INTRODUCTION

The global community is confronted with a number of challenges, mapped out below, leading to a bifurcation stage (Hofkirchner & Maier-Rabler, 2004), which offers the opportunity of a rare new window of decision making. The challenges referred to apply concurrently to the following areas of; (a) climate change (b) demographic change (c) the increasing urbanisation of society and (d) ‘food security’.

Robert Frost wrote the following lines in 1920 which can be seen as an allegory for the bifurcation challenges facing societal development and which demand discerned choice, not only by governments, but also by individuals.

ABSTRACT

This chapter maps out various ‘bifurcation challenges’ to societal development, such as, (a) climate change (b) demographic change (c) the increasing urbanisation of society and (d) ‘food security.’ The research encapsulates a basic Human Rights approach to foster the acquirement of the necessary ‘capabilities’ to make informed discriminate choices, with regard to one’s personal development and to one’s community of reference. It further offers a concept of Civil Society of committed individuals, facilitating the discovery of new aspects of their identity, through their commitment to societal development. The three main concepts, in this chapter: 1. The ‘Community Informatics’ Concept, 2. The ‘Civil Society’ Concept and 3. The ‘Capabilities’ Concept, could, with the aid of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), converge, to cope with the current discernable bifurcation challenges to societal development.
Two roads diverged in a wood and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference

(Robert Frost, 1920)

It will be argued that convergence of endeavors will be necessary, in the sense conceived by Bradley (2006, 53); ‘Convergence means a move towards a common point’, to cope with the outlined bifurcational challenges, and that when such convergence occurs, it is further conceivable that the process of societal development will be more comprehensively fostered.

‘BIFURCATION CHALLENGES’

Climate Change

While the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009 did not reach binding protocols to replace those of Kyoto, a consensus is building world-wide as to the need for bifurcational choice, with regard to climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, (United Nations, 2007 p.2) stated; “Eleven of the last twelve years (1995-2006) rank among the twelve warmest years in the instrumental record of global surface temperature (since 1850).” While dissenting voices exist, the consensus would seem to be that climate change is indeed unequivocal and decisive decisions are inevitable.

The Report of the Global Humanitarian Forum 2009, (11), states that; “Science is now unequivocal as to the reality of climate change. Human activities, in particular emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide are recognized as its principle cause.” The report goes on to point out (14) that; “Solutions do also exist for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, some even with multiple benefits. For instance, black carbon from soot, released by staple energy sources in poor communities, is likely causing as much as 18 percent of warming.

The provision of affordable alternative cooking stoves to the poor can, therefore, have both positive health results, since smoke is eliminated and an immediate impact on reducing emissions, since soot only remains in the atmosphere for a few weeks.”

The United Nations Environment Program maintains that; “The changing climate is pushing many Earth systems towards critical thresholds that will alter regional and global environmental balances and threaten stability at multiple scales. Alarmingly, we may have already passed tipping points that are irreversible within the time span of our current civilization.” (UNEP Report 2009, p.21)

Demographic Change

Demographic change refers to the three areas of; (a) the aging of society (b) the decline in the birth rate and (c) migration. The aging of society is attracting increased attention and research. Aging is in effect a positive result of e.g. advances in both medical and economic fields. However relatively little attention is being give to the fact of the increasing cost of medical care for the elderly. ‘The Global Burden of Disease and Risk Factors’ study, carried out by the World Health Organisation of the United Nations and published by the World Bank (2006), forecasts that disabilities caused by increases in age and related chronic disease will soon be greater than those from accidents, as well as infectious and childhood diseases, and hence increase the demand for more health care considerations for the ageing. The U.S. National Institute on Aging, of the United States government, issued: “Why Population Aging Matters: A Global Perspective” in 2007, which highlights the fact that the impact of population aging has yet to be fully understood and preparing financially for longer living and seeking ways to reduce aging related disability should become national and global priorities. (cf. Crowley, 2010, 30)