaving far behind those still getting used to the digital world's logic and those who did not have the resources to access social interaction channels. With this, the existing inequality has increased, and people who already were out have lagged further behind.

The last few months have seen a process of expansion and generalization of the digital world. Internet and technological devices are now basic elements for all social fabric dimensions: work, training, education, bureaucratic procedures, etc. Through this acceleration, the "digital divide," which was initially a consequence of social inequalities, has now become one of its causes. In this new scenario, the "digital divide" becomes a factor of exclusion.

In a country with a high percentage of Internet networks, like Spain, the "digital divide" in this sense has an effect equivalent to that of a technological blackout, leaving many out, either due to lack of device, connection, or sufficient skills to navigate the digital world. In the post-Covid-19 reality, the technological blackout causes these families to lose opportunities in different dimensions of social life: in training, in employment, in aid from public administrations, and in maintaining social or mutual support relationships.

For entire families, during confinement, the only Internet access they had was father's or mother's mobile phone, so that receiving classes online was impossible for the children. In

employment, many could not go out to look for work, as they did not have the necessary skills to do so through Internet platforms. If many jobs were poorly prepared for teleworking, those usually done by people in social exclusion were even less prepared.

The same happened with access to social protection: all public administration processes were digitized, but part of the population lacks the necessary knowledge and resources to access web pages. The digital world mechanics are not familiar to everyone; the widespread language in electronic applications is unknown for some people. Hence, for example, entire families lost the possibility of requesting the newly publicized "minimum vital income" and other social benefits, due to lack of Internet access and lack of knowledge and information.

In addition to employment, training, and State administration processes, the technological blackout has also affected emotional health of people in social exclusion. During the confinement period in Spain, the only way to maintain contact with the outside was through electronic devices connected to the Internet, so all those who lacked the devices or the knowledge to use them found themselves totally isolated.

Digital emergency

Although the digital world tools can be used for harmful purposes, nowadays they represent a basic need for social immersion in any country, be it for poor populations to enter economic modernity, or for people in our immediate environment to avoid growing marginalization. Reducing the "digital divide" is essential to fight against poverty; Internet connection appears as a necessary first element, the same as roads opened the possibility of trade. Immersion in the digital world should be recognized within human rights or as a Sustainable Development Goal, starting with connectivity, since without this, no individual or family can achieve true social immersion, leaving them in exclusion.

This enhancement must be done in a coordinated way and accompanied by training and organizing digital literacy campaigns. Training without devices or devices without training are steps in the wrong directions. It is necessary to bet on a correct appropriation since there is no direct relationship between connectivity and social development. The deficit is in the use of technology: it is an educational problem, as well as a technical and economic problem.

Access to the digital world must be understood as an emergency, just like the climate one, since digitization extends to all social dimensions. Otherwise, we would enter the generational transmission of poverty and the "culture of poverty". Fighting for the digital emergency becomes an indispensable requirement, but this is inseparable from the educational task in the broad sense.

We are in the middle of the transition to the digital world. This represents a profound change that can affect the roots of society. Hence, the digital emergency must appear on the public policy agenda as a main priority.

Attendees:

1. **Alex Rayón Jeréz**, Vice-Rector for International Relations and Digital Transformation, Universidad de Deusto

2. **Alfonso Carcasona**, CEO, AC Camerfirma

3. **Alfredo Marcos Martínez**, Professor of Philosophy of Science, Universidad de Valladolid

4. **Ángel González Ferrer**, Executive Director, Digital Pontifical Council for Culture

5. **Carolina Villegas**, Researcher, Iberdrola Financial and Business Ethics Chair, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas

6. **David Roch Dupré**, Professor, Universidad Pontificia Comillas

7. **Diego Bodas Sagi**, Lead Data Scientist – Advanced Analytics, Mapfre España

8. **Domingo Sugranyes**, Director, Seminario de Huella Digital

9. **Esther de la Torre**, Responsible Digital Banking Manager, BBVA

10. **Francisco Javier López Martín**, Former Secretary-General, CCOO Madrid

11. **Gloria Sánchez Soriano**, Transformation Director, Legal Department, Banco Santander

12. **Guillermo Monroy Pérez**, Professor, Instituto de Estudios Bursátiles

13. **Idoia Salazar**, AI ethics expert, Universidad CEU San Pablo

14. **Idoya Zorroza**, Contracted Professor Doctor, Faculty of Philosophy, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca

15. **Ignacio Quintanilla Navarro**, Philosopher, Educator, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

16. **Javier Camacho Ibáñez**, Director of Ethical Sustainability and professor at ICADE and ICAI

17. **Jesús Avezuela**, General Director of the Pablo VI Foundation

18. **Jesús Sánchez Camacho**, Professor, Faculty of Theology, Universidad Pontificia Comillas

19. **José Luis Calvo**, AI Director. SNGULAR

20. **José Luis Fernández Fernández,** Director of the Iberdrola Chair of Economic and Business Ethics ICADE

21. **José Manuel González-Páramo**, Executive Director, BBVA

22. **José Ramón Amor,** Coordinator, Bioethics Observatory of the Pablo VI Foundation

23. **Juan Benavides**, Professor of Communications**,** Universidad Complutense de Madrid

24. **Julio Martínez s.j.**, Dean, Universidad Pontificia Comillas

25. **Raúl Flores Martos,** Study Team Coordinator. Communication Area. Cáritas Española

26. **Raúl González Fabre**, Professor, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas