

**THE USE OF AN INTERNET CAFÉ AND SOCIAL CAPITAL
IN A LOCAL COMMUNITY
- A Preliminary Report -**

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1. BACKGROUND

This report presents a study on the relationship between the use of an Internet Café and social capital in a local community. Following Putnam, social capital is defined as "features of social organization such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation" (1995a: 66).

The general research question is: To what extent can the use of an Internet Café create social capital in a local community? In more detail: Does the use of an IT-Café lead to more social contacts? How can it provide community members with support and trust and generate solidarity? Who are the users of the Café and what is it used for?

1.1 The Community

The studied Café is located in the suburban community of Skarpnäck, Sweden. The community consists of two sub-areas called Skarpnäcksfältet and Skarpa By. The former area mainly contains rented flats; the latter of flats or houses, which are owned by the residents. The community is physically separated from the rest of the urban area. There was no underground connection until 1994. The area has been stigmatised in the media where it often has been described as being 'problematic'.

* Centre for Research and Development in Learning Technology

According to data from the Research and Statistic Office (Utrednings- och statistikkontoret - USK, 2000), the population is around 8600 with a preponderance of young people. (34% of the population are under 19 years old and 8% over 65¹.) There is a relatively low middle income compared to the rest of the urban area and a considerable mobility. (In 1999, residents aged 20-64 had a middle income of 178,000 SEK p.a. versus 205,200 SEK in the rest of Stockholm. In 1997, 1324 residents moved into the community and 1421 moved out.)

Possibly as a result of the high proportion of students in the community, the educational levels are rather high. (Among residents aged 25-64¹, 19% have elementary school as their highest educational level, 42% secondary school, and 37% have a university degree. 44% of the residents in the whole of Stockholm had a university degree.) The local area has a high percentage of residents with a foreign background (28%²), and single parents (28% of all households with children³), groups generally identified as being at high risk of social exclusion.

The housing area was built in the 1980s and is well planned in terms of architecture. No other newly built Stockholm suburb has been as well planned as Skarpnäck. The area was built as a contrast to the so-called "Million Programme"⁴, with its suburbs being criticised for being monotonous and large-scale. It was now important to create attractive suburbs characterised by diversity and identity. The aim with Skarpnäck was therefore to build a cohesive small-scale area with a sense of community and local identity. This was, for instance, to be accomplished through the creation of inner-yards as natural meeting-places within each block of flats. There is an avenue in the middle of the community with shops, restaurants and other local services, including the Culture House, which contains a library, a cinema and the Internet Café.

¹ In 1999

¹ In 1999

² In 2000

³ In 1998

⁴ The post-war period in Sweden was characterised by a lack of accommodation. In order to prevent this the Swedish Parliament decided in 1965 to start the large-scale project of the 'Million Programme'. The aim was to build 100 000 new households every year during a 10-year period, which was also accomplished. Many of the areas built during this time are characterised by the size and the speed in which they were built (Fogelstrom, 1996).

1.2 The Internet Café

The Internet Café was officially opened in April 2000. At this time there had been several threats to local services, e.g. citizen services had been closed down and the Culture House itself was thought of to be in danger of being closed. The residents, through citizen groups, requested more meeting-places and proposed the opening of an IT-Café. Their pleas were listened to and the Café was opened and sponsored by a combination of the local council, the two main housing associations and an Internet provider.

The full-time staff of the IT-Café consists of a single person: the IT-manager, a network technician living in the area with a background as a youth carer. The Café is open daily (mainly afternoons) from Monday to Friday as well as one evening a week. Visitors to the IT-Café are offered access to computers and to the Internet with support from the IT-manager.

1.2.1 Aims of the Internet Café

The Internet Café provides subsidised access to computers and to the Internet. The prices are low: 10 SEK (£ 0.70) for half an hour, 20 SEK (£ 1.40) for an hour and 100 SEK (£ 7.50) for a monthly card, which gives unlimited access during the opening hours of the Café (with a maximum 1 hour if the Café is full). In addition to using computers, the Café provides a meeting-point where people get the opportunity to meet face-to-face. It was initially hoped that an ‘ordinary’ café would open next-door to the IT-Café to cater both its visitors and other people not necessarily interested in C&IT. This has, however, not been accomplished.

