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Internet, Social Capital, and e-Inclusion in Post-Conflict Belfast: Expectations of Community Workers

Francesca Savoldi and Pedro Ferraz de Abreu

ABSTRACT *In this paper, we discuss Belfast community workers' expectations about the influence of the Internet on social capital and on social inclusion among youngsters from segregated areas of the city. For the purpose of conducting onsite research, we selected one of the main organizations working with young people and distributed a questionnaire among the organization's workers. The results show that according to the workers' expectations, the Internet is increasing the openness of youngsters' minds and their social integration, giving a glimmer of hope in light of the challenges of segregation; at the same time, those surveyed indicated that the Internet is not strengthening ties among the young people they work with. Secondly, we verified that different Internet use by the respondents correlated to different expectations, and we found a slight difference in expectations between "higher" and "lower" Internet users.*

KEYWORDS *Divided cities; Belfast; ICT; social capital; e-inclusion*

Background

This work is part of a wider research agenda aimed at observing the influence of the Internet in divided cities: a category of cities characterized by a divided urban space caused by a conflict. The term "conflict" has a very wide connotation, but often it is associated with a divided society. According to Van Kempen (2007), a clear connection can be established between a divided society and a divided city: if a society is divided, the urban space must also be divided. The divided city has also been described as "a physical crisis nestled within a political crisis carried forward by a raft of social ills" (Calame and Charlesworth, 2012: 171). In fact, divided cities often navigate between problems of social exclusion and community cohesion (Graffikin and Morrissey, 2011), and suffer in general from segregation problems, a generalized sense of fear, and important limitations on citizens' mobility, among other urban diseases.

The case analyzed in this paper refers to Belfast, a divided city in transition where peace-lines (also known as peace-walls or interfaces) are still dividing communities. The city's structure and character reflect decades of society-wide sectarian conflict between the Irish nationalist (predominantly Catholic) and British unionist (predominantly Protestant) communities.¹ There, the structure of segre-

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gation follows the concentration of electoral wards, predominantly Catholic in the west and Protestant in the east, with some enclaves in both parts.

According to Boal (2006: 13), 80 percent of the population lived on “segregated streets” of either Protestants or Catholics by the 1980s. Segregation, through its multiple components, still has a heavy influence on the lives of its citizens, and also on the perception of the conflict, generating tension, which leads to fear and mistrust. In addition, residents’ lives are influenced by the conflict in their daily spatial practices, such as when citizens feel “fear” when traveling to the area where their job is because of recognized potential trouble spots that they either avoid or give extra attention to on their way to and from work (Jarman and Bell, 2009).

Several Northern Irish politicians hope to remove the peace-lines by 2023. This goal precipitates the need for constructing dialogue and networks between local communities. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) could play a role in the construction of common ground, influencing relationships, increasing or decreasing prejudice, or altering other social conditions.

As Wellman and Haythornwaite (2002) claimed more than 10 years ago, online communication has become increasingly important in everyday life: an integral part of daily work and home life. Nowadays, technology is a ubiquitous part of our daily lives, extending the possibilities for communication. This phenomenon has given rise to a booming literature about the influence of ICT on society. Authors of this literature can be seen as falling into camps as optimists or pessimists. The first group sees ICT as tools that promote democratic horizons and liberated information flows (Sproull and Kiesler, 1992), improving social engagement (Kouvo and Rasanen, 2005), as well as tolerance (Robinson et al., 1998), and that contribute to the creation of new forms of social participation (Katz and Rice 2002). Pessimistic authors see ICT as tools that promote homophily² (Sunstein, 2001), loneliness (Slouka, 1995), and social isolation (Stoll, 1995). The pessimists also note that ICT allow authoritarian regimes to monitor activists (Morozov, 2011) and can lead to anarchy or dictatorship instead of democracy (Kollock and Smith, 1999).

ICT have also been considered in processes of conflict transformation and peace building dynamics. Hattotuwa (2004) sees ICT as potential tools for revitalizing stagnant dialogues when meetings between key protagonists cannot be accommodated in the real world. In the conflict resolution field, we can mention Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna (2006), who suggest that the Internet has an enormous potential for providing tools to create effective intergroup contact in practices where opposing groups are segregated and/or geographically distant from each other. The intersection between ICT and conflict has given rise to initiatives that use ICT for peacemaking purposes, such as *ICT4Peace*, a foundation aimed at improving communication between people, communities, and stakeholders in a situation of conflict through better understanding of and enhanced application of ICT.

However, only a few studies about the influence of the Internet in a post-conflict context have been conducted, and they have demonstrated different effects. Ruesch (2011) found that in those contexts, ICT could produce fragmentation and polarization of the division, as well as an increased dialogue; Lindroos (2011) showed that ICT could help decrease feelings of frustration and the “flammability” of conflict through online “opinion venting.”

