What can Social Capital and ICT do for Inclusion?

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Preface

This paper was developed by JRC-IPTS in response to a request by the Directorate General Information Society and Media (European Commission) for research input into the process of drafting a Communication on eInclusion (2007) and into an Action Initiative for eInclusion (2008). It was first presented to stakeholders in a series of meetings in Brussels (September, 2006) and to EU Member State representatives at the eInclusion Subgroup Meeting (October 2006) where eInclusion policies were discussed.

It presents the concept of Social Capital as a potentially very useful guiding principle to inform the design and implementation of eInclusion strategies. Its purpose is therefore twofold. First, it represents a stand-alone contribution to the academic and policy-oriented debate on the relationship between social capital, ICT and social inclusion. Second, it provides direct research input to the consultative process in the development of the Communication and Action Initiative on eInclusion, focusing on the priority themes for a European eInclusion agenda as defined in the Riga Ministerial Declaration of June 2006.

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Executive Summary

Thinking about the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for social inclusion (eInclusion) from the vantage point of social capital can make existing initiatives for bridging digital divides more effective. This approach also points to new levers and strategies that could better harness the power of ICT for social inclusion in a wider sense. Thus, social capital provides a promising conceptual framework and policy tool to support the implementation of the European Union policy agenda for eInclusion, as most prominently articulated in the June 2006 Riga Ministerial Declaration on eInclusion.

What is social capital? Social capital refers to *the extent, nature and quality of social ties that individuals or communities can mobilize in conducting their affairs.* Social capital is not a new concept, but gained prominence in the policy arena in the late 1980s, when it found its way into many policy programmes for social integration and cohesion in North America and Europe.

How does social capital relate to social inclusion? A robust and growing body of empirical research confirms that:
- a lack of social interconnectedness is, in itself, an important dimension of individual deprivation. Exclusion is not only a matter of poverty or a lack of material resources. Social isolation poses risks to individual well-being and health, as well as social cohesion. This makes the strengthening of social capital within groups at risk of social isolation an important aim for social inclusion efforts;
- social capital facilitates learning and the acquisition of skills. Learning is a social process and social networks and communities of practices are indispensable spaces for informal learning, providing opportunities for individuals to seek advice, discuss ideas and upgrade their work-related and other skills;
- social capital creates economic opportunities. It helps individuals to find a job, enhances their employability and productivity and generates the trust and reciprocity between co-workers and business partners required for efficient markets; and,
- social capital stimulates political participation, civil engagement and community governance. Ties between friends and colleagues are found to be important motivating structures for civil engagement.

- To sum up, social capital is an important objective and cross-cutting policy tool for addressing some of the root causes of social exclusion. It can serve as an early warning diagnostic to detect a breakdown of social cohesion and the onset of individual alienation. It also directs attention to the various bottom-up networks, community initiatives and other civil society organisations that can be mobilized for outreach and inclusion efforts.

How can social capital inform and support eInclusion efforts? Mirroring the multiple interlinkages between social capital and social inclusion, a social capital approach promises to enhance the design and implementation of eInclusion initiatives at various levels:

- At conceptual level, it helps us to better understand how ICTs are adopted and ICT skills are learnt in social learning environments, thereby providing guidance for making ICT literacy and skill initiatives more effective;
- At the programme level, it puts the support of social networking aided by ICT firmly on the eInclusion agenda. It also emphasizes the significant opportunities offered by a new generation of increasingly popular ICT-led social networking tools and platforms, commonly labelled as Web 2.0, for fostering social capital formation and inclusion. At the same time, it alerts us to the challenge to make these emerging online meeting spaces and tools accessible for all;
- At the operational level, it directs attention to the pivotal role of civil society and bottom-up community initiatives in reaching out to people at risk of exclusion. Civil society and bottom-up community initiatives are indispensable partners in the design and implementation of social inclusion initiatives, including eInclusion efforts.
- At the service design level, it leads to the insight that individual citizens often interact with online public services via networks of intermediaries. As a consequence, the design of such online services needs to take into account the information needs of this additional client group of private or civil society-based intermediaries.

What does this mean in practice? Experiments with social capital informed approaches to eInclusion are being carried out in many countries. Examples with regard to ICT literacy initiatives include the use of peer trainers and peer learning in day activity centres in Denmark or the use of existing youth workers as ICT teachers for disadvantaged young people in youth centres in Germany. Support for online

self-help groups and communities of practice for care givers and support groups is a central element in some active ageing initiatives in Finland, while a web project in the Netherlands catalyzes the networking and social integration of ethnic communities through the provision of a very popular online discussion space and news service for North African immigrants. Moreover, with regard to reaching out to target groups and supporting their social networking, eInclusion efforts can also take a cue from the private sector which has recognized the importance of new online meeting spaces and is setting up a virtual presence to become visible and engage more closely with target audiences. This strategy might also help the designers of online public services and elected representatives to reconnect with specific client groups, such as young people, that are difficult to reach and motivate through established communication channels.

These examples illustrate the breadth and diversity of current social capital informed approaches to eInclusion. They confirm that a social capital approach aligns itself very closely with the European eInclusion agenda, which aims not only to combat social exclusion in its various dimensions with the help of ICT but also seeks to prevent new generations of ICT from generating new socio-economic disparities. Early evidence points to encouragingly positive outcomes for these social-capital-informed projects and suggests a wider application of the social capital perspective for eInclusion, which in turn will require a more systematic stock-tacking and comparison of innovative projects and emerging good practice in this area.

1   Introduction: Examining the triangle of social capital – inclusion - ICT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), inclusion and social capital are in themselves three very broad concepts that can be plausibly interlinked with each other in a wide variety of ways.

Social capital, for example, can mitigate many risks of social exclusion, while dynamics of exclusion such as inequality and marginalization can precipitate an erosion of social capital. Likewise, ICT can support social inclusion efforts, while - in the form of digital inclusion - becoming itself a new item on the inclusion agenda. And the relation between social capital and ICT can plausibly be assumed to be even more ambivalent: ICT is sometimes expected to pose challenges to the social capital in local communities, but also believed to open fresh opportunities for weaving new social ties and expanding the formation of social capital.