On the web site of the Internet Café the following aims are stated (<http://itcafeet.cjb.net>):

“To increase the knowledge within the new media and to create a place where people, old and young and with different nationalities, can meet and in that way increase communication between people in the area.” (translated by S. Ferlander)

The aim of the Internet Café is hence to increase interest in and knowledge in the new media of communication and information technology (C&IT). This is accomplished through help and support from the IT-manager. The Café also offers a variety of computing courses, for example Word and Internet courses for beginners. In addition, an evening course in the creation of web pages (Front Page) has recently been offered. Furthermore, by provision of a local meeting-place, the Café aims to increase communication in the area, especially between different groups in the community that may not naturally meet and communicate with each other, such as different age and different ethnicity groups.

The Café is making a determined effort to attract groups that might otherwise be excluded from the Information Society, e.g. elderly people and people with a foreign background. It does this through offering computer courses and organising special events for different groups and interests. Several computer courses have been aimed at elderly people, so called 'senior courses'. The IT-manager also tries to reach a variety of visitors through inviting different associations to make use of the Café, such as immigrant-, youth- and pensioner associations. One result of this has been that a Spanish-speaking group meets weekly in the Café, making use of its computers.

1.2.2. Community Portraits

In addition to the courses and special events, the Café has been involved in an international project with the University of Stirling, Scotland, called "Community Portraits". The project is designed to use the Internet to engage members of local communities in developing their own view of their local areas and to compare them with other groups in another country (Timms, 1999). The aim is to increase local knowledge and identity as well as to increase social networks trans-nationally. The project has been piloted among a group of Café-users in the Swedish community, which has resulted in a web site concerning the local area created by the residents themselves. For further information about the outcome see

<http://www.itcafeet.com/skottland/skottland.htm>.

2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the Internet Café has used mixed methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative. In-depth interviews have been carried out with the IT-manager at the beginning of the project as well as about a year later. The researcher has also attended several meetings regarding the Internet Café as well as conducting observational studies in the Café. Focus groups with Café users will be conducted early in 2002.

Postal questionnaires have been sent out to about 90 visitors who at some point have bought membership cards. About 35 questionnaires have been returned and will shortly be analysed. Questionnaires have also been put in the Café for visitors to fill in. The analysis of these questionnaires in conjunction with the qualitative research conducted is the focus of the present report.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Sample Description

The questionnaires in the Café have been filled in by 62 visitors. Comparison with statistics from USK (2000) suggests that the respondents who have filled in the Café questionnaires are generally representative of the overall characteristics of the area's population.

	IT-Café Sample (%)	Population (%)
Age		
12 - 25	29	33 ⁵
35 - 64	55	38
65 -	29	11
Occupation		
Students	17	na ⁶
Employed	32	72 ⁷
Unemployed	13	2
Pensioners	42	na
Gender		
Female	60	52
Male	40	48
Handicapped		
	7	7 ⁸
Educational Level⁹		
Elementary School	23	19
Secondary School	36	42
University	42	37
Ethnicity		
Residents with Foreign background	27	28
N=	62	300 (Source: USK, 2000)

Table 2: Demographic Factors in the Sample versus the Population (%).

The age of all respondents varies between 12 and 80. Almost a third of them (29%) are under 34 years (cf. 33% in the population) and about a half (52%) is between 35 and 64 years (cf. 38% in the population). The Café sample has more old people than the population as a whole: almost a third (29%) is over 65 years in the sample versus a tenth (11%) in the population. The high level of elderly visitors may be a result of the determined effort to attract elderly people through senior courses in computing. Another group that is more prominent in the Café sample than in the population as a whole are the unemployed (13% vs. 2%). Like with the elderly people it may be assumed that the Café is also attractive to the unemployed as a way of 'passing the time' and learning new skills.

⁵ Age 13 - 25

⁶ Not available in the USK data

⁷ Age 20 - 64 (USK, 1999)

⁸ Early retirement or disablement pension (USK, 1999)

⁹ (USK, 1999)

60 percent of all respondents are female (cf. 52% in the population). In line with the population data, 7 percent of the sample has some kind of handicap. The educational levels among the Café respondents seem to be rather representative of the area: 23 percent of the Café sample have elementary school as their highest educational level (cf. 19% in the population), 36 percent secondary school (cf. 42% in the population) and 42 percent have a university degree (cf. 37% in the population).

