

Editorial

Everybody who is concerned about the fate of mankind and the conservation of human culture should equally well be concerned about gaps. Gaps between the rich and the poor, North and South, those who know and those who don't, those with and those without handicaps, ideals and reality.

Information, knowledge are now synonymous with power, health and wealth. Sometimes, in this era of information consciousness, this is presented as a new truth; however, it is not new: Francis Bacon (1561–1626) has written: “Knowledge itself is power”.

In our daily profession we are constantly striving for expansion of our knowledge, expansion of our information infrastructure, intensification of communication to learn even more. Of course, that attitude in itself is not immoral: we are just occupied in expanding mankind's grasp on life itself. Nevertheless, that attitude will inevitably lead to a widening of the gap between ourselves and other people—people like you and me—who live their lives only to get some food.

That gap is widening, indeed: in applying modern technology, like online information systems, we will become information-richer, and they information-poorer. It is one of my strongest convictions that the gap has to be bridged, not only for the survival of the poor, but also for the survival of the rich.

That is the reason why I am proud of this issue of our journal. It shows that some people have made an attempt to begin to bridge the gap. That is one of the attainments of modern society: we have erected organizations which, with all the bureaucracy which may pertain, aim at bringing people and nations together. Sometimes that seems to be a hopeless ideal, at other times there is a shining of light. For me, this issue of ISU is an example of hope.

The report which we publish is the result of a United Nations committee which studied the perspectives for the global online information market. Some of the finest people—and pioneers—in the online field have contributed to it, people like Carlos Cuadra and Mary Berger. Of course, you can, as technologists, disagree with details in the report. But its message is different from that: we all have to think about our potential to bridge gaps—ultimately, that will safeguard the survival of all of us!

Cor van de Weteringh