Exploring in more detail these multiple interrelationships in the triangle of social capital-inclusion-ICT is both a timely and topical endeavour for at least two reasons:

- A wealth of empirical evidence clearly indicates that social capital plays a beneficial role for health, education, public participation and the realization of economic opportunities.
- A new generation of digital ICT, such as the Internet, have by now been around for a sufficiently long time to move from speculation to grounded observation and better understand their impact on society, including issues of inclusion and social capital. A growing body of empirical investigations bears testament to this and, in our view also supports one very important conclusion:

Adopting a social capital perspective can significantly enrich the design and operationalisation of research and policy initiatives that focus on making ICT work for social inclusion.

This is the central message of this background paper that will be developed by addressing four main questions:

- What is social capital and why is it important for inclusion in general and eInclusion in particular?

- What is the impact of new ICTs, such as the Internet, on social capital?
- How can a social capital approach enrich initiatives for eInclusion, especially with regard to priority themes for action as identified by the Riga Ministerial Declaration on eInclusion?
- What policy and research questions need to be addressed to fully exploit the synergies between social capital and new ICT for the aim of eInclusion.

These four questions will be tackled by linking major messages from the vast and growing literature on social capital to rapidly evolving insights into the relation between ICT, social capital issues of social inclusion as they are emerging both from IPTS research initiatives on a variety of related themes and from other recent research projects for the European Commission and within the wider policy research community.

This working paper is intended to provide input to the consultative process of identifying priority themes, practical initiatives and policy options for eInclusion that accompanies the Commission's formulation of an eInclusion Communication in 2007 and a related European eInclusion initiative in 2008.

2 What is social capital (SC)?

2.1 From classic origins to modern fame

Social capital is not a new concept. Related ideas can be traced back to classic scholars in political philosophy, such as Aristotle, Thomas von Aquinas or Edmund Burke who considered empathy and trust as essential ingredients for good governance.[1] The concept in its modern form has been popularized in the 1980s by the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman and their work on social ties and networks that help generate trust and social reciprocity.[2] The prominence of social capital in the political science and policy community culminated in the mid-1990s with the seminal work by Robert Putnam. In two large-scale research projects Putnam convincingly linked a wide variety of social ills in the United States to the steady erosion of social capital and also showed that a significant part of the socio-economic disparities between the North and South in Italy can be attributed to different levels of social capital in both regions.[3] These studies have been met with widespread interest among think-tanks, the media, civil society and a generation of progressive policy-makers, such as Bill Clinton or Tony Blair. Since then the notion of social capital has inspired a great number of visionary blueprints and practical policy agendas for social and economic modernization around the world, that seek to reap the benefits and address the challenges of globalization through a balanced approach without resorting to excessive command-and-control dirigisme, nor passively subordinating themselves to the pure play of market forces.

2.2 A working definition

Reflecting the diversity of disciplines and scholars that contribute to the debate on social capital, different definitions and conceptualizations abound. For the purpose of this paper, we propose the following working definition that is sufficiently wide to cover the most common elaborations o the concept:

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[1] See Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (2000). 'Social Capital and Community Governance'. Working Paper No. 01-01-003 Santa Fe Institute.

[2] See Coleman, J. (1998). 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital'. in: American Journal of Sociology. Vol. 94. pp. S95-S120; Bourdieu, P. (1986). 'The Forms of Capital'. In: Richardson, J. (ed.). '*Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education'*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.

[3] See Putnam, R. (2000). 'Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community'. New York: Simon&Schuster; Putnam, R.; Leoanardi, R. and Nanetti, R. (1993). ' *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy'.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

> *"Social capital refers to the extent, nature and quality of social ties that individuals or communities can mobilize in conducting their affairs"*

In this broad formulation social capital encompasses a wide variety of connections and networks and that people maintain with family, friends, neighbours, colleagues etc. and it also relates to the strength of social norms, such as trust, sense of commitment and reciprocity or shared understanding that can underpin these ties.

2.3 Ingredients

Many typologies exist to bring order to this wide conceptual space that such a definition of social capital opens. Scholars typically make a difference between

- formal ties, i.e. institutionalized linkages governed by fixed rules, such as formal membership in an organization, relationships established via work contracts etc.; and,
- informal ties: i.e. more fluid, non-codified linkages between friends, like-minded people that are upheld and structured by mutual personal commitment.

Another, very common distinction of particular importance for the purpose of this paper is between:

- Bonding social capital: tight, strong ties with the most immediate family members, closest friends and within closely-knit communities of like-minded people that are bound together by common features that they regard as fundamental to their identity, such as ethnicity or deep religious beliefs;
- Bridging social capital: rather more loose, less committal connections to acquaintances, colleagues, and far-flung, weaker ties between rather diverse communities;
- Linking social capital: vertical interconnections between different levels of social aggregates, for example between small-scale community groups and state institutions.

2.4 Measurement

Considering the many facets of social capital it is not surprising that many different methods can be employed to measure it.

A straightforward approach is to <u>survey people directly</u> and enquire about specific aspects of their social and professional lives. Typical questions to be asked in this context include how many close friends people perceive to have and how frequently

they meet up with them, whether and how often they engage in community activities, whether they trust or share similar value with their neighbours or colleagues etc.

Another popular method is to look at <u>formal statistics</u> the number, distribution and membership of registered community groups, clubs, professional associations, public community events etc.

More <u>experimental approaches</u> rely on mapping network structures by asking individuals to forward a specific piece of information to a number of friends or colleagues with the request for further forwarding. Keeping track of this snowballing effect and the spread of the information in each round should then allow the observer to trace the extension and structure of social networks.