In any case, after considering the study of Hattotuwa (2004), it is useful to keep in mind that the effect of the Internet on people's relationships in a post-conflict fractured society could be different during the conflict and the peace-building process.

Theoretical Framework

Considering that a fractured social fabric and situations of social exclusion are common diseases in divided cities, and that in cyberspace people are allowed to connect with more people, we decided to analyze the influence of the Internet through the lens of social capital and e-inclusion.

Social Capital

Several authors, according to different criteria, have defined the term "social capital." It generally refers to ties among people and the benefits or output that come with them. The main contemporary proponents of social capital theory are Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Nan Lin, and Robert Putnam—who took the concept of social capital to a mainstream audience with his best seller *Bowling Alone* (2000). Putnam has defined two main dimensions of social capital: bridging and bonding. Bridging social capital is related to social networks characterized by weak ties and constituted by different people; bonding social capital is related to social networks characterized by strong ties among close and similar people. According to Putnam (2000), bonding social capital could have more negative externalities than bridging social capital, but it is where the majority of people find social support. Nevertheless, a healthy society has to be composed of homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.

Authors such as Lin (2001), Rheingold (1993), and Wellman (1997) have already analyzed the relationship between social capital and cyberspace, claiming that the Internet can be described as a series of networks connected to other networks that comprise a huge network. Putnam (2000: 45) claims: "Social capital is about networks, and the Net is the network to all ends." Hampton and Wellman (e.g., Hampton, 2002; Hampton and Wellman, 2003) suggest that information technology may enhance place-based community and facilitate the generation of social capital. Katz and Rice (2002), observing the results of the research of the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2000), propose that when users are more familiar with the Internet, they tend to participate in a greater number of communities. Moreover, it is important to consider that in an increasing number of cases, virtual communities reflect existing local offline communities. In addition, social network sites are an emerging practice that has been growing tremendously in popularity over the last 10 years. As these sites are mainly about social relationships, they play an important role in maintaining existing social ties and creating new connections. "Much of the early research on online communities assumed that individuals using these systems would be connecting with others outside their pre-existing social group or location, liberating them to form communities around shared interests, as opposed to shared geography" (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996, quoted in Ellison et al., 2007: online).

e-Inclusion

The context can also be observed through the framework of e-inclusion, which has been defined, basically, as social inclusion in a knowledge society (Kaplan 2005). In Belfast, spatial and social segregation is an important issue for policies as “more than 50 percent of the city’s population now lives in segregated wards that are either 90 percent Protestant or 90 percent Catholic” (European Union, 2007). In Belfast, the residential segregation also has a class dimension: “one will encounter fewer sectarian beliefs and attitudes within mixed (i.e., middle-class) areas and more sectarian beliefs and attitudes within segregated (working-class) areas” (Hamilton et al., 2008: 20). Observing data from NISRA (2001), interface areas, which have been defined as “the intersection of segregated and polarized working-class residential zones, in areas with a strong link between territory and ethno-political identity” (Jarman 2004: 21), have a higher index of deprivation. That dimension of the problem is an indicator of a situation of social exclusion, which is confirmed by the strong presence in the city of organizations that work with young people, who are considered excluded, or youth who are living in areas of social/economic disadvantage. Given that, as Kaplan (2005) claims, e-inclusion and social inclusion are highly correlated; the framework of social capital represents a proper approach for e-inclusion. As mentioned previously, e-inclusion refers directly to ICT use:

E-inclusion refers to the effective participation of individuals and communities in all dimensions of the knowledge-based society and economy through their access to ICT. Further, e-inclusion refers to the degree to which ICTs contribute to equalizing and promoting participation in society at all levels (social relationships, work, culture, political participations, etc.). (Kaplan, 2005: 53)

Cyberspace, Riots, and Anti-Social Behavior in Belfast

Just a few studies have been published on the use of the Internet in Belfast. The Centre for Young Men’s Studies (2009) suggested that young men aged between 13 and 16 were using Bebo and MSN Messenger to threaten members of the “other community” and to organize riots in interface areas. These riots, which have been defined by Leonard (2010) as “recreational riots,” are a kind of anti-social behavior that consists of creating disorders like throwing stones at people living on the other side of the peace-line. Jarman and O’Halloran (2001), observing this kind of anti-social behavior, found that such trouble is frequently an adjunct to the rising tensions of the “marching season,” but the cause of such activities is mainly boredom and bravado rather than political motivation. Therefore, problems of social exclusion are channeled into the question of identity. Reilly (2011) claims that the use of social media to organize recreational rioting in interface areas is likely to continue sporadically until such time as the causes of this anti-social behavior are addressed.

YouTube has been used on several occasions to post videos of anti-social behavior in Belfast. An example of such was reported by the *Belfast Telegraph* (2010): young people who live in close proximity to sectarian interfaces posted a video on YouTube of themselves attacking a man in the street. Moreover, social networking

sites have been used by gangs to recruit new members and to threaten their rivals online (Reilly, 2011).

