TOWARDS AN EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING NETWORKS

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED RESOURCES

Compiled By Leslie Regan Shade
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The following annotated bibliography is a compilation of selected resources that examine the following broad areas: articles about Public Policy and Programs related to digital divide initiatives; evaluations of community networking and telecentres; issues and definitional stances surrounding the digital divide; various studies on design & usability of networked services; and studies which measure the impact of community networking and Internet initiatives on social capital.
PUBLIC POLICY AND PROGRAMS


Analysis of a variety of community technology projects in Scandinavia (Denmark and Sweden) and the U.K. (community telecottages and electronic village halls) through a comparative critical evaluation of community ICT initiatives and a critical analysis of information society policies. Day builds upon community informatics theory to develop an alternative, inclusive, and participatory approach to community ICT practice. He also develops criteria for a democratic design framework (democratic community, democratic politics, democratic work, securing democratic sustainability, perpetuating participatory democracy in the local technological order). Day concludes with the following policy recommendations (p. 321-23):

“Encourage the development of free virtual spaces where citizens and community groups can assemble and communicate informally and formally. This recommendation is based on the recognition that despite the importance of the community services approach, community development and action are equally valid components of community practice. The provision of free virtual spaces will support and promote the communication processes crucial to supporting such community organisation and assembly.

Promote the production of relevant local content and the opportunities to develop the skills to generate local content. The intention here is that through capacity building activities, the potential range of ICT functions and applications can be fully explored and exploited by community groups and citizens in a liberating and democratic way.

Provide non-threatening, community managed public centres where citizens and groups can access ICTs and interact to develop human networks. This is essential if initiatives are to promote a socially inclusive ethos and encourage the fullest participation.

Recognise the importance of, and reward properly, intermediaries and skilled community practitioners. Initiatives cannot be sustained with high levels of staff turnover. Without adequate recognition and remuneration, these jobs, whilst rewarding are often too demanding.

Encourage the sharing of experiences, knowledge and expertise to promote social cohesion. As communities are social constructs of enormous social diversity, developing an understanding of different cultures and value systems is important both within and between communities. Communications plays a significant role in facilitating social cohesion.

Involve existing community and voluntary sector groups in planning and policy development and meaningful dialogue. This is another recommendation based on the recognition that social inclusivity and participation are crucial to ensuring the needs of communities are identified and addressed.

Mix bottom-up with top-down approaches to ensure a balanced range of community practice activities and approaches.
Encourage the utilisation of partnership resources to fully support initiatives in combating social exclusion and meeting community needs. Many partnerships need to undergo a cultural transformation. They must evolve from talking-shops that offer some degree of financial support to active partnerships that contribute to and are involved in the community.

Promote the use of community processes not ready-made solutions. This again relates to partnerships and should be taken to mean that solutions to community problems can often be found by supporting existing community processes and mechanisms. It is not always necessary, or appropriate to develop, or worse still, impose, new solutions.

Recognise and encourage diversity through the promotion of a diverse range of good practice, rather than best practice, to meet community need. No one community is the same. Similarly, no one community ICT initiative is the same. Differences, as well as commonalities need to be recognised in the development of community policy. There can be no such thing as best practice is community”.


Calls on EU member states to facilitate and provide online content and services affordably to all, particularly those with disabilities and other special need, as well as digital literacy programs and gender mainstreaming.


Examination of the UK government’s ICT-based social policies (UK Online) through analysis of documentation, policy statements, and political discourse. Selwyn points out how the focus of recent social policy has been a debate about whether or not ICTs can increase or decrease social exclusion. UK policy is, Selwyn contends, weak in conceptualizing access, as it does not consider a capabilities approach. His fear is that such policy “will only redefine a ‘digital divide’ rather than overcoming it” (p. 11). Also, policymaking places an emphasis on “the role of technology access as a means of increasing social inclusion and as a means of increasing economic competitiveness” (p.13). The latter focus Selwyn illustrates by describing policy on education and training. Selwyn concludes that ICT policy is weak because the overarching social and political elements of ‘social exclusion’ are “very much sidelined or ignored altogether in the ICT drive, as in the New Labour exclusion project as a whole” (p.17).

