

ABSTRACT

Bridging the “Digital Divide”? Prospects for Caribbean Development in the New Techno-Economic Paradigm

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Information communications technologies (ICTs) are generally viewed as one of the contemporary strategies to redress developmental problems. The thesis assesses the value of such claims by analyzing the structure and workings of the global political economy (GPE) and its impact on, and prospects for developing countries in the current techno-economic context. The thesis uses a case study of the Caribbean to illustrate the challenges and opportunities faced by small-island developing states (SIDS). Hence, the dissertation addresses the central problem of the digital divide and whether emerging ICTs offer any real economic opportunities for the Caribbean region. The research question is, **do ICTs represent the new locomotive for peripheral development, or are they likely to widen the gap between rich and poor countries?**

The digital divide debate is situated within the historical techno-economic development discourse. Technological development is itself a product of, and determined by a wider politico-economic context, hence the thesis investigates how these politico-economic arrangements inform the structure of the international division of labor (IDL). It operationalizes a World-Systems approach (WSA) in examining the nodes in which the new economy is being established. The fundamental challenge for developing countries, like those of the Caribbean is to overcome the underlying historical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors that confine them to a peripheral role in the IDL.

The thesis challenges the optimistic postulations about the socio-economic benefits of harnessing ICTs by focusing on the structural causes of underdevelopment in the world-system. The findings of the thesis are that the new techno-economic paradigm has not altered the dialectical relationship between core and peripheral countries. Moreover, despite the promises of an emerging new economy the structural conditions of the IDL remain. Thus, the problem of the digital divide cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional concern about access to the artifacts of ICTs.

Keywords: Gale T C Rigobert; World-Systems approach; Digital divide; Techno-economic paradigm; Caribbean; Development