Existing sources at European level that can be used for the purposes of measuring aspects of social capital include panel data from the e-Living initiative[4] or the European Community Household Panel (ECHP)[5] as well as cross-sectoral data sources, such as the European Social Survey (EES),[6] Eurobarometer,[7] or the European Value Survey (EVS).[8]

2.5 Some limitations and their implications for policy design

Its popularity and utility notwithstanding, the concept of social capital also comes with a series of qualifications that should be kept in mind.[9]

First, the <u>capital metaphor</u> should not be taken too far since it <u>can be misleading</u>. Unlike financial capital, social capital is about social relations and the complex motivations and often fickle social dynamics that govern them. It cannot be generated through a straightforward production process, nor can it be accumulated owned, stored or easily transferred in the way financial capital can.

Second, social capital it is <u>not intrinsically benign</u>, but can be mobilized for negative purposes. The Mafia, the KuKluxKlan or Al Quaeda all could be viewed as collectives

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[4] http://www.eurescom.de/e-living/
[5]http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1913,47567825,1913_47568298&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL
[6] http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/
[7] http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm
[8] http://www.europeanvalues.nl/index2.htm
[9] For an overview of qualifications see Fine, B. (2001). '*Social Capital versus Social Theory: Political Economy and Social Science at the Turn of the Millennium'*. London: Routledge.

that exhibit, foster and effectively leverage extraordinarily high levels of social capital. All are closely-knit, often extensive networks sustained by strong codes of trust, identification and reciprocal commitment.

Third, social capital <u>can be exclusive and excluding</u>. Gaining entry into a closely-knit community with strong mutual bonds and shared values can demand a level of adjustment and conformity that runs counter to individual diversity. Or similarly where participation depends on specific ascriptive features such as ethnic origin or religious denomination certain groups of people that do not share these features are excluded from the outset.

These three caveats have important consequences for policy makers.

- The insight that social capital is a soft concept that many informal social ties cannot be produced and measured like financial capital, requires to move beyond simple assumptions about direct linkages between input and outcome in designing, implementing and evaluating policies aimed to enhance social capital.

- The fact that not all social capital is good social capital means that such policies should not seek to sponsor community groups and initiatives indiscriminately but need to carefully consider their purposes and objectives.

- Finally, the excluding effect of social capital varies in degree and is to some extent an inevitable feature of creating a community or network. At the same time this risk of generating exclusion needs to be kept in mind when community groups are considered as partners in public service delivery and democratic governance, both roles that ultimately need to satisfy strong normative principles of equitable participation, accountability and representation.

3 Why is social capital important for inclusion policies?

At first sight social capital might appear as a rather abstract concept, more of interest to academic researchers than policy-designers. On closer inspection however its importance in informing and guiding initiatives for inclusion in a wide variety of policy fields becomes apparent.

3.1 Social capital as important factor for well-being and prosperity

A wide variety of empirical studies, often using sophisticated econometric techniques to control for potentially intermediating variables, clearly establish the paramount role of social capital as a resource for improving quality in many areas, including the opportunities for active ageing.

- *Social capital enhances learning and the acquisition of skills*

In education, many forms of learning are increasingly viewed as a social process. Very often people encounter new information and are introduced to new practical knowledge through their friends and colleagues, while networks of professionals or colleagues provide an important platform to access, share, discuss and collectively evolve practical skills. What's more social networking itself is an important training process. It helps practice and develop interpersonal skills such as the ability to reason, effectively communicate, engage with other perspectives, all viewed as increasingly important and commanding a wage premium in an increasingly service-oriented, globalizing knowledge economy. Longitudinal studies in the US and the UK, for example, show that the sociability at early age significantly raised the probability to hold a job that requires people's skills and interpersonal tasks. [10]

- *Social capital helps to find a job, greases the wheels of the economy and is good for productivity*

In economic life, social capital is viewed as important resource to find a job. According to estimates by the U.S. Department of Labor between 70 and 80% of jobs are found through networking (including contacting potential employers directly).[11] At macro level social capital is considered as providing the stock of trust, the social norms of fairness and good faith that cannot be guaranteed by laws and regulations

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[10] See Borghans, L.; Weel, B. and Weinberg, B. (2006). 'People People: Social Capital and the Labor-Market Outcomes of Underrepresented Groups'. NBER Working Paper No. 11985.

[11] See Stoneman, P. (2005). Presentation on Employment Topic, SOCQUIT Results Conference, Paris, 29-30 September 2005

alone and are indispensable for transacting efficiently in a market economy and for avoiding free-riding in the production and consumption of public goods. In addition networks between colleagues of firms provide important infrastructures for collaborative work, innovation and information flows that are found to raise productivity.[12]

- *Social capital stimulates political participation, civic engagement and community governance*

Ties with friends and colleagues and interlinked organisations of civil society are found to be important building blocs of democratic engagement. At least as important as the mass media they provide mechanisms to articulate and discuss individual grievances, develop common interest, form political opinions and mobilize collective political engagement. In addition, communities with higher level of social capital are associated with lower levels of violent crime and an enhanced perception of personal safety.[13]

- *Social capital helps fend off and cope with illness*

Individuals with extensive social support networks consistently perceive their own health and well being as more positive than individuals with fewer social network ties and are better able to cope with adverse life situations. In addition, various studies have conclusively found social capital to exert a beneficial effect upon a number objectively diagnosed health conditions. For example, higher levels of social capital has been associated with lower rates of heart disease or infant mortality and higher life expectancy, even when controlling for income effects and other intervening variables, thus making social capital an important catalyst for active ageing.[14]

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[12] For a seminal contribution see Granovetter, M. (1985). 'Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness'. in: American Journal of Sociology. Vol. 85. pp. 489-515. conceptual overview see Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (2002). 'Social Capital and Community Governance'. in: Economic Journal. Vol. 112. pp. 419-436. For a large scale study on Italy that finds a positive link between membership in voluntary organization and labour productivity see Sabatini, F (2005). 'Does Social Capital Improve Labour Productivity in Small and Medium Enterprises?'. Working Paper No. 92, Rome: Universitá degli Studi di Roma.