Ethnicity among the Café respondents is also in accord with the population figures: about a fourth in the Café sample (27%) and in the population (28%) have a foreign background. 25 percent of the Café sample has a foreign mother tongue; 25 percent has a mother with a foreign mother tongue; 30 percent have a father with a foreign mother tongue. Some of the visitor's mother languages are Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, Romany, Russian, Estonian, Danish, Persian, Pakistani (Urduc) and Finnish. Three quarters of the respondents with foreign background (76%) are females.

The Manager's Description of the Variety of Visitors

The variety of visitors in the Internet Café, evidenced in the survey, is supported by the IT-manager who believes the visitors to be representative of the area. He has noted a variety of age groups in the Café and a recent increase in young visitors. There is also a large number of pensioners using the Café, again partly due to the popular senior courses provided in computing. The manager states that about half of the visitors are men and half women. Initially, it was believed that there would be a majority of male visitors, but this has turned out not to be the case.

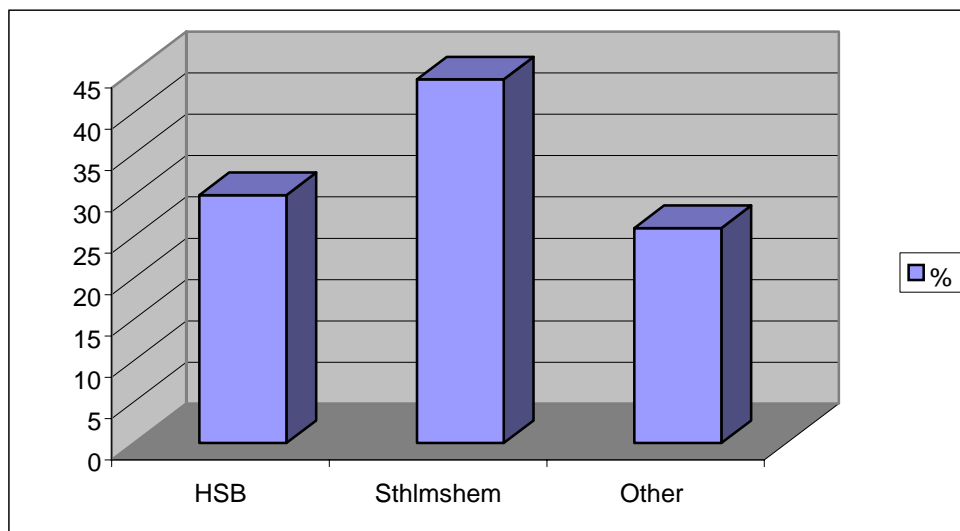
A category not as represented, as initially intended, is physically handicapped people. According to the IT-manager this may be due to the Café not being very 'handicapped friendly'. There are, however, several visitors with mental handicaps, who, according to the manager, seem to appreciate the IT-support offered by the Café. The manager also points out that Café also has many visitors of foreign background. In contrast to the questionnaire data presented above, he states that most of the visitors of foreign background are men.

In general, the manager believes that the Café has an important role to play in enhancing social capital in Skarpnäck. The variety of visitors can reinforce social integration in the area creating new contacts and bridges between different groups:

“I feel a bit touched when I see a youngster helping an elderly person or when an immigrant asks straight out in the room about the spelling of a word. These things happen in the Café. I definitely think that the Café integrates people. I also think it can lead to new contacts, at least superficial ones. People might meet here in the Café, perhaps talk, and later say 'hi' to each other out on the street” (the IT-manager, 2001).

3.1.1 Housing

More than three-quarters of the respondents (77%) live in the local community of Skarpnäck. Most of them (92%) live in ‘Skarpnäcksfältet.’ About one-fifth of the respondents live in the nearby areas of Bagarmossen (16%) or Kärrtorp (3%).