In cyberspace, it is possible to find a large number of webpages regarding the conflict, including those that defend fighting and rioting. O'Dochartaigh (2007) claims that these pages facilitate a rapid proliferation of the representation of boundaries.

Another interesting research study conducted by Reilly (2012) analyzed the perspectives of community workers on the potential use of ICT to reconfigure socio-spatial relations in contested interface areas in Belfast. Its findings suggest that all the interviewees considered social media more likely to facilitate negative intergroup contact than improve community relations. In any case, a feature not to be underestimated in this study is that the interviewees expressed a skeptical viewpoint through which they looked at ICT, perhaps due to their lack of the technical skills required to use new media technologies effectively. In fact, as the author suggested, the community workers did not feel comfortable using new media technologies, which is also demonstrated by the fact that only one of the interviewees maintained a Facebook profile and that several of them indicated that they felt they were "too old" to maintain a social networking profile.

Aim of the Research and Methodology

Reviewing the existing literature, we have seen how certain authors consider the Internet a tool with enormous potential for influencing society and in particular social capital. This research is aimed at uncovering the expectations of community workers at a local organization (Youth Action Northern Ireland) about the influence of the Internet on social capital and on e-inclusion among young people who live in disadvantaged areas of Belfast.

We want to verify if, according to the expectations of the community workers, the Internet is:

- influencing social capital
- operating in favor of social inclusion.

Furthermore, we want to observe if there is any correlation between the community workers' Internet use and their expectations.

The target demographic is the young people of Belfast living in the more highly segregated areas of the city. We consider this segment of the population the most meaningful for this research, for several reasons. First, given that the last peace agreement was in 1998, they represent the first generation of the post-conflict stage. In Northern Ireland, policies of conflict resolution have a huge interest in the issue of young people; they are considered the key to moving away from the conflict and to reaching a permanent peaceful society. Young people have an inherited idea of the conflict, and they are still suffering its effects, mainly because of segregation, when considered in all its dimensions. Nowadays, young people from more highly segregated areas are considered especially vulnerable because of the particular circumstances relating to the legacy of the conflict. According to Haydon (2009), in these areas, sectarianism, social exclusion, and deprivation continue to affect young people, contributing to "anti-social" or offending behavior, such as, the clashes caused by teenagers from disadvantaged areas, known as recreational riots. Moreover, according to the report of Ofcom

(2012), youngsters between 15 and 30 years old are among the highest users of the Internet in the United Kingdom.

With the aim of observing the impact of the Internet on the target population, after several interviews and field observations, we asked for the collaboration of one of the main organizations in Belfast working with young people and social integration: Youth Action Northern Ireland (YANI). It is an umbrella, nonprofit organization that has been working with young people from disadvantaged areas coming from both communities for the last 65 years. YANI's community workers constantly interact with young people; they have direct knowledge of young people's personal and communitarian experiences; and, in a collective interview with the authors, they claimed to be concerned about the consequences of Internet use on the lives of young people. Therefore, after conducting an initial interview, we hand-delivered to them a questionnaire about their expectations regarding the impact of this technology on social capital and e-inclusion among youngsters. We also asked about their personal ways of using the Internet. The questionnaire and its set up protocol is available at http://www.labtects.net/papers/FSA-PFA_questionnaire.html.

Results

We considered that, according to the research of Reilly (2012), the skeptical perspective of the community workers could be related to the respondents' low level of Internet use and the lack of technical skills. So, we planned some questions about the Internet use of the respondents (the community workers), with the aim of observing if they had technical skills and analyzing whether different classes of users had different trends of opinion regarding the influence of the Internet on social capital and e-inclusion.

Use

The total number of respondents was 23, which corresponds to the total number of community workers available at YANI's Belfast building when this research was conducted. Considering also community workers who work outside of the main building, YANI's community youth work staff is 45 members.

The first question, which was about the device used to connect to the Internet, revealed that almost every one of the respondents used a smartphone to connect to the Internet (21 respondents), and for eight of them, the smartphone was the only device used for that purpose. Twenty-five percent of the community workers connected to the Internet from multiple devices, in particular combining the smartphone with a home computer. Only two respondents connected to the Internet from a work computer (combining it with a smartphone), and only one person connected to the Internet from the library (also combining with a smartphone). Only one respondent used the computer as the only way to connect to the Internet. Considering that the national statistic of Ofcom (2012) shows that in Northern Ireland only 20 percent use mobile phones to access the Internet, the respondents of our survey were strongly over the national average, which may be because of their young age (all the respondents were between 20 and 30 years old, while the national statistic considers all adults older than 16, including the elderly.)