Provides a set of measurements for the state of information technology in and how it impacts the social, economic, and cultural health of Seattle. Five goals of a technology healthy city include: enhancement of local economy; application to solve social issues; use to foster civic participation; promote relationship building and community development; support the sustainability of our quality of life; and access to technology tools is equitable and affordable. Measures were longitudinal in nature, encompassing a collection of various city surveys and consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders.
EVALUATIONS


Collection of a variety of resources which examine the sustainability and effectiveness of community telecenters in developing countries, particularly in rural communities.


Reports on a model to analyze the relationship between ICT and development created by the WSU (Washington State University) Center to Bridge the Digital Divide. The circular model highlights the role of three major stakeholders: community members, ICT Investment (those public and private groups that finance the infrastructure) and Public Policy (formulators of public policy that enable and regulate the builders and providers of ICT infrastructure).


Proceedings of a workshop sponsored by IDRC on effective strategies for telecentre evaluation. In the final summary of the workshop, participants were asked to come up with basic principles to ensure that telecentre evaluation is useful, financially responsible, builds local capacity, and enables shared learning. Emphasized was the need to build evaluation into the initial project design; a people-focused, participatory evaluation design sensitive to gender and the local context; use of local expertise for evaluation; an open, public, and transparent process; analysis of both successes and failures; design of evaluation process to ensure sustainability and quality; use of adaptable and replicable designs; and dissemination of results.


Panelists assess their experiences with telecenters in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa. They assess the potential of telecenters as a means of enhancing women’s access to and use of ICT. Particular issues investigated include an assessment of business models used by telecenters; how women’s participation can be targeted for use of the telecenter for public and political participation; gender disaggregated data on the frequency of use of community telecenters in Africa.

Harris’ framework for evaluating telecentres looks at both input and output measures. Input measures look at the activities that the Telecentre is engaged in, such as resources, accommodation, equipment, people employed, services (both technical and human), and institutional support. Output measures relate to the telecentres’ relationship with the community it serves, both primary and secondary effects. These include community-based indicators, socio-econometrics, and personal stories.


Based on experiences with the APC WomensNet in South Africa, Holmes et. al contend that effective and viable telecentres must incorporate the needs of women. A gender-based approach to evaluation would allow for questions to be asked concerning design, development, and management of the telecentre. For instance, policy processes need to be interrogated (were women involved in decision-making?), and questions need to be asked about the selection, ownership, and management of telecentres. For instance, “are telecentre owners women or women’s organisations? Where communities own telecentres, are women's organisations involved? Where telecentres run as individual businesses are the individuals who are provided with equipment men or women? Is the experience of women owners of telecentre/businesses in rural areas empowering for them or is it simply a means of survival? Are business models mission-driven or not?“ Training is an important objective for telecentres. Questions thus need to be asked concerning “How many of the people trained are women? Who is in charge and who makes the operational and content decisions? What training processes are employed? What are the objectives of training? Is training the same, no matter what the mission of a particular telecentre may be or is it dovetailed to incorporate different kinds of service provision? Does training take into account the learning needs of women? Who determines the content? Are trainers of women, men? Are women trained in mixed groups or with other women? Do managers manage in isolation or in consultation with a reference or support group from the community?” Are services offered meeting the actual needs of women? If not, how can these be built into existing telecentre services? Are women information creators as well? How can their needs and their local knowledge be facilitated and distributed via the telecentre? Recommended evaluation methodology includes interviews, focus groups, onsite visits and observation, analysis of training materials, and quantitative analysis of the role of men to women in training, management, and use.