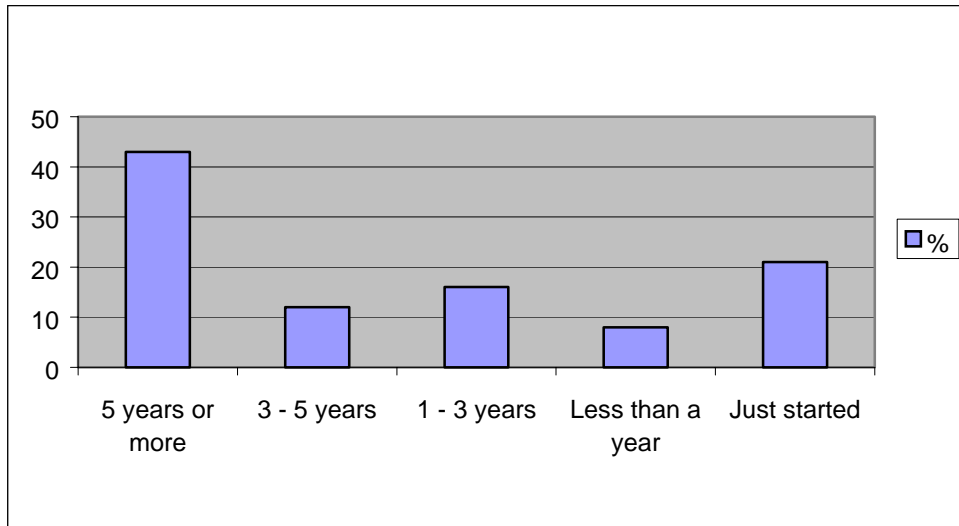
N = 57

Table 1: Housing Companies (%).

The majority of the sample (60%) live in rented flats; about one-third (29%) live in flats, which they own. About one-tenths of the respondents (11%) live in houses. Almost half of the sample (44%) rent their flats from "Stockholmshem", the main

housing company in the area; about a third (30%) have bought their flats from "HSB". Examples of other housing companies are "Svenska Bostäder", "Riksbyggen" and "SKB". The first housing company is a provider of rental flats and the two latter provide flats for purchase.

3.1.2 Computer Experience



N = 61

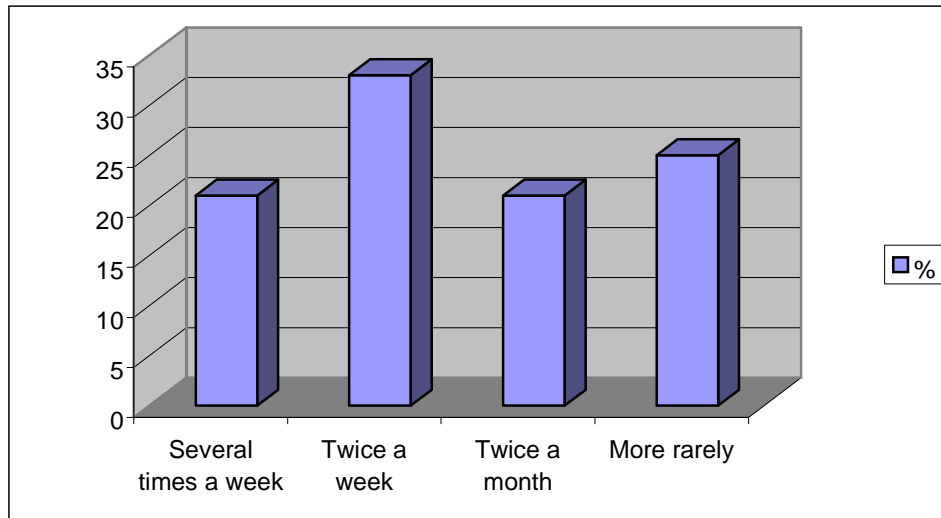
Table 3: Computer Experience (%)

The computer experience is relatively high among the sample: 43 percent have used a computer for five years or longer. In contrast to this group, almost a third of the respondents (30%) have little previous experience of computers (less than one year or just started). Perhaps surprisingly, almost two-thirds of the Internet Café sample (63%) has a computer at home.

There is no relation between computer experience and the demographic factors such as ethnicity, gender, or occupation. Young respondents, however, seem to be slightly more experienced in using computers than old ones. There is also an insignificant positive correlation between computer experience and educational level.