The second question asked about the daily time spent on the Internet expressed in hours, and the results show an average of three hours per day;

nine respondents spent from one to two hours per day on the Internet; eight of them spent from three to four hours, and six people spent from four to six hours per day on the Internet. In the second part of the second question, we asked participants to indicate the activities they did online. The largest number of respondents used the Internet mainly for accessing social network sites, sending and receiving e-mails, searching for information, and looking at videos. Six respondents said that they used it to work online, and five respondents played online games; buying and selling online was also a diffuse activity. In addition, two people were following online tutorials at the time. Five respondents used the Internet to read online magazines and newspapers. According to the statistics shown by Ofcom (2012) for Northern Ireland, the most common activity online is surfing/browsing, followed by sending and receiving e-mails, the use of social network sites, and e-banking. Again, we can see little difference between the respondents and this national statistic: the use of social network sites is maybe most diffused through young adults (as the respondents are), as well as watching videos. The third question related to the use of social network sites, and the results show widespread use: every one of the respondents had an account on Facebook; 11 of them combined Facebook with Twitter; three respondents combined more than two accounts (mainly Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram); two respondents had an account on Bebo and other social sites. Moreover, many people who had an account on only one of these sites were the same ones who spent less time on the Internet. Their common reasons for using social network sites were communicating with friends, family, and colleagues from work or school, in addition to looking for information about people.

In the last question about Internet use, we asked if the respondents had ever met anyone offline as a consequence of an online first contact. For 11 of them, the answer was positive, while 12 of them had never had it happen.

Considering these results about Internet use, we can claim that the surveyed community workers had technical skills. The results coincide with the national statistics about Internet use by young people. Every one of them used social network sites, including the people who connected to the Internet just from an Internet café. Many of them have accounts on different platforms, and they use these sites with multiple purposes. The respondents used the Internet in their daily lives, and the results underline a proximity between their lives in cyberspace and in the physical world.

Expectations Regarding the Influence of the Internet on Social Capital

With the aim of observing what the expectations of community workers are about the influence of the Internet on social capital, we created two groups of questions related to the dimension of bridging and bonding social capital, and we analyzed the results item by item.

The following group of statements (from Q6 to Q18) refers to the dimension of bridging social capital.

- Q6) Online, young people are interacting with people from different parts of the world more than offline.
- Q7) Interacting online, young people are more curious about differences in others than offline.

Q8) Online, young people look for information about the “other” community more than they do offline.

Q9) Online, young people are interacting with people from the “other” community (with different aims: curiosity, threatening, leisure, other?) more than offline.

Q10) Online, young people interact with people from different backgrounds (age, religion, nationality, etc.), more than they do offline.

Q11) Online, young people belong to more and different communities than offline.

Q12) Connecting with more online communities, young people feel connected to the bigger picture more than when they interact offline.

Q13) Interacting online, young people are used to helping strangers, spending time on general community activities, and doing things without expecting a payoff, more than offline.

As we can see from [Figure 1](#), there is a general trend to agree with the statements.

In the sixth question (Q6), the greater part of those surveyed strongly agree with the idea that young people tend to interact more online than offline with people from different parts of the world. But respondents are divided on the idea that the Internet makes young people more curious about differences with other people (seven strongly agree, seven agree, and seven were neutral).

Question Q8 was about the potentiality of the Internet for looking for information about the “other” community. (While distributing the questionnaire, we informed the respondents about what we meant by “other community.”) As we can see from [Figure 1](#), many respondents chose “neutral” as the answer. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents (seven people who strongly agreed and six who agreed) think that young people use the Internet to find information about the “other community.” These responses show that the expectations of the community workers do generally agree with the idea that the Internet is increasing the dimension of bridging social capital, broadening social horizons, and fostering curiosity about different people, as well as opening up new opportunities for increasing their knowledge about the “other” community, offering in this way a chance of reducing the effects of segregation.

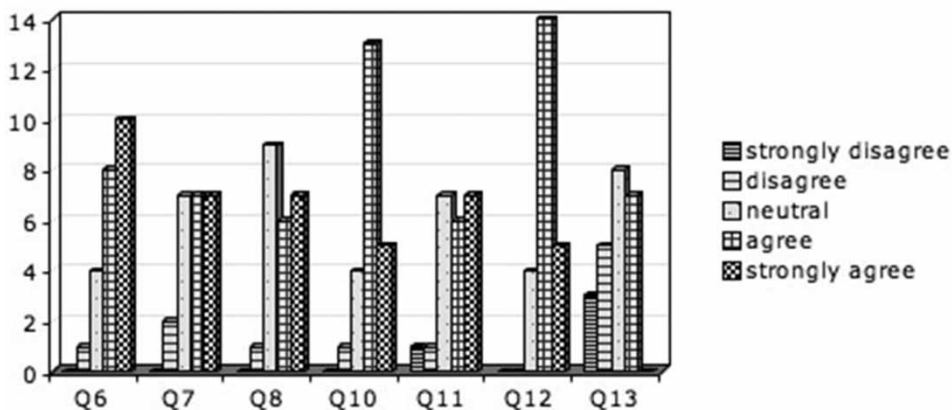


Figure 1: Answer for bridging social capital indicators.