[13] See Klofstad, C. (2001). 'Social Networks and Political Behavior: The Impact of Political Talk on Civic Participation", unpublished paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 29.08.01 – 02.09.01.

[14] For overviews of the empirical evidence see for example Harpham, T.; Grant, E. and Thomas, E. (2002). 'Measuring Social Capital within Health Surveys: Key Issues'. in: Health Policy and Planning. Vol. 17. No. 1. pp. 106-111; Poortinga, W. (2006). 'Social Relations or Social Capital? Individual and Community Health Effects of Bonding Social Capital'. in: Social Science & Medicine Vol. 63. pp. 255–270.

3.2 *Social capital for practical policy guidance*

Taking social capital seriously can enrich public policy-making in a number of ways.

First and foremost, social capital and the lack thereof is in itself an important dimension of social exclusion. The limited access to resources for a health, learning, participation and to economic opportunity that comes with a lack of social capital, makes the building of social capital an <u>important objective and cross-cutting policy tool</u> for addressing some of the root causes of social disparities.

Keeping track of the stock and fluctuations in social capital for specific groups of people or geographic communities can serve as an <u>early warning diagnostic</u> to detect the breakdown of trust between different social groups, the emergence of community conflicts or problem neighbourhoods in a city or the vulnerability to personal crises due to social isolation for a specific category of people. Detecting these signals of crises early can help fathom preventive or pro-active interventions in urban planning, community conflict prevention initiatives, social or health care policy.

The notion of social capital can also aid policy design. Adopting a social capital approach <u>directs attention to the various bottom-up networks</u> and associations which are both important seeding points, building blocs and outcomes of social capital and its formation. This means civil society in all its diversity assumes the role of an important agent for building social capital and is recognized as a powerful ally in reaching out to people at-risk-of exclusion and provide complementary mechanisms to provide public goods and deliver inclusion initiatives through, for example, charity work, counselling and training programs, research, awareness-raising and advocacy activities or support of grass-roots and self-help initiatives.

From the point of the policy-planner this emphasis on leveraging public policies and the delivery of public goods by involving community organizations rather than relying on private market mechanisms or top-down policy interventions can also serve as an <u>ideological bridge</u> to mobilize support. It helps to transcend what is often presented as a rigid dichotomy of the *state vs. market* as the only two possible mechanisms for organizing social and economic affairs.

4   The potential impact of ICT on social capital

How do ICTs affect the building of social capital and its distribution within a community? Such a broad question can never be answered conclusively, but some more general dynamics and patterns can be identified.

4.1   ICT and social networks

Early speculations and rather anecdotal evidence tended to view the impact of a new generation of ICTs, such as the Internet, as quite negatively and suspected that ICT would follow in the footsteps of television and precipitate a further erosion of social capital. However, more recent and more grounded empirical investigations convey quite conclusively a different message: far from undermining the formation of social capital ICTs are found to enable individuals to <u>thicken existing ties and generate new ones</u>. ICT in the form of mobile phones or email, for example, are used to stay better in touch with close friends and family members, making it possible to retain close communication while meeting increased demands for mobility, or, through enabling teleworking arrangements, reducing the need to spend time outside the family home in the first place.

At the same time, ICT in the form of interest-oriented online discussion groups or networking spaces come in handy to develop more new ties to like-minded people in what are looser, more fluid, differentiated, interest-based, elective and far-flung networks for a wide variety of purposes, including professional skill and career networks, common hobbies and socializing or self-help groups to cope with specific problems. A growing number of studies confirm this enhancing and transformative impact of ICT on social capital.[15]

4.2   ICT and local communities

The question remains whether this transformative impact might have a negative effect on one particular type of social capital, the social ties within a geographically defined, local neighbourhood. Although no conclusive evidence is available there are also reasons to believe that ICT has the <u>potential to enrich rather than to undermine local life</u> for several reasons.

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[15]   For a large scale study, see for example Pew Foundation (2006).'The Strength of Internet Ties'. Washington DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project. For an excellent overview discussion of these trends see Benckler, Y. (2006). 'The Wealth of Networks'. Yale University Press. Chapter 10.

- Despite its virtual, borderless image, it is estimated that up to 80% of the information available on the Internet has a place-bound geographic aspect to it.[16]

- Most communication and networking tools provided by ICT do scale. This means they can handle the networking needs of small and large communities alike and make it possible for local networks to expand and interlink with other local communities, thereby supporting bridging and linking social capital and enhancing the networking and collaboration opportunities for local networks.[17]

- A new generation of ICT applications and business models are built on unlocking the power of the Internet for local neighbourhoods. New geographic information platforms such as Google Earth, make it possible to visualize, annotate and share local information of all types with unprecedented ease and effectiveness. New local search tools have emerged that help to better target searches and retrieve locally-relevant information from the online space. Finally, local online marketing is viewed as a major untapped revenue source for websites and therefore has evolved into a major incentive for innovation and experimentation in online publishing to develop locally-targeted content collections.

All these trends conspire to make the Internet and the information and applications that it provides more place-sensitive and more relevant for local communities and their information needs.

4.3 ICT-enabled opportunities for social capital

As the previous sections show, there is ample evidence to suggest that ICTs are helping to expand, transform and diversify social capital. And they do so by providing:

- Tools for communication and collaborative information sharing, ranging from simple email to interactive publishing tools such as blogs and to sophisticated collaborative work platforms that allow to jointly create, annotate and share information items, such as wikis or social tagging applications.

- Meeting spaces, where like-minded people can gather and socialize. These online spaces started with the bulletin boards of the early internet, then morphed into tens of thousands of thematic discussion groups carried by Usenet or on websites and are by now developing into sophisticated

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[16] Townsend, A. (2004): 'Digitally Mediated Urban Spaces: New Lessons for Design'. Praxis 6, quoted in: Davies, W. (2004). 'Proxicommunication: ICT and the Local Public Realm'. London: The Work Foundation. p. 50.