3.2 IT-Café Usage

3.2.1 Frequency of Visits to The IT-Café

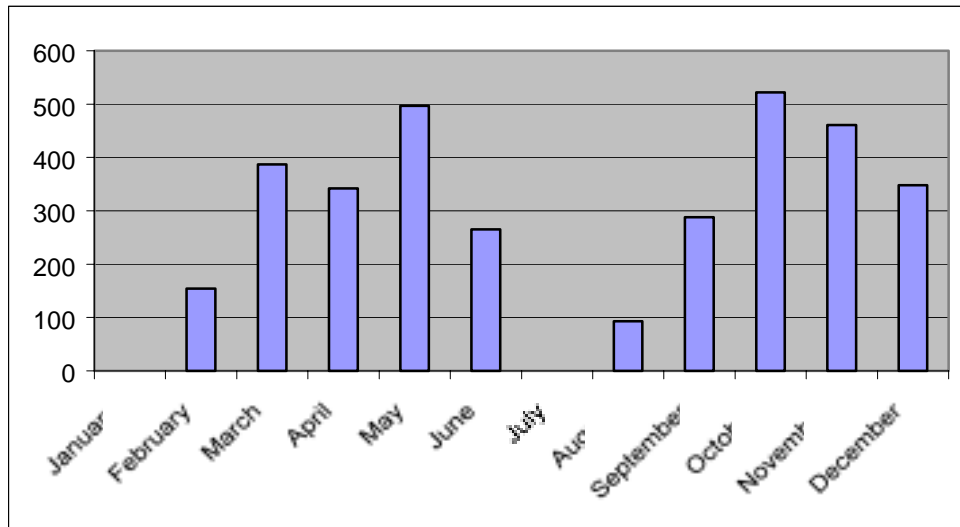


N = 52

Table 5: Frequency of visits to the Café (%).

Most respondents (33%) visit the Café about twice a week. About one-fifth (21%) goes to the Café even more often than that: several times a week. The same about of the sample (21%) visit the Café about twice a month and one-fourth (25%) more rarely than that. One-fourth of the respondents (25%) who replied to the questionnaire are first time visitors, which probably is related to the fact that the same amount of visitors state that they use the Café more rarely than twice a month. One-third of the sample has been to the Café between two and ten times (32% 2-5 times; 34% 6-10 times). 16 percent of the respondents have visited the Café more than ten times.

The Manager's View on Frequency of Visits to the IT-Café



N = 3357

Table 7: Numbers of Visits per Month in 2000

Source: Internet Café (Cullgert, 2000)

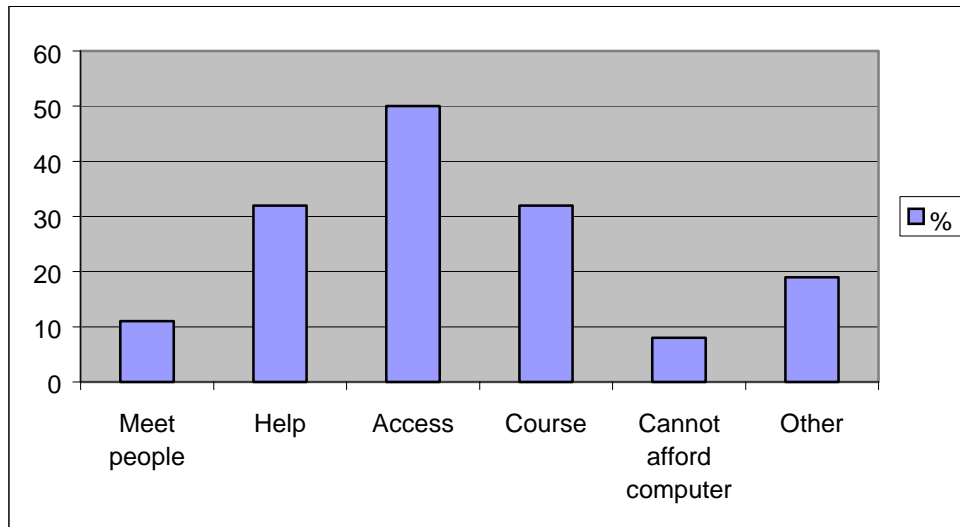
The manager has since its opening conducted monthly statistics on the number of visits to the Café. The Café was officially opened in April 2000, but had visitors coming from February. The Café was closed for summer from July 1 until August 18. October was the most visited month in 2000 with 522 visitors. From its official opening in April, the Café has had an average of 389 visitors per month (excluding July and August when the Café was closed most of the time).