In question Q10, 13 people agree with the idea that the young people they work with interact online with people from different backgrounds more than they are used to doing offline. In Q11, community workers show different expectations about the idea that when young people are online they belong to more and different communities than in the physical world (seven of them strongly agree, six of them agree and seven chose neutral). Question Q11, as well as Q12, considers the work of Putnam (2000) and refers to the idea of viewing oneself as part of a broader group.

A great majority of respondents agree with the idea that the Internet is helping young people feel more connected to the larger picture than when they interact offline. However, in Q13, community workers express uneven opinions about the idea that young people interacting online spend time helping strangers or the community just for solidarity. This means that according to their expectations, the Internet is not increasing reciprocity within a broader community, nor is it fostering a charitable feeling.

Question number nine (Q9) was not included in the graph of [Figure 1](#) because it was planned in a slightly different way, but it is also part of the group of questions about bridging social capital. It asks if young people are interacting with the “other” community online more than offline. Twenty respondents said yes, which represents a very high percentage. In a post-conflict context, where the segregation between communities still exists and clashes between them still happen, not all the online interactions can be positive for inter-community relationships. As some authors like Reilly (2012) or Ruesch (2010) emphasize, cyberspace could be a new field for social collisions. For that reason, we have associated this question with a second one asking participants to specify the aim of this online interaction. The result showed that the majority who think that young people interact more online with members of the “other” community do so mainly for leisure or curiosity; nevertheless, three of them considered the aim of this interaction to be in order to threaten, a negative output for the creation of weak ties.

The following group of questions relates to the dimension of bonding social capital:

Q14) Online, young people are used to having somebody to trust to help them solve problems or make very important decision, more than they have in their offline community.

Q15) Online, young people find very close friends who would put their reputations on the line for them, more than they would find in their offline community.

Q16) Online, young people have somebody who will help them to fight a sectarian harassment, more than in their offline community.

Q17) Online, young people are used to developing more bias for a rival community identity than they do offline.

Q18) Online, young people used to show more symbols of communitarian identity than offline.

As we can see from [Figure 2](#), respondents tend in general to disagree or choose “neutral” in the questions relative to the dimension of bonding social capital. In Q14, the majority of respondents chose the option “neutral,” which means that they have no clear idea about online relationships of trust among young people.

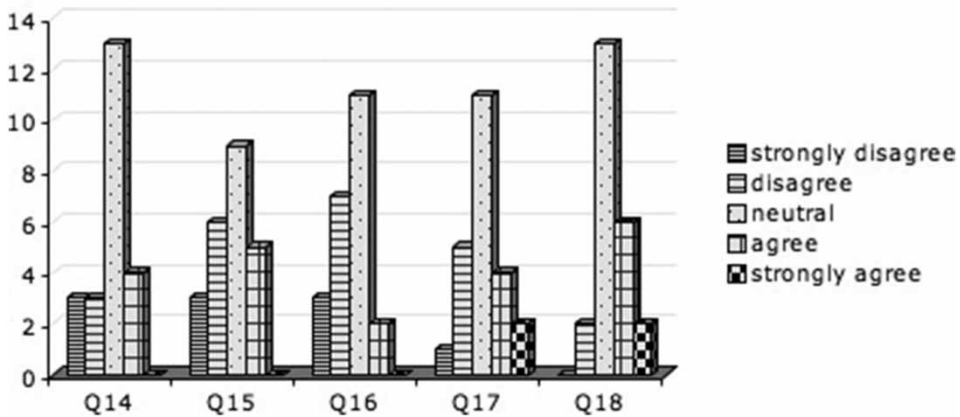


Figure 2: Answer for bonding social capital indicators.

Following a similar trend, in Q15, nine community workers thought that young people have closer friends offline than online, as well as another nine respondents who neither disagreed nor agreed. In the next question (Q16), we can see how the respondents do not consider the Internet as a tool used by young people to mobilize solidarity for the sectarian cause, 13 of them choosing the option “neutral.”

From these results we can see that community workers tend to think that the young people they work with are still maintaining stronger personal connections in the offline world.

As we have said before, the dimension of bonding social capital has a critical sub-dimension which is the out-group antagonism and that is reflected by Q17 and Q18. In these questions, the opinions of the community workers follow different directions; most of the respondents answer with “neutral” to Q17, which means they are undecided or they don’t know if online young people develop more bias toward the “other” community than offline. In question Q18, the greatest number of respondents again chose “neutral;” they are not sure if young people show more symbols of communitarian identity online than offline. These results show that community workers have an unclear idea about this item in general.