[17] Davies, W. (2004). 'Proxicommunication: ICT and the Local Public Realm'. London: The Work Foundation.

multimedia online social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook populated by well over hundred million users and their networks of friends, as well as increasingly popular virtual words such as Second Life that mimic ambient aspects of real environments and enable participants to develop sophisticated online alter-egos.

- Collaborative projects that serve as attractors to bring together volunteers and seed networks around initiatives to share Internet connectivity18, to jointly develop software (e.g. thousands of open source projects), or to build online content resources (e.g. the Wikipedia project to build an online encyclopaedia currently with 67,000 active contributors working on over 4,6 million articles in more than 100 languages.[19]

4.4   A big challenge: from benefits for the few to benefits for all

However there is another important message that clearly emerges from the literature. All these opportunities for building and expanding social capital with ICT are currently benefiting mainly those that are already privileged and well-endowed with social capital in the first place. Growing evidence suggests that it is the already highly educated and professionally advanced that use ICT to enhance their skills and network for career advancement, that it is the already politically engaged that harness online tools for mobilizing and civic participation, that it is the already well informed and well networked that actively seek out common interest groups online and fresh information resources of relevance to their lives.[20]

At the same time, the provision of ICT left to the market alone and its appropriation taking place in the context of existing socio-economic inequities does not make ICT work for expanding social capital of the marginalized and disadvantaged. New ICT are unlikely to link-up people with low networking skills, are unlikely to create networks from scratch where there are no pre-existing motivations and are unlikely to build ties and bridges across diverse communities with differing interest.

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[18] For examples, see Gaved, M. and Anderson, B. (2006). 'The Impact of Local ICT Initiatives on Social Capital and Quality of Life'. Chimera Working Paper No. 2006-06. University of Essex.

[19] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Wikipedia_statistics

[20] For evidence, see for example Lusoli, W.; Ward, S. and Gibson, R. (2006). '(Re)connecting Politics? Parliament, the Public and the Internet'. in: Parliamentary Affairs. Vol. 59(1). pp. 24-42; Norris, P. (2001). 'Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide'. Cambridge: University Press.

In a nutshell, without enabling policy measures and dedicated eInclusion efforts it is not possible to fully and equitably realize the significant opportunities that ICT presents for strengthening social capital and the concomitant opportunities for improving individual lives, prosperity and communal cohesion.

5   Making ICT and social capital work for eInclusion – examples, research and policy implications

The Riga Ministerial Declaration of June 11, 2006 emphasizes that "eInclusion means both inclusive ICT and the use of ICT to achieve wider inclusion objectives."

The resulting research and policy challenge at the intersection of social capital and eInclusion is therefore twofold:

- how can a social capital perspective help to make eInclusion activities that aim to bridge the digital divide in all its dimensions more effective? and,
- how can ICTs be harnessed for strengthening and expanding social capital in pursuit of broader social inclusion goals?

In the following we outline a series of exemplary initiatives and ideas that highlight the benefits that a social capital approach can bring to eInclusion and flag related implications for policy and research.

5.1   ICT skills for all – learning through social networks and existing support infrastructures

The challenge

Confidence in one's own ICT and familiarity with advanced digital skills such as locating information online or using key software applications are prerequisite for effective ICT use. However, overall ICT skill levels are quite modest and specific competences are unevenly distributed. For example, only 45% of Internet users in most advanced ICT countries in Europe feel very confident to use search engines, which are key tools for locating information online. And this number even drops below 30% in NMS.[21] In response the Riga Ministerial Declaration has set the ambitious target to halve the gap in digital literacy and competence between specific groups at risk of exclusion and the average population by 2010.

The social capital perspective

New ICT skills are often learnt through friends, colleagues, groups in which an individual participates, rather than acquired through formal learning. This central

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[21]   Cullen, K. (2005). 'Study on eInclusion as a Means of Combating Social Exclusion'. Presentation at Expert Worksop, Brussels, October 4, 2005

insight from a social capital perspective on learning is particular relevant for adults and elderly people who have already completed formal education and have to rely to a large extent on social support networks to be familiarized with new ICT devices and digital competences. But is also the case for young people still in school, since training on the latest skills necessary to put the latest generation of rapidly evolving ICT devices and applications to use for practical purposes are unlikely to have already found their way into the regular school curriculum. A recent survey by Eurostat, for example, reports that individuals in Europe aged 16 to 74 irrespective of gender, education level or degree of urbanisation persistently rank self-learning and informal assistance from colleagues, relatives and friends as by far the two most important mechanisms for obtaining e-skills.[22]

Research and policy implications

The questions for researchers and policy-makers that this example raises include:

- What grass-roots groups and other civil society organizations can be identified as connectors and implementers for peer-learning projects for elderly people, disadvantaged youth, ethnic minorities etc.
- How can already very busy community organizers or social workers be recruited into train-the-trainer and peer-learning schemes? What support mechanisms are required to ensure their participation?
- How can the skills and expertise of community trainers be flexibly upgraded when new applications and technologies emerge that require different or more advances skills?

Implementation examples

How can existing social networks and support infrastructures be harnessed for spreading digital literacy among groups at risk of exclusion. Two examples point the way:

- In the German city of Cologne, ICT access and training for disadvantaged young people under the JUMEK initiative was disbursed through existing youth centres and established youth workers as trainers that are familiar to and firmly embedded in the target community. Working with this train-the-

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[22] Eurostat (2006). 'How Skilled Are Europeans in Using Computers and the Internet?'. Statistics in Focus. No. 17/2006. p. 6.

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trainer approach and through existing outreach channels ensured low drop-out rates and positive impact evaluation.[23]

▪ In Denmark a pilot project on ICT skills for elderly people situated the training in an existing day activity centre for senior citizen in Silkeborg. The project also opted for training elderly volunteers to become ICT coaches for their peers, rather than relying on professional ICT trainers. Success rates of the project were considered to be higher than in similar initiatives that chose a more formal approach to organizing the teaching.[24]

5.2 Leveraging popular online meeting spaces for social inclusion

The challenge

As mentioned earlier, the stunning popularity of new social networking tools and online communities generates unprecedented opportunities for individuals and communities to plug into new networks and expand existing ones, but a major concern is if these new online spaces and tools are accessible and usable by all.