Hudson discusses two forms of evaluation: formative (feedback on project in progress) and summative (final post-mortem). Formative evaluation provides a mechanism for comment on process and feedback with respect to facilities, staff, users and usage trends, and applications. Summative evaluations analyse the impact of telecentres on the community, target groups (diverse community members, youth, women, NGOs etc), and impact on communication policies (national or international). Hudson emphasizes understanding the socio-economic context of the telecentre under evaluation; specifics look at the cultural context (who uses the centre? what languages are spoken? what are the gendered dynamics?), education (what is the literacy level of users, are local schools or universities involved?), communities of interest (where do people seek out information?), the economic context (what is the basis of the local economy? what skills do people need to participate in the workforce? do they need specific computer skills), the telecommunications context (local resources and costs), and telecommunications policy (current and future context). Research design includes creating indicators and usage data, assessing content (what is available and what is desired?), identifying users and beneficiaries, and assessing the sustainability of the project (analysis of costs and revenues, facilities, and staff).


Examines best practices and lesson learned from community-based ICT programs across Canada, with an emphasis on performance measurement and sustainability. The report concludes: “...most community based networks manage projects with a focus on lower level project outputs and outcomes in terms of service provision, and do not manage with a focus on higher level social and economic development results. Most of the organizations contacted track network use, membership data, and event- and project-specific outcomes. They recognize the value of this data to demonstrate their relevance to funding agencies and clients/members. There are few examples of client/member involvement in developing performance measurement approaches or defining the indicators that will be measured”. See also Developing Performance Measurement and Sustainability Plans: Best Practices and Lessons Learned, 2003, URL: http://smartcommunities.ic.gc.ca/pm/pm_e.asp


Three generations of community networking (1970s/Community Memory, 1980s/Free-Nets and 1990s/Boulder Community Network) are identified and differentiated in terms of technology, applications, organizations and key actors. The authors ask whether the original political goals of community networks are still applicable for current community nets. The future of community networks is offered (will the new fourth generation of commercialization merely be a conduit for commercial content, how can new community nets develop new features for sustainability?) Kubicek and Wagner consider three new
generational models: merger and cooperation with commercial systems, specialization, and computer-supported cooperative work. A brief overview of European community nets is also provided (notably, Amsterdam’s Digital Stadt).


This research was funded by Industry Canada, the International Telecommunications Union, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and conducted by a team from Cornell University. The team focused on rural CAP programs, and made site visits to 46 CAPs, as well as interviewing personnel in the CAP and IC administrations. Interview questions focused on: general information about the CAP site (location and equipment, service and operation, users and logs, interview with customers); staff interviews (origin, ownership, and management, composition, services offered, users and usage stats, finances, quality of services, impact, marketing, other local competition, problems and faults, links to the community). The researchers conclude that CAP is a very successful and popular program that is “fulfilling a national goal” but that “most CAP sites believe they are not maximizing their potential, often in the areas of community participation, services provided, and marketing. There is great variety among sites in eastern Canada on issues such as training, sustainability, and community participation.”


Provides a model for exploring the success of community informatics projects: The Autonomy/Harmony Model. Autonomy is defined as the degree to which a CI project is resourced or managed by the community - it revolves around the continuum of resources and management. Low autonomy = project is resourced and managed by individuals or organizations outside of the community; medium autonomy = project resources and managed by individuals or organizations outside of the community (for instance, government entities) but managed by members within the community; high autonomy = the project is both resourced and managed by members of the community.


Silver provides institutional histories of two community nets – the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) and the Seattle Community Network (SCN). Both differed in their origins -
BEV was built from the top-down with the help of Virginia Tech and Bell Atlantic, whereas SCN was bottom-up, from its CPSR-Seattle origins.


This research examined public computing sites in Toledo, Ohio, in order to analyze their social environment and how social processes are influencing the informatization of society and ameliorating (or not) the digital divide. The paper first provides an overview of literature that looks at the informatization of US society - (how are people using ICTs, what has been the impact of government policy on public computing, what has been the contribution of community technology centres, and what trends provide leading models for change?) The authors created the D6 method for research analysis: definition of the problem, data collection, digitization, discovery, design, and dissemination. Surveys, key informant interviews, and statistical analysis were utilized. The researchers found that many public computing sites are not readily or easily identifiable; however, they identified 253 sites and coded them as community, government, commercial, and university sites.
DIGITAL DIVIDE


Birdsall claims that the current liberal public philosophy in North America prohibits the adoption of socially responsible policy that will curb the digital divide in Canada. Despite a strong history of communications technologies and policies in Canada serving the needs of Canadian culture and identity, the concept of universalism has faded as Canada has aligned itself with the American free-market ideology.