Expectations about e-Inclusion

After observing the expectations of community workers about the dimensions of social capital, we wanted to know their expectations about the influence of the Internet on issues of inclusion. In Q19, we asked the community workers if they considered the Internet a tool that helps the young people they work with to be more included in the society. Ten respondents agreed with this idea, five of them strongly agreed, two respondents disagreed, and six chose “neutral” as the answer. People who agreed or strongly agreed answered further questions in which the impact of the Internet on inclusion was characterized through different sub-indicators. The Internet is used to:

- improve their school education
- look up education, training, and course offerings

- look for a job or send a job application
- seek health information on injury, disease, or nutrition
- obtain information from public authorities' websites and interact with them
- sell or buy goods and services
- access services related to travel and accommodation
- watch movies
- read newspapers or magazines
- communicate with others
- look for cultural events going on in the city.

Most of the people who agreed with the idea that the Internet is helping young people feel more integrated in society believe so specifically because young people can communicate more with others using the Internet and because they can watch movies. Additionally, they can easily look for information about education, training, and course offerings, which were the items to which respondents mostly expressed agreement. These items refer to the index created by Bentivenga and Guerrieri (2010), and they are useful for e-inclusion since these activities can improve communication skills and can increase the knowledge that comes from culture and entertainment. However, the respondents least agreed that young people used the Internet to:

- improve their education
- obtain information from public authorities
- interact with authorities online
- read more newspapers or magazines online.

Summarizing, we can see from these results that the expectations of the community workers about the impact of the Internet on inclusion is more visible in the field of social relationships, culture and entertainment, and finding opportunities, items that are useful to improving personal capacity and social networks—while the impact of the Internet is less visible in improving education and accessing government services.

Relationship between Expectations and Internet Use

The last part of this work aims to observe if the expectations of people who have a more complete experience with the Internet are more or less skeptical about the beneficial impact of the Internet on social capital and e-inclusion than those who have less experience. The Internet “means different things to different people and it is used in different ways, for different purposes” (Selwyn et al., 2005: 123). Moreover, people with the same level of Internet access can use the Internet in fundamentally different ways (Singer et al. 2012). As Bae Brandtzaegan et al. (2011) claim, dividing people into distinct groups with regard to their different needs and behaviors is commonly used in both market research and requirement engineering to target the various activities and preferences of users, and it is useful for a better understanding of the features of a complex behavior.

Several authors have tried to classify different types of usage into different classes. According to Howard et al. (2003), typologies of users can be performed using different approaches depending on their prior experience combined with intensity. Horrigan (2007), while creating 10 classes of different users, considered the availability of technological assets, mixed with the online activities in which

people engage, and their attitudes towards information and communication technologies; these 10 classes are organized in three categories: elite tech users, middle-of-the-road tech users, and low tech users. Meyen et al. (2010), with the aim of answering the question regarding which kind of capital the Internet user gains online and which factors influence the pattern of usage, have distinguished seven different user types, identifying classes according to their engagement in different capital-enhancing activities. Ortega Egea et al. (2007), analyzing a representative dataset from 15 European countries with the aim of comparing them at the international level, have created five types of European Internet users: laggards, confused and adverse, advanced users, followers, and non-Internet users. Bae Brandtzaegan et al. (2011), in their research aimed at understanding the new digital divide, have labelled Internet users into five classes similar to those of Ortega Egeas' (2007) classification: non-users, sporadic users, entertainment users, instrumental users, and advanced users.

Considering that this part of our research is aimed at analyzing possible correlations between different classes of Internet users and different outcomes in expectations about the influence of the Internet on social capital and e-inclusion, we have decided to classify the respondents into two groups according to the intensity of use and the complexity of their experience on the Internet. Classifying Internet use in terms of distinct user types will help us to observe the existence of any relationships between the use of the Internet by the workers and the nature of their expectations.

Considering that all 23 respondents of the survey were between 20 and 30 years old, and that all of them were daily Internet users, we opted to create only two classes. These categories reflect mainly the time spent on the Internet, with the complexity of the Internet use, considering that a more "varied" or complete usage gives to the users a more articulated experience on the Internet, allowing them to more greatly exploit the benefits of the Internet.

For that reason, we created Class 1, which combines less time spent on the Internet and less varied experience in complexity, and Class 2, where more time is spent on the Internet with more complex use.