Since only one person works in the Café, it is closed when the manager is ill, takes care of ill children or attends meetings. It is also closed when there are computing courses in the Café. In total, the Café was open 161 days (mainly afternoons from 1 pm to 5 pm) last year, which gives an average of 21 visitors per day. The target of the Café to have an average of 20 visitors a day is hence being accomplished. The managers points out that some days there are 40 visitors and others less than 20.

Despite the reached aims in terms of users, the manager would like to see an increase in visits. He thinks it could be accomplished through increased marketing of the Café, which so far has been fairly moderate. The only marketing conducted is information sheets handed out in the underground. Most of the marketing of the Café has occurred

through the spoken word between people. However, information sheets will shortly be delivered to all residents in the area.

3.2.2 Reasons for Visits to the IT-Café



N= 62

Table 8: Reasons for the Visits (%)

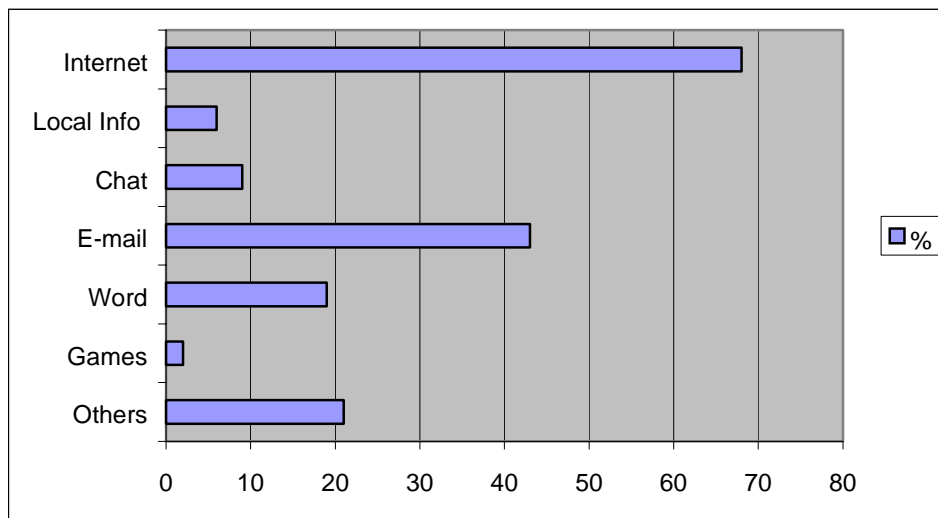
The most common reason stated for visiting the Café is, not surprisingly, getting access to a computer. Receiving help and support as well as attending computer courses (32% each) are other common reasons for the respondents' visits. About one-tenth go to the Café in order to meet people (11%) or because they cannot afford to buy a computer (8%). Almost a fifth of the respondents (19%) have stated other reasons like getting access to the Internet (11% of the sample) and taking part in the Spanish association (5%). The rest of respondents (5%) have mentioned either the good prices, applying for jobs or doing homework as reasons for their visits.

Many female and elderly respondents use the Café in order to get help and support. More visitors with a secondary school degree than with a university degree claim to go to the Café for support. In relation to gender, claim to visit the Café because they cannot afford to buy a computer. Meeting people and taking courses seem to be more common reasons among male respondents. Most respondents attending computer courses tend to be over 50 years and have elementary school as their highest educational level.

The Manager's View on Reasons for Visits to the IT- Café

As evidenced in the survey, visitors to the Café provide many different reasons for their visits. The IT-manager remarks that in addition to the rather obvious reason of getting access to computers, people also go there to receive help, e.g. with printing, scanning and emailing. Many visitors with computers at home go to the Café to get help and advice about their own computers. The manager thinks many people come to the Café because they feel a sense of security there. In his opinion, some people also want privacy, which they might not get at home. The social aspect seems to be another reason for visiting the Café. Many users have told the manager “they think it is more fun to go to the Café where things happen and they can meet other people”. The manager says that many visitors want to talk. For example, some pensioners return after computer courses only to chat to the manager, making no use of the computers.

3.3 Computer Usage in the IT-Café



N = 53

Table 10: Computer Usage (%)

Surfing on the Internet is the most common usage among the respondents (68%). Sending emails (43%) and word-processing (19%) are other popular activities. Searching for local information is not very common with only 6 percent of the respondents doing that. One-tenths (9%) of the respondents chat with people on the Internet when they are in the Café. According to the survey data, playing games is the least popular activity in the Café with very few respondents (2%) claiming to do so.

