



SCHEMA

Social Cohesion through Higher Education in Marginal Areas

Different Solutions to Digital Exclusion:

Local Nets vs. Internet Cafés

Sara Ferlander and Duncan Timms

CRDLT, University of Stirling

Email: sara.ferlander@stir.ac.uk



Local Nets and IT-Cafés

- *Local Nets*: Computer Networks in Physically based Communities, dealing with Local Issues.
- *Local Nets* provide subsidised home access; *Internet Cafés* offers public access to ICTs. Both aimed at combating the digital divide.
- *Dual Digital Divide*: A physical aspect to the digital divide: Poorer people lack access to ICTs, but poorer people in poorer areas also lack training and informal mentors to give them skills (Reddick, 2000; Fong et al, 2001).



Research Aims

- To investigate whether the use of Local Nets and/or Internet Cafés can increase digital and social inclusion in disadvantaged areas.
- To compare Local Nets and Internet Cafés in terms of their success in enhancing digital and social inclusion in disadvantaged areas.



Research Questions

- *Will the use of Local Nets and Internet Cafés lead to new forms of social inclusion or to the creation of a digital divide?*
- *What factors are important for the creation of an inclusive Information Society?*
- *What impact does the nature of access points have upon digital and social inclusion in disadvantaged areas?*





A Swedish Case Study

- The Local Community
- A Local Net
- An Internet Café



The Local Community

- A suburban area of Stockholm (pop. 8600)
- Many disadvantaged groups: single parents, residents with low educational levels, low income levels and immigrant background
- High levels of social problems and low levels of social capital. Stigmatised in the media
- Community at risk of the Dual Digital Divide





The Local Net

- Started in 1998. Ceased to exist in 2000
- Sponsored and run by the Housing Association
- Subsidised home access to local pages/Internet
- Local/global Communication/Information Services
- Aims: to increase digital and social inclusion, to improve the reputation, to enhance social contacts and the sense of community



The Internet Café

- Opened in 2000
- Sponsored by Local Housing Companies + Local Council. Run by a young local resident
- Provides subsidised public access to ICTs, computer courses and informal support
- Aims: to increase digital and social inclusion, to enhance social integration and to provide a meeting-place (online and offline)



Research Methods

- Mixed Methodology: combination of qualitative and quantitative methods
- Methods of data collections: documentary research, participant observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires and focus groups



Research Samples

■ Local Net: Connected vs. Non-Connected

Surveys: 87 Connected – 90 Non-Connected

Interviews: 11 Connected, Key People and Non-Connected

■ Internet Café: Visitors vs. Non-Visitors

Surveys: 94 visitors – 90 Non-Visitors

Interviews: Seven Visitors, Key People and Non-Visitors

Focus Groups: Twelve Visitors



Research Question

- *Who are the users?*
- *What is it used for?*
- *What are the perceptions?*



Findings: Local Net

- *Connected:* young computer-experienced residents in employment
- *Users:* young, Swedish men with higher education
- *Usage:* little usage of the Local Net and hence little impact upon social participation
- *Perceptions:* high in terms of digital and social inclusion



Findings: Internet Café

- *Visitors:* elderly people, unemployed, single parents, immigrants and low income.
- *Reasons for visits:* access to ICTs, computer courses and informal support.
- *Usage:* Looking for jobs, keeping in touch with family and friends and taking part in higher education.
- *Perceptions:* Very high in terms of digital and social Inclusion



Visitors to the Internet Café

- *The Café approached us pensioners because we are a group that doesn't work and who need to learn about computers. And there was a great interest from the whole community and beyond. I took part in two courses and I learnt a lot (Greta, 81).*
- *Those who are pensioners, on early retirement or unemployed, like myself, it is good for them that this exists because it is a lot of fun to be here. And we learn new important skills (Katitzi, 26).*



Reasons for Café-Visits

- *We cannot afford a telephone at home or a mobile, so for me it is good to come here. I can be reached through the computer. It is good here since it is cheap (Lucia, 22).*
- *That [the senior course] is when I learnt everything I know. I was so curious about computers, but I knew nothing. It was mysterious... but the manager thinks that I have learnt a lot. I think so too (Astrid, 66).*



Reasons for Café-Visits

- *It has absolutely increased IT interest here! If there is an IT-Café of course you go there, if you live in the area (Jurgita, 47)*
- *I'm unemployed and I come here to check the work agency out, so I don't have to go there every day. This is much closer (Juan, 22).*



Summary of Findings: Local Net vs. Internet Café

- The Local Net largely failed to reach its goals in terms of digital and social inclusion; the Internet Café has been more successful.
- The IT-Café has included many disadvantaged groups and increased their skills and interest in ICTs. The technology in the Café also facilitates social participation for its visitors.





Reasons for different outcomes

- Timing
- Management
- Cost
- Support
- Access



Conclusions

- A bottom up approach
- Subsidised public access
- Informal computer training and support
- Online and offline interactions
- Internet Cafés can be ideal forum