Bishop argues that community networking initiatives are needed to address the increasing gap between those who have access to the Internet and those that don’t because of socio-economic inequities.


What is the role of social context in the implementation of information technology? Using the concept of social capital, this paper focuses “on the role that norms of cooperation and civic and political culture play in addressing disparities in access to information technology”. The authors contend that it is the civic culture of a community that determines the nature of IT – whether it is seen as a public good (with collective action taken to assure access for citizens) or as a private good (best provided by the free market). A longitudinal study of two rural Minnesota communities (using survey results, focus groups, and historical contextual analysis) shows how the communities have adopted different approaches to IT implementation. These different strategies, the authors suggest, have different consequences for equality of access.


Hargittai looks at the differences between people’s online skills through a study wherein individuals were asked to find various information online, including information on local cultural events, music, tax forms, children’s art, and election information. She concludes that “Policy decisions that aim to reduce inequalities in access to and use of information technologies must take into consideration the necessary investment in training and support as well. Like education in general, it is not enough to give people a book, we also have to
teach them how to read in order to make it useful. Similarly, it is not enough to wire all communities and declare that everyone now has equal access to the Internet. People may have technical access, but they may still continue to lack effective access in that they may not know how to extract information for their needs from the Web. Although providing Internet access may help alleviate some problems of the digital divide, information presented in this paper demonstrates that a second-level digital divide exists relative to specific abilities to effectively use the medium”.


Investigation of the formation of skills in the new media industry, looking particularly at the articulation of web design skill. The author concludes that the web design skill-set: “emerged as a fluid, rather than narrow and technically defined, set of competencies; thrived in a tension between art (design) and code (development); utilized web technology itself to create professional institutions; and required constant skill maintenance and upgrading”.


A survey of university undergraduates (African American and European American) who have similar access to the Internet was conducted to examine motivational, affective, and cognitive factors influencing Internet use. Racial differences in Internet use were obtained, but limited to e-mail use. The authors develop a model of Internet use that considers motivational, affective, and cognitive antecedents and consequences of use.


Provides examples of how low-cost computing can assist developing countries in becoming computer literate.


From a U.S. perspective, Light critically examines how the term ‘digital divide’ has been constructed as a public problem by various stakeholders (or as she calls them “claims makers”). She contrasts the current discourse with the discourse in the 1960s and 1970s about the role of cable television as an educational and community tool, when communications policy aligned itself with urban social policy. Rather than narrowly defining the digital divide in technical terms, Light urges academics and practitioners to ask more pointed questions about the role technology can play in solving social inequalities. However, citing the trajectory of cable TV as more of an entertainment, rather than educational force,
she advises educators to be proactive in constructing educational policies and practices that are “attentive to the complex and often contradictory consequences of technological innovations” (p. 71).


Combining empirical, theoretical, and policy critiques, Norris is particularly concerned with how and if the Internet is being utilized to increase and enhance civic engagement for citizens and civil society groups worldwide. Towards this end, her book is divided into three sections: the first examines the evidence of the digital divide internationally and provides a conceptual framework to examine the digital divide through an Internet Engagement Model; the second section examines the virtual political system, wherein governments and civil society groups are utilizing the Internet for democratic ends; while the third section explores whether or not Internet engagement creates a new cultural and political environment which facilitates more equitable and democratic decision-making. Norris describes several dimensions to the digital divide: the social divide (the gap between the ‘information rich’ and the ‘information poor’ in nations); the global divide (the gap between industrialized and developing countries); and the democratic divide (those who use the Internet for civic participation versus those that are passive consumers of Internet resources). According to her, “the chief concern about the digital divide is that the underclass of info-poor may become further marginalized in societies where basic computer skills are becoming essential for economic success and personal advancement, entry to good career and educational opportunities, full access to social networks, and opportunities for civic engagement” (p. 68).