We designed the criteria by giving to every variable the same level of importance (or weight); nevertheless, further studies to create different values between heterogeneous components of the Internet are needed for a more accurate classification and comparative judgment.

i) *Frequency*: time spent on the Internet:

Class 1: From 1 to 3 hours per day—15 people

Class 2: From 4 to 6 hours per day—8 people

ii) *Variability in device for connection*: the number of devices used to access the Internet:

Class 1: Access from just one device—8 people

Class 2: Access from multiple devices—15 people

iii) *Variability in activities*:

Class1: Common activities (most diverse activities: use of social network sites, e-mail, online searching)—5 people

Class 2: Common activities plus additional activities (use of social network sites, e-mail, online searching, reading newspaper, working online, video, games, tutorial, using online telephone, buying/selling, other)—15 people

iv) *Variability in presence on social network sites:*

Class 1: Account just on a single SNS—12 people

Class 2: Account on several SNSs—11 people

v) *Variability in activities on SNS, considering that five of the most common and shared activities (communicating with family, friends, work colleagues, school colleagues, and searching about people):*

Class 1: Use of the SNS for five or fewer activities—11 people

Class 2: Use of SNS for more than five activities—12 people

vi) *Encounter between online and offline world:*

Class1: People who have never met somebody offline after an online meeting—12 people

Class 2: People who have met somebody offline as a consequence of meeting online—11 people

Classification

The assigning of the class considers every respondent as belonging more to Class 1, which we have called “low,” or to Class 2, named “high.” The estimation is made by counting how many individuals have more answers in the first or in the second class. In this way we have assigned 11 people to the class “low” and 12 to the class “high.”

As we have seen before, the group of questions from Q6 to Q13 refers to the dimension of bridging social capital. As we can see from Figure 3, in all the

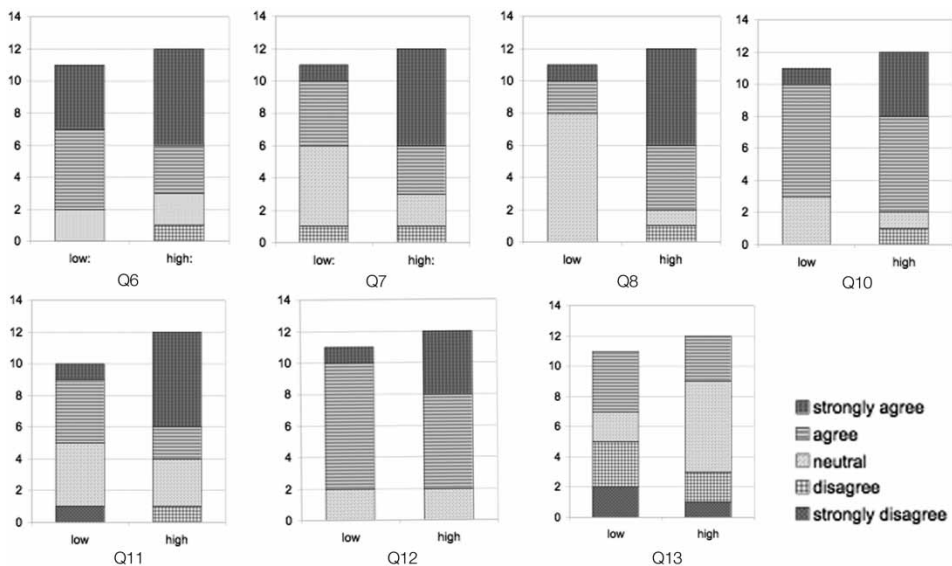


Figure 3: Relation between expectations about bridging social capital and Internet usage.

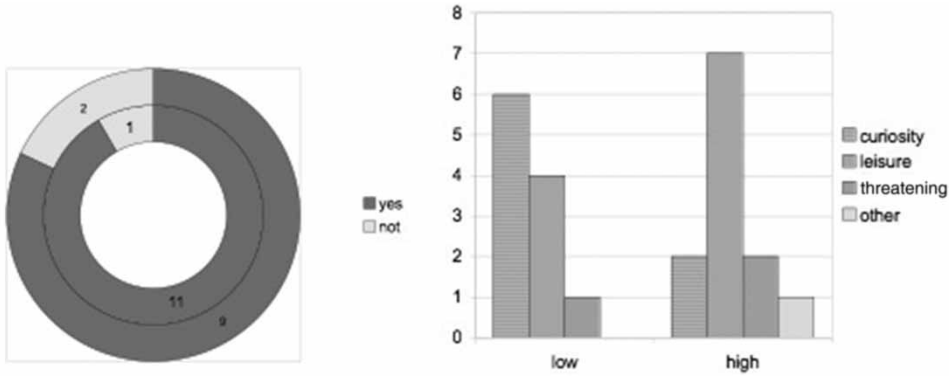


Figure 4: Online interactions with the "other" community and aims of the interaction. (Answer to Q9)

questions excluding Q13, the "high" class, which is composed of respondents with a greater amount of time spent on the Internet and a more diversified complexity in the experience of usage, tend to "strongly agree" more often than the class "low." In this group of questions, the higher users have more positive expectations than the lower users. In addition, we can see from the next graph in Figure 4 that there is a slight difference between the high and low class.

Comparing how both classes answer the questions related to the dimension of bonding social capital, we can see that the difference between the opinions of the two classes does not diverge as we saw in the answers related to the dimension of bridging.