The social capital perspective

A social capital approach makes clear that these spaces should not bee considered as rather unimportant venues for socializing and leisurely digression. They offer new, effective forms of social organization for collective initiatives and can be central to an individual's pursuit of a healthy life, new skills, career opportunities and active participation in public affairs. Empowering people at risk-of exclusion to use these new networking tools and spaces is therefore an important task.

Research and policy implications

▪ Providing ever more sophisticated multi-media environments, these new online meeting places come with a new set of potential barriers to entry. Where physical distance or membership fees might have made participation in conventional clubs and interest associations unattainable, it is now primarily access, affordability, skill, as well as design and accessibility issues that can pose insurmountable obstacles for people with low incomes, low skill

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[23] Evaluation report: http://www.sw.fh-koeln.de/wvw/downloads/Internetversion%20Abschlussbericht%20Jumek#search=%22jumek%20evaluationsbericht%22

[24] See Fuglsang, L. (2005): "IT and Senior Citizens: Using the Internet for Empowering Active Citizenship", in: Science, Technology, & Human Values, Vol. 30, No. 4. pp. 468-495.

levels, or with disabilities to participate in online communities. On the one hand, this emphasizes the urgency of existing access, skill and affordability initiatives to ensure that the online networking opportunities are not confined to the privileged only. On the other hand, it also poses a specific challenge for eAccessibility initiatives that usually focus on removing barriers for access to public sector websites.[25] The challenge is to extend such initiatives to private web platforms. Pertinent questions for research and policy are which incentives and facilitative measures can be employed to develop and implement accessibility standards, so that the new networking tools and spaces do not bypass and exclude disabled people?

- New online communities are frequented by young people and some minority groups that are typically difficult to reach by public service providers and are hard to mobilize for civic or political engagement. In the UK, for example, more than half of the young people report to frequent social networking sites regularly.[26] In the U.S. some ethnic minorities are more strongly represented as users of blogs than their share in the overall community of Internet users might suggest.[27] This opens interesting opportunities for eGovernment and other public services. Complementing strategies to get young people and alienated groups back in touch with established government institutions, it might be worthwhile to experiment with approaches that establish visibility for public services, policy campaigns and consultations in these popular new online spaces.

Implementation examples

- Private businesses already flock to new online spaces. They maintain blogs, establish an online profile on networking sites, or a fully-fledged virtual shop in virtual environments, in order to promote their products, stage elaborate marketing events or directly sell their products in these virtual worlds.
- Government agencies in the U.S. such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Marines Corps use these new online spaces for recruitment advertising.[28] And this trend to be present where large crowds of online users congregate is also already reaching political campaigning. A potential

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[25] For an overview of accessibility problems at *Myspace,* the most prominent social networking site, see for example http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MySpace#Accessibility.

[26] See Financial Times. 'Most UK Youth on Social Networking Sites'. August 10, 2006.

[27] See Lenhart, A. and Fox, S. (2006). 'Bloggers. A Portrait of the Internet's New Storytellers'. Washington DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

[28] See Financial Times. 'Employers Target the Myspace Generation'. August 07, 2006.

presidential candidate in the U.S. has already set up a virtual alter ego and held a press meeting in Second Life, the most popular virtual world.[29]

- Educational institutions are also following suit. Harvard Law School, for example, has established an entire virtual classroom in the virtual world of Second Life and is this autumn for the first time teaching a fully-accredited fee-based course in this environment.[30]

5.3 Using the full range of ICT to connect through eInclusion

The challenge

Compared to other ICTs the Internet poses relatively high barriers to effective use in terms of required equipment, affordability, accessibility and necessary skills. This poses a double challenge for eInclusion: The very people at risk-of-exclusion that are supported to avail themselves of the new social networking tools and online information resources are the people least likely to be fully connected and online.

The social capital perspective

Social bonds and networking do not rely on one single mode of communication but can be underpinned by a wide variety of communication and information channels. The Internet is only one element in such an ICT toolbox for personal communication and networking and other ICT can also be suitable for enhancing networking and social capital formation, for example mobile phones or interactive TV applications.

Research and policy implications

Other ICT such as mobile phones are more easy to use, more affordable and much more widely spread than the Internet, in particular among groups at risk-of exclusion. Using mobile phones and text messaging therefore do not only present opportunities for opening new interfaces to government services in general (mGovernment, mLearning), but also offer a great potential to reconnect groups at-risk of exclusion to public services, learning and civic engagement. What's more, the capability to send short textual alerts at a pre-programmed time at low cost also generates new possibilities for active ageing initiatives by supporting people with dementia in daily activities or ensuring compliance with complex medical treatment regimes.

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[29] See Economist: 'Living a Second Life'. September 28, 2006.
[30] http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/cyberone/

Experimentation with these and other rather low-tech alternative tools for eInclusion, such as television, has begun over the last years and a broadening of these trials as well as a systematic comparative analysis of what is tried out where and what works and what does not could be very helpful.

Implementation examples

- Political participation: In September 2006 the UK's Citizen Calling Initiative has carried out a trial public consultation on criminal justice issues to which young people between 16 and 25 were invited to register their opinion and contribute via text and multimedia messages. The outcomes are currently being assessed. [31]

- Job-seeking: some recruitment agencies inform registered users via text messages about upcoming job opportunities and even start to accept applications via mobile phones.[32]

- Health issues: several industry-sponsored experiments with text message reminders in the health sector in the UK showed impressive success rates. For example, the number of missed appointments with family doctors was reduced by 26-39% and the number of missed hospital appointments by 33-50%, leading to estimates that a national roll-out of the system could yield annual savings of £256m-364m. Likewise text messages were found to significantly strengthen compliance with medication regimes for diabetes.[33]

- Learning: Mobile phones can also be used to support education. The "BBC Bitesize" initiative, for example, provided revision materials via mobile phones, using a downloadable Java game and SMS text messages. The service proved so popular that the BBC was forced to start charging for messages, which led to a sharp declined in usage.[34]

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[31] http://www.citizencalling.com
[32] See Financial Times. 'Employers Target the Myspace Generation'. August 07, 2006.
[33] Vodafone (2006).'The Role of Mobile Phones in Increasing Accessibility and Efficiency in Healthcare'. Vodafone Policy Paper Series. No. 4
[34] See Naismith, L.; Lonsdale, Vavoula, G. et al. (2004). 'Literature Review in Mobile Technologies and Learning'. Futurelab Report Series No. 11, Bristol: Futurelab.