Pigg applies community informatic perspectives to looking at how U.S. community networks are trying to achieve their goals.


Critical overview of the Connecting Canadians agenda, with a specific focus on the Community Access Program (CAP) and the Community Learning Networks (CLN) programs. Rideout emphasizes that urgent questions need to be asked regarding the sustainability of these networks, and suggests more research and analysis to evaluate the costs and benefits of public access to the Internet. Such a research agenda needs to consider the social, political, and economic relations of communities and regions, as well as identifying the specific digital divide needs of the various communities.

Analyzing household penetration by detailed income level, this report, using data from Statistics Canada, concludes that socio-economics still determines the extent of the digital divide.


Examines how the U.K. Women Connect project has met the needs of women’s organizations, and conceptualizes it as a ‘learning community’ which is dialogic and playful. The authors also look at community-sector processes of innovation and change agency, arguing that the current outcome-driven model for funding for voluntary sector organizations inhibits the development of learning communities.


Results of a qualitative and online survey to ascertain whether and how seniors are using the Internet, with a particular emphasis on their training experiences. The report identified six primary barriers: economic, education and literacy, program development, human resource and organizational, psychological and social, and disabilities.


Servon examines the nature of the digital divide, looking at it in terms of not just technological gaps, but social gaps. Using case studies from the U.S., she looks at the community technology movement and specific community technology centres (CTCs), with a wider discussion of specific public policy interventions in the U.S. (federal, municipal, community and private). Specific chapters look at addressing the needs of youth, disadvantaged workers, and the integration of community-based organizations (CBOs). The City of Seattle is presented as an exemplary case study of technology meeting the needs of a diverse citizenry.


Describes how Community Technology Centers (CTCs) are addressing the economic and social impacts of the “information society”. The authors develop a typology of CTCs by organizational type and programmatic goal.

A collection of articles that examine how to create equitable learning environments using the Internet within K-12 educational spaces in the US. The authors look at the policy challenges of ICT projects, the increasing multiculturalism and multi-linguism of schools, support for students with physical and learning disabilities, multiple literacies and digital literacy, and the organizational challenges of integrating ICTs into the curriculum.


Warschauer argues that we need a more critical conceptualization of the digital divide that encompasses a look at the use of technology for social inclusion. This concept refers to the extent to which families and communities can participate in society in an autonomous fashion. Access to economic resources, health, education, housing, culture, and civic engagement are all elements here. Literacy is a key element. Effective use of ICTs involves a model that accounts for physical resources (telecommunications and computers), digital resources (relevant content in diverse languages), human resources (literacy and education), and social resources (community and institutional support). Social inclusion today is the ability to access, adapt, and create new knowledge using ICTs. Along with a critical overview of the digital divide literature, Warschauer provides his own empirical evidence from site visits to community access sites in California, Hawaii, Egypt, India, and Latin America.
DESIGN and USABILITY

Christina Wodtke’s blogs on User Centred Design and Usability
http://www.eleganthack.com/archives/cat_user_centered_design.html

Ethnographic usability methods:
http://www.newarchitectsmag.com/archives/2001/02/ellis/


Bruckman looks at the ongoing design elements of MOOSE Crossing, a text-bases virtual community (a MUD) for children. MOOSE Crossing applied constructionist learning theory to the design of an online learning community.


Examines the development and design of VIOLET, a website for abused women and their service providers. Its aim is to provide legal information and an online community of support for the sharing of experiences and services. Access barriers and the design of information resources and learning environments for abused women are described via an account of the formative evaluation of the project’s website.


Useful overview of issues and trends in participatory design research.


Kling asks whether new developments in Internet technologies will be able to adequately support the needs of ‘everyday’ citizens. He advocates that designers and policymakers consider seriously the notion of ‘social access’: “the ability of diverse organizations and people from many walks of life to actually use these services” (p.58). Understanding the ways that social access is supported by people at home and in community center is a rich research area that needs to be explored.