As we can see from Figure 5, for question Q19, respondents who belonged to the "low" class tended to agree more than the "high" class that the Internet is helping young people to be more included in society. In the "high" class, there were more people who neither disagreed nor agreed and people who disagreed, factors that imply a more skeptical opinion compared to the "low" class.

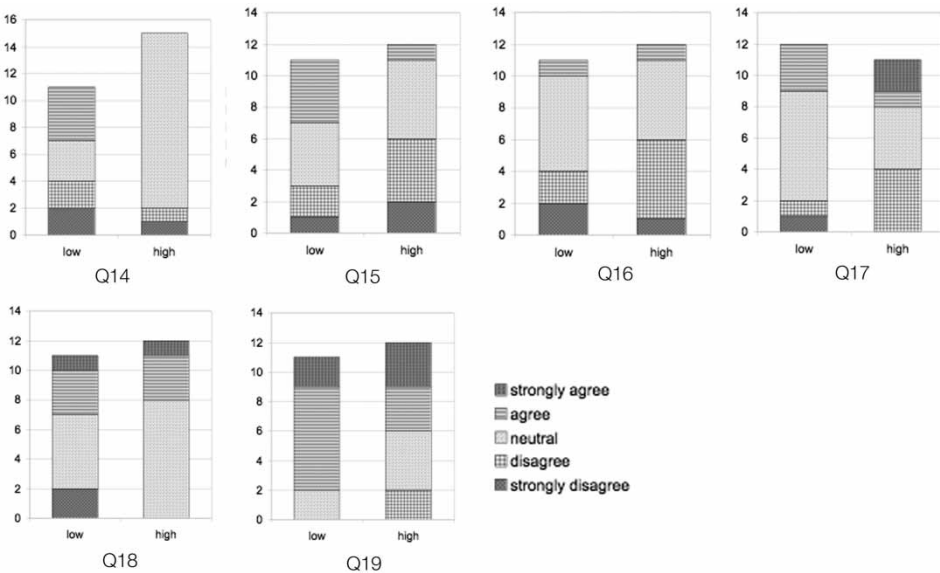


Figure 5: Relation between expectations about bonding social capital and Internet usage.

Conclusion

This paper wants to provide a view of the influence of the Internet on social capital and inclusion among young people living in highly segregated areas of Belfast. With that aim, we asked for the collaboration of a local umbrella organization that is working with this target population and, after an initial interview with its community workers who are in constant interaction with those young people, we distributed a questionnaire to them.

According to the expectations of the community workers, the Internet is having a positive impact on the dimension of bridging social capital. In particular, it is broadening young people's social horizons and fostering curiosity about cultural differences in addition to opening up new opportunities for increasing knowledge about the "other" community, which could offer a chance to defy segregation.

The expectations are different for the bonding dimension. In fact, community workers think that the Internet is not influencing strong ties among the young people they work with. Moreover, they believe that the Internet is helping young people to be more included in the society, particularly because youngsters are improving their personal capacity and social networks using the Internet.

In this research we approached Belfast as a post-conflict, divided city, with a special focus on social capital theory. As with other divided cities, it is characterized by several urban diseases and by a fractured society. Considering that the Internet can have an impact on social capital and, therefore, on inter- and intra-community relationships, it is worth analyzing how this technology is influencing the status of these cities. From our findings, we had indications that the Internet is positively influencing social capital and social exclusion in our context, at least in part. This result, aside from giving us a glimpse of hope, shows that ICTs are currently having an impact on divided cities. As we have seen from the literature review, this impact can be analyzed under different lenses that can lead to opposite results, for which reason further studies are needed for a better understanding.

In the second part of this paper, we considered the criticism regarding the work of Reilly (2012). In particular, after noting that low technological skills of respondents could lead them to have a skeptical opinion about the potential of ICTs to reconfigure socio-spatial relations, we asked our interviewees how they use the Internet with the aim to observe if there is any possible correlation between different Internet use and expectations. Thus, we divided the respondents into two classes based on their Internet use and we compared the expectations of the "high" to those of the "low" class. The results show that the expectations of the "high" class tend to have a more positive attitude about the impact of the Internet on bridging social capital, but there is not a substantial difference comparing expectations about bonding social capital and inclusion.

Nevertheless, these results show some limitations because the differences in Internet use among the respondents were very slight.

Notes

1. The members of the Protestant community are descended from settlers from England and Scotland who wish to preserve the political union with Britain. Conversely, Irish nationalists seek to abolish the border with the Irish Republic and establish a single unified Irish state. The two sides fought a decades-long civil war which resulted in around 3,000 deaths. The conflict ended with the Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, which established a power-sharing executive made up of repre-

sentatives of both communities to govern Northern Ireland, and an agreement that any future change in the status of the province would be by popular vote only.

2. Sunstein's conception of the term refers to greater interaction between like-minded individuals, which results in polarization

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