Usage patterns in the Café seem to be slightly associated with gender and age. Women tend to use email and word more than men do, while men tend to surf on the Internet more. More young respondents surf the Internet than older ones, who instead seem to use word-processing more.

The Manager's View on Computer Usage among Different Groups

The IT-manager believes there is a clear connection between patterns of usage and demographic factors. He points out that many young people play games, chat and download mobile phone signals and icons. The latter is rather recent, but very popular activity among youngsters. Gender differences among youngsters have also been noticed: male visitors tend to play games and surf the Internet without any specific aims; females generally prefer a more specific computer usage, such as email and private chat groups where they can create their own personal layout and be more intimate.

The IT-manager has observed that elderly people like to use email and use word-processing, e.g. writing for an association they belong to. He also declares that many visitors of foreign background tend to search for information about their home countries, for example through national newspapers. An increase in such activity has been noticed during problematic times. For instance, recently there have been many Afghans searching for information about the war in their country. Finally, the manager discusses the rather low interest in local information and communication. In his view, the reason is the lack of good web sites containing local information and communication services. The level of usage would, according to him, be much higher if there were such sites available. The manager stresses the importance of local web sites concerning and run by the community members themselves.

3.4 Social Capital in the Local Community

A number of questions in the survey of Café users are concerned with the elements of social capital in the local area, including community identity, aspects of trust and beliefs about social integration.

Café-visitors (2001)	7.1	N = 62
Non-visitors (1999)	5.4	N = 90
Non-visitors (1997)	5.4	N = 250 (USK)
Non-visitors (1993)	5.1	N = 250 (USK)

Table 12: Sense of Local Identity (x)

Using a scale from 0 (no sense of local identity) to 10 (high sense of local identity), which have been used in earlier studies of Swedish communities (USK, 1993, 1997), the results show an average of 7 on the identity scale among the IT-café respondents. This indicates is a considerably higher sense of local identity among the Internet Café users than among non-visitors. Whether the Café has increased the sense of identity with the community or if people with a strong sense of local identity tend to visit the Café is difficult to determine.

	IT-Café Visitors	Non-Visitors
Satisfaction with Meeting-places	26	26
Dissatisfaction with Meeting-places	35	39
Strong Social Cohesion	29	24
Weak Social Cohesion	33	31
Much Tension Groups	19	39
Little Tension Between Groups	37	25
General Trust in Other People	16	19
No Trust in Other People	47	66
Trust in Politicians	20	17
No Trust in Politicians	53	58

N = 62 90

Table 13: Social Capital in the Community (%)

The data indicate a rather low level of social capital in the community among the IT-Café respondents. Although there seem to be little social capital in the Café sample, the level is higher than among non-visitors, especially in relation to their attitudes towards tension between different groups in the area. 39 percent of the non-visitors think there is tension between different groups in the area compared to only 19 percent among the Café respondents. 25 percent of the non-visitors versus 37 percent of the Café sample do not think that there is much tension in the community. Almost half of those in the Café sample who think tension exists (47%) cite Swedes and immigrants as the main groups involved; 33 percent pronounce that there is tension between older and younger residents. Like in the case with local identity, it is difficult to determine if the Café has decreased tension between different groups or if people who do not think there is tension tend to visit the Café.

Slightly more among the Café sample compared to non-visitors are satisfied with meeting-places in the area and with the level of social cohesion. Just over a third of the respondents (35%) think that there are not enough meeting places for the residents (cf. 39% among non-visitors). About a fourth (26%) in both groups, visitors and non-visitors, think there are enough local meeting-places. 39 percent of the Café respondents think there is pretty strong social cohesion in the area; 33 percent think it is pretty weak (cf. 24% vs. 31% among the non-visitors).

There is not much difference between visitors and non-visitors of the Café in terms of trust. There seems to be a relatively high level of general distrust among both groups. Most of them have little trust in others and believe they have little influence in decision-making. However, visitors seem to have a slightly higher level of trust compared to non-visitors. Almost half in the Café sample (47%) agree with the statement “these days you do not really know whom to trust”; 16 percent disagree (cf. 66% and 19% among non-visitors). More than half of the respondents (53%) agree with the statement that there is “no point in writing to officials since they are rarely interested in the problems of the average person”; one-fifth (20%) disagrees (cf. 58% and 17% among non-visitors).