Reports on a participatory design project with the PoliTeam project, which introduced groupware into the German government. Techniques to analyze the users’ needs included user-advocacy and osmosis, which were integrated into system development.


Based on their own experiences designing and developing networked communities, the authors describe network communities and a description of their common capabilities, or affordances, and design implications for the sustenance of networked communities. Affordances of networked communities include persistence, periodicity, boundaries, engagement, and authoring. Community development depends upon building up technosocial elements, including the community’s history and change, the ability to constantly learn, and to retain and recruit members.


Introduction to special issue of *CSCW* on invisible work – work that is done in invisible places (example used is that of reference librarians), work defined as routine or manual (example used is that of telephone operators) work done by invisible people (example used is that of domestics), and informal work processes that, although not in formal job descriptions, are necessary for healthy and productive workplaces.


The researchers examine the social and technical design circle through an evaluation of Pueblo, a school-centred community network based on a MOO. They emphasize the importance of looking at social and technical elements together and the “circle of co-evolution of social and technical elements” (p. 316) as well as designers becoming “insiders to the settings of technology use” (p. 317).

This study assessed whether the Internet could be an effective tool to educate women with disabilities about reproductive health. Using a time-series design, participants were tested before and after they toured a reproductive health website. The study found that the website was effective in increasing the participants' knowledge of reproductive health (“statistically significant 10.00% increase in post-test scores over pre-test scores and by the women’s positive feedback”).


Preece’s definition of online community includes aspects of sociability (mechanisms that encourage social interaction) and usability (mechanisms that focus on human-computer interaction). Aspects of sociability can include policies for membership, codes of conduct, security, privacy, copyright, free speech, use of moderators). Design usability can include navigation, interaction dialog, registration forms, feedback, user representation, message format, archives, support tools. Provides guidelines for sociability and usability as well as techniques for assessing community needs and evaluating usability and sociability.


A textbook for those studying human-computer interaction, interaction design, and web design. Specific chapters examine the nature of interaction design, how to conceptualize interaction, user cognition, designing for collaboration and communication, identifying user needs and requirements, design and prototyping, user-centered approaches to interaction design, evaluation and evaluative frameworks, studying and testing users.

Edited collection of articles examining learning and cognitive changes fostered by virtual communities. Many of the examples provided are those communities to support educational environments (K-12 and university). Several overviews conceptualizing virtual communities are given, including the role of social network theory (Haythornthwaite), analysis of communities of practice, and creating tools for knowledge-building communities.


Schneiderman discusses his tenets of universal usability, whose goals are to enable all citizens to succeed in using ICTs to support their various tasks. Usability challenges include technology variety, user diversity, and gaps in user knowledge. His fundamental idea is that human needs should guide technology development. Schneiderman discusses web-based applications for education, business, healthcare, and government, providing examples of both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ usability design.


Overview of theoretical approaches towards visible and invisible work, with a close look at work done by invisible workers – domestics. The authors suggest several design criteria for CSCW researchers.
SOCIAL CAPITAL

Lynn Schofield Clark. Challenges of social good in the world of Grand Theft Auto and Barbie: a case study of a community computer center for youth. *New Media & Society* v5 (1) (March 2003). URL: [http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals/details/issue/abstract/ab030909.html](http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals/details/issue/abstract/ab030909.html)

Case study of a community technology center located in a low-income neighborhood in a high-tech city. Through participant observation and interviews, Clark determined that its actual use was not consistent with that envisioned by its supporters and policymakers. Given this, and the notion that CTC’s should serve a social role, the author raises questions and suggests policy implications of at-risk CTCs, such as “how those centers may be funded, and how the relationship of computers and the social good must be reconceptualized to better address the issues of the digital divide that extend beyond the technological realm”.


Conducted at the University of Salford as part of an ESCR funded project on ‘Democracy and Participation’, the study surveyed adults to ascertain the potential of the Internet to mobilize UK citizens. The researchers found out that although those that tended to participate in online politics were from a higher socioeconomic class, the Internet was also reaching previously politically disengaged groups, particularly lower socioeconomic youth aged 15-24 years.

The Syntopia Project, based at Rutgers University, has been conducting national random telephone surveys since 1994 tracking social and community aspects of Internet use, comparing users and non-users, identifying and analyzing Internet drop-outs, and identifying and analyzing those still unaware of the Internet. Although heavily reliant on quantitative survey data, analysis also draws on case histories and ethnographic observations. The summary of basic issues and survey results include the following:

Access: Digital divides are centered along income and age; however, a second digital divide – awareness – exists. Barriers to Internet use include cost, access, and complexity. The digital divide is not along gender or race lines, but rather income and education.

Civic and community involvement: Internet users are even more involved in social and political activities than their non-Internet counterparts. In many instances the Internet has helped expand community networks and thus created more social capital.

Social interaction and expression: Online users engage in friendship creation and online sociability, and Internet users are no less sociable than non-users.

Access, involvement, interaction and social capital: The Internet contributes to social capital, supplements rather than supplants other forms of communication, and makes it easier to participate in traditional forms of social capital. The Internet builds new forms of social capital including “new relationships, access to and cocreation of practical information and theoretical understandings, and networks of friendship, purposive community, and political organizations. The social support that can be obtained in turn yields richer ways to link with those who share interests and to benefit from the knowledge and networks created by users” (p. 330). However, the Internet has not yet transformed politics or the nature of government.


Using the example of the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) (www.bev.net), this article considers whether community networking extends benefits beyond access, such as quality-of-life impacts, to communities. Data was compiled from a 1999 telephone survey that asked questions concerning Internet use, community attachment, and community involvement. The latter was measured using the Rothenbuhler Community Involvement Scale. The researchers hypothesized that “as the number of community computer network users increases” one would see both a “greater…community involvement and attachment within the community” and a “greater…use of the network to build social capital by communicating with other community members”. However, analysis of the survey concluded evidence for only one claim – that the longer people have been connected to the Internet, the more likely they are to use it for developing and building networks of social capital. Further debate is given over to Putnam’s claims that community computer networks do not contribute greatly to the development of social capital. The researchers conclude by noting that more research needs to be conducted on whether community networks are likely to be more successful in communities wherein there are already high levels of social capital.

Description of “Reach for the Clouds”, a networked community for residents in Atherton Gardens, a low-income, ethnically diverse high-rise public housing estate in Melbourne, Australia. The consortium of government and community groups relies on voluntary labour from local businesses, government funding, and donations from local companies. In order to assess the effectiveness of the program a three-year analysis combining qualitative and quantitative analysis has been planned. This includes interviews with the stakeholders involved in establishing the network, preliminary focus groups with tenant groups to assess levels of social capital and community participation, a survey to measure tenants’ skills in technology, their expectations of the computer network, and their attitudes to living on the estate, and their patterns of social interaction, both before the network is fully established and after it has been functioning for some time.


In the aftermath of September 11th, Preece asks how online communities and the Internet can contribute to enriching social capital development. She argues that low-cost hardware, software, and a universally usable computing infrastructure must be available to all. Software that supports sociability (including email, chatrooms, and instant messaging) are examples of tools that encourage community development, but “better integration of these technologies and the addition of facilities to support consensus building, voting, and information retrieval will further enrich them as we are starting to see in Web environments, PCs, and handheld devices”


Using an example of the development of a rural community electronic network, the authors examine what resources (individual-level and community-wide) can best contribute to a successful network. They build a conceptual model focusing on economic, political, and social resources. A mail survey examined attitudes towards computer use, technology ownership, community attitudes, political engagement, membership in civic organizations, social attitudes, and sociability. The researchers hypothesized, and confirmed, that pre-existing political resources in a community play a vital role in determining whether community networks can be effective. Thus, extant political resources and community infrastructure, rather than social networking, may be more critical to the development and sustainability of community networks.

This paper provides an overview of social capital trends and theory (Bourdieu and Putnam), assesses measurement of social capital, and looks at applications in social and health policy in the U.K.