5.4   Empowering bottom-up initiatives, local communities and self-help groups with ICT

The challenge

Neither markets nor governments can single-handedly generate the social trust and cohesion that are prerequisites for a functioning society. Nor can they efficiently provide all the public goods and services required to safeguard equality in opportunity, equitable participation in economic and political sphere and intact communities.

The social capital perspective

Bottom-up community initiatives play a pivotal role to complement markets and governments in creating prospering, equitable societies. Inclusion in many dimensions is facilitated by a wide range of community groups and other civil society organisations. Self-help groups help to cope with adverse life situations, illness or loneliness, providing pillars for active ageing. Communities of practice facilitate learning and skills exchange in a variety of fields and can be supportive to elderly workers and ICT learners alike, both target groups under the Riga Declaration. Community initiatives help to make Internet access more available and affordable and thus can play an important role for bridging the digital access divide, another important concern of the Riga eInclusion agenda. In the UK alone, for example, estimates put the number of community initiatives that helped to broaden access to the Internet at more than hundred.[35]

Research and policy implications

How can public policy initiatives help this wide range of self-help groups and community initiatives that work on all aspects of inclusion to make best use of new ICTs?

In the health sector, how can self-help groups for specific illnesses and networks of informal carers be best supported through networking tools? In the economic sphere how can elderly workers or job seekers benefit to the fullest from online skill exchanges and communities of practice? How can local communities support their

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[35]   See Gaved, M. and Anderson, B. (2006). 'The Impact of Local ICT Initiatives on Social Capital and Quality of Life'. Chimera Working Paper No. 2006-06. University of Essex.

activities with online tools? A number of research and policy challenges arise in relation to these questions:

- A general issue seems to be that many grass-roots initiatives face a critical juncture when trying to scale-up and professionalize their support services or when initial funding runs out. The resulting policy challenge is how to make available and best disburse low-volume, yet longer-term financial support to a large number of very diverse and often very small initiatives.

- Fusing expertise on inclusion with expertise on technologies is another challenge. Linking community organizers and social entrepreneurs with ICT innovators and developers is important to raise awareness about new technological opportunities, as well as to develop and operate applications and initiatives that are appropriate for specific local and social context.

- Kick-starting ICT-enabled networking among groups at risk-of-exclusion faces a chicken-and-egg problem. Motivation to learn ICT skills and get involved depends on the availability of practical uses and tangible benefits. At the same time the utility of online communities depends on high participation rates committed engagement. This requires a balanced approach for eInclusion to foster access, skills and application in tandem, in order to ensure a critical mass of users, uses and utility.

- Community organisations and other civil society intermediaries can act as facilitators and bridges to help citizens interact with eGovernment or eHealth applications. New research by the EU-funded eUser project, for example, finds that "almost half of the eGovernment users also act as social intermediaries assisting non-users in the family or among friends in using services or actually acting on their behalf" and concludes that "there are reasons to assume that full supply of all citizens with online services can only by achieved through the use of intermediaries."[36] This requires eGovernment practitioners and related public online service providers to design interfaces and content also with the information needs of these intermediary category of users in mind. With regard to the provision of public sector information online, for example, this could mean to make data on environmental, health or consumer issues not only available as charts and summaries, but also provide access to the full datasets to enable these intermediaries to carry out their own analysis tailored to their specific needs.

Implementation examples

- Online communities of practice flourish in many areas of relevance to eInclusion, for example for healthcare and active ageing issues. SeniorNet.Se is a Swedish initiative to encourage more older people to use the Internet and has created an online community of stakeholders around its training and awareness raising initiatives.[37]   Finland with its Kansaallinen ITSE-hanke initiative that supports ICT-supported independent living in old age, also provides a platform for the various related support networks of social service staff and carers. EQUIP, an online health information portal in the UK maintains a regularly updated directory of more than 2000 self-help groups, which can be searched by health issue or geographic location.[38]

- In the Netherlands the Web in de Wijk initiative tailors a bundle of software applications, easy to use for community members to present, share and discuss locally-relevant information online.[39] Longer term effects of early community initiative can only gradually be assessed but early findings indicate a positive impact. In the Wired-up Community of Alstor, UK, early adopters set up a local online lift-sharing scheme, as well as a skills directory and discussion board for community matters. In a later stage of the project older residents and unemployed were encouraged to go online. As a result the community today exhibits Internet access rates significantly above the national level and makes widespread use of access to local and medical information as well as of lifelong learning services.[40]

- With regard to providing public information in a data format that is suitable for further analysis by public interest organisations and other eGovernment intermediaries, an interesting example comes from Germany. A federal portal on air pollution makes it possible to query a database for detailed near-real time measurement of major pollutants across the country and allows to download data for further analysis in a standard spreadsheet format.[41]

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[36] Press Release: 'Europeans want easy-to-find, useful and accessible public online services - but supply is short'. eUser Project. September 22, 2006.

[37] http://www.seniornet.se

[38] http://www.equip.nhs.uk/search.html.

[39] http://www.webindewijk.nl/

[40] See ESRC. (2006). 'ICT, Social Capital and Voluntary Action'. ESRC Seminar Series. Swindon: ESRC.

[41] See Zinnbauer, D. (2005). 'Vital Information at Your Fingertips? UK and German eGovernment Strategies Under Scrutiny'. Berlin: Anglo-German Foundation.