Men within the Café sample seem to be more satisfied with the amount of local meeting-places than women. Women, however, think there is less tension between different groups in the area than men do. Women, elderly people and visitors with Swedish parentage tend to trust other people more than men, younger visitors and visitors with a foreign background.

3.4.1 Local versus Global Social Capital

Most respondents claim to be in receipt of informal social support. Questions were asked about the availability of support if the respondent were to be sick, to want company, to need to talk about personal problems, to have to borrow 500 SEK (£35) or to need help with baby-sitting. Only 5 percent of the Café-respondents know nobody who would provide those kinds of support. In general, respondents get slightly more support from people outside the local community than from within it (65% non-locally vs. 51% locally). The one exception to this rule is baby-sitting in the Café sample, where more support is believed to be available locally (50% non-locally vs. 60% locally).

	Café-Users	Non-Users
Locally	2.3	1.5
Non-locally	5.5	6.3

Table: Number of Friends (x)

As with informal support, most Café respondents claim to have most of their close friends outside the local community (an average of 2.3 locally vs. 5.5 non-locally). Non-visitors seem to have fewer friends locally and more friends non-locally than visitors (an average of 1.5 locally vs. 6.6 non-locally). According to these results, users seem to have more friends in the local community than non-users.

As with the amount of friends and social support, most spare time activities seem to be performed outside the local community. The majority of both the users and non-users state that they attend courses and study circles, go to the theatre, cinema,

concerts, exhibitions, nightclubs, discos, parties, cafes, restaurants and pubs outside the local community. However, many respondents visit the local library as well as attend meetings, debates and lectures in the local area. Most Café respondents also, of course, visit the IT-Café in the community.

3.5 Attitudes towards the IT-Café

Almost every respondent in the survey (98%) is positive towards the Café. More than three-quarters of the sample (76%) are *very* positive. Nobody is negative. This indicates that there are no differences between different groups in relation to the attitudes towards the Café.

In the open survey questions, most respondents cite the staff (i.e. the IT-manager) as the reason for their positive attitudes. They feel very welcomed and receive considerable support and help from the IT-manager who is regarded as calm, friendly and helpful. The Café is also seen as a social meeting-point for different groups (e.g. different age groups) as well as for people with similar interests (e.g. Spanish-speaking visitors).

Other important aspects in relation to the positive attitudes are the low price and access to C&IT. Several respondents have mentioned the availability of computers, the fast connection, and the easy accessibility both to C&IT and to the Café itself (with it being locally based) as positive aspects.

Moreover, the calm and quiet atmosphere in the Café is brought up by many respondents. Some have stated that they are satisfied with the room in terms of size and tidiness. On the other hand, others have complained about the small size of the room and the poor working environment in the Café, specifically regarding lightning and ventilation. There is a demand for more courses, which seem to be very appreciated, as well as for longer opening hours, e.g. at weekends and more evenings. Finally, many respondents have stressed the importance of the Internet Café in the community in terms of social inclusion. Some examples of their statements are:

"Important initiative!" "It is crucial since everyone cannot afford to have a computer at home", "It is absolutely necessary", "It gives everyone the possibility to deal with and use computers."

3.5.1 Expectations of the IT-Café in terms of Social Capital

	IT-Café	Skarpnet (Local Net ¹⁰)
More Contacts	69	27
More Participation	69	33
Decreased Isolation	66	42
Decreased Tension between groups	40	22
Stronger Cohesion	48	33
Increased Local Identity	67	42
Increased Trust	53	28
Increased Support	41	26
Increased IT-Interest & Knowledge	95	80
More attractive Housing-Area	80	58
N =	62	87

Table 13: Expectations of the IT-Café versus the Local Net in terms of Social Capital (%)

Most respondents believe that the Café will lead to an increase in social capital. In comparisons with expectations of the Local Net in the area, which were rather high, the expectations of the IT-Café are even higher. More than two-thirds of the Café respondents (69%) believe the Café will lead to more contacts and to more participation; few do not think so (8% vs. 2%). One third of the Local Net sample think the Local Net will increase social contacts (33%) and about one fourth increased participation (26%) in the area. Two-thirds (66%) expect the Café to decrease isolation of residents (cf. 42% in relation to the Local Net).

¹⁰ In 1