

# Next Generation of Regional Inequality: Digital Divide

*Yeni Nesil Bölgesel Eşitsizlik: Sayısal Uçurum*

**Ayşegül ÖZBAKIR**

With the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in recent years, a significant gap has emerged between regions and countries in terms of accessibility and the use of such technologies. In particular, the increasing use of smart devices enables us to connect to the internet anywhere at any time. Nevertheless not all sectors of society are capable of absorbing the benefits of ICT use. Hence the subject of unequal access to and use of information technologies, the so-called “digital divide,” has started to attract attention since the late 90s both in Turkey and the world in academic, private and public sectors. Before that time, more general concepts such as information inequality, information gap or knowledge gap and computer or media literacy were used. During the last few decades many countries have attempted to define strategical tools and policies to reduce the digital gap between nations, regions and cities. The United Nations (UN) has organized the “Millenium 2000 Summit” where action against the divide was discussed. Similarly, the Okanawa Summit of G8 Countries in 2000 emphasized that “the gap between rich-knowledge and poor-knowledge societies is also a major determinant of achievements in economic welfare, education, health, and literacy levels. Furthermore, it is also mentioned that the digital gap causes

long-lasting effects and differences among nations.

Among many strategies and action plans proposed to decrease the digital divide, the Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) introduced by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of the United Nations has been frequently used. Although this index is among major techniques that measures the divide, it is also argued that the parameters used to construct the index are the same for all countries. However, most of the recent research indicates that one size does not fit all due to the geographic, social, economical and cultural differences among countries. For this reason, when ranked according to the results of this index, countries or regions might reveal misleading performance results.

Preliminary digital divide research that started around the late 90’s in Turkey has led to the equivalency of media or technology access with physical access. Paralell with the world’s awareness on the subject of “digital inequalities”, the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) of Turkey was founded in 2000 and released its first strategic plan to decrease the digital divide in the country. Currently, the majority of this research still focuses on physical access. However, since the year 2002, an increasing number of researchers suggest going ‘beyond access’,

Department of City of Regional Planning, Yıldız Technical University,  
Faculty of Architecture, İstanbul, Turkey

Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Mimarlık Fakültesi, Şehir ve Bölge Planlama Bölümü,  
İstanbul

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İletişim (Correspondence): Dr. Ayşegül ÖZBAKIR. e-posta (e-mail): aozbakir@yildiz.edu.tr

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to reframe the overly technical concept of the digital divide and to pay more attention to economic, social, psychological and cultural backgrounds. It can be observed that analyses covering geographical location, socio-economic status and local regulations have been incomplete regarding the digital divide concept that is rapidly increasing and covering new dynamics parallel to changing technologies.

At this point, the main question is: how will this new generation of “divide” that increases so rapidly among regions and countries effect planning? What will the new position of the cities and regions that are still under the transition process from industrial to service sector in this global phenomenon be? As planners, how and with which tools will we direct these changes in a positive way? Before answering these questions, not only the dimension of “physical access” but also “social” and “cultural” dimensions of the divide, should be well analyzed.

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