5.5 ICT for cultural diversity and social integration

The challenge

Cultural and ethnic diversity is a reality for European nation states in the context of globalization. For example, the number of migrants to Western Europe has increased by 6.5 million over 1990s to reach 32.8 million by 2000. Countries of origins are becoming more diverse and the stock of non-citizen foreigners has increased in many countries, even doubling in FI, PT, ES, IT, IE.[42]

As a result, the average number of ethnic groups that account for more than1% of population in Western (not only European countries) is estimated to be 4.7[43] This makes cultural diversity and social integration priority issues for public policy-makers and is also recognized by the Riga Declaration, which aims to improve the possibilities for economic and social integration for immigrants and minorities by stimulating their participation in the information society.

The social capital perspective

Social capital provides vital resources for immigrants and ethnic communities to provide a sense of identity and belonging, as well as practical support networks for everyday life. However, this type of social capital is quite often of a bonding, more than bridging nature, meaning strong bonds and networks typically exists within a relatively homogenous ethnic community, while links across diverse ethnic communities are weaker and less frequent. ICT networking tools appears to amplify this effect. They serve ethnic communities to strengthen their internal bonds and help stay in touch with their countries of origin, but they are less frequently used to weave networks across ethnic or sectarian boundaries.

Research and policy implications

- The central question is how ICT can help to create bridging social capital and how supportive policies can help to create a shared experience and an online meeting point for individuals from different ethnic communities as a basis for dialogue and a starting point for exploring common interest and weaving networks. In other words, what is the virtual equivalent to neighbourhood

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[42] International Organization of Migration (2005): "World Immigration Report", chapter 3.
[43] See Alesina, A.; Devleeschawer, A. et al. (2003): "Fractionalization", in: Journal of Economic Growth, pp. 155-194.

football, an initiative that very effectively brings together a diverse range of people that have otherwise not much in common.

- Finding ways to make online public services more accessible to ethnic minorities is another challenge. A starting point is to take advantage of the relatively low costs for online publishing and make essential public service information available online in languages of major ethnic minorities. This does not only lower practical access barriers, but also comes with a psychological benefit in the form of strengthening the feeling of not being overlooked and of having a stake in the institutionalized governance system of the country.

- Anti-discrimination resources and services, such as repositories of related legal frameworks, available hotlines, counselling or practical advice on how to deal with administrative matters are offered online by a wide variety of public and civil society information. Online portals that review, consolidate and edit these dispersed information resources can enhance usability and access, especially when these portals are actively promoted and co-edited within ethnic communities.

Implementation examples
- Giving voice and openly accessible meeting space to ethnic communities: Maghreb.nl is a highly interactive website that provides an online space for young people of Moroccan origin living in the Netherlands to socialize, discuss and share information. The site has proved very popular and receives on average 2,500 visitors per day.

- Anti-discrimination resources online: The publicly supported Progetto Melting Pot Europe in Italy provides news and resources on citizens' rights and advocacy for immigrant communities in several languages of immigrant communities.[44]

- Multi-lingual government websites: The UK Department for Work and Pensions provides essential information resources in addition to English in eight major languages of immigrant communities[45] and the UK Cabinet Office has issued guidelines for UK Government websites, which specify in detail best practices with regard to designing information resources in different languages.[46]

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[44] http://www.meltingpot.org/
[45] These languages are Arabic Bengali Chinese Gujarati Punjabi Somali Urdu Vietnamese (http://www.dwp.gov.uk/otherlanguages/).
[46] http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/docs/resources/web_guideline_handbook/pdf/wgl_2-7.pdf

6 Conclusion: Social capital for guiding the design of eInclusion strategies

To sum up, a social capital approach can enrich eInclusion initiatives and promote the goals outlined by the Riga Ministerial Declaration in a variety of ways:

- It helps us to better understand how ICTs are adopted and ICT skills are learnt in social learning environments, thereby providing guidance for making ICT skill initiatives more effective.

- It puts the support of social networking firmly on the inclusion agenda, including eInclusion. A social capital perspective identifies the danger of social isolation and the objectives of fostering social networks between individuals and across diverse communities as central building blocks for mitigating risks of exclusion and creating equitable opportunities.

- It emphasizes the significant opportunities offered by a new generation of increasingly popular ICT-led social networking tools and platforms for fostering social capital formation and inclusion. At the same time, it alerts us to the challenges to make these emerging online meeting spaces and tools accessible for all.

- It directs attention to the pivotal role of civil society and bottom-up community initiatives in reaching out to people at risk of exclusion. Civil society and bottom-up community initiatives serve as indispensable partners in the design and implementation of social inclusion initiatives, including eInclusion efforts.

- It leads to the insight that individual citizens often interact with online public services via networks of intermediaries, As a consequence, the design of such online services needs to take into account the information needs of this additional client group of private or civil society-based intermediaries.

The various case studies presented here indicate that, while experimentation with these new ICT-enabled opportunities and a social capital approach to eInclusion are well underway in some areas, they are just beginning in others. There is therefore a need to roll-out more projects more widely. Emerging empirical evidence is encouraging, as it confirms the beneficial impact of ICT on social capital formation and inclusion in several dimensions. Finally, the continuing rapid evolution of ICT and their adoption for social networking on the one hand and the many new social-capital oriented eInclusion efforts on the other, indicates that these efforts could benefit from

a more comprehensive and systematic stocktaking of innovative ideas and lessons learnt.

Abstract

This paper presents the concept of Social Capital as a potentially very useful guiding principle to inform the design and implementation of eInclusion strategies. Its purpose is therefore twofold. First, it represents a stand-alone contribution to the academic and policy-oriented debate on the relationship between social capital, ICT and social inclusion. Second, it provides direct research input to the consultative process in the development of the Communication and Action Initiative on eInclusion, focusing on the priority themes for a European eInclusion agenda as defined in the Riga Ministerial Declaration of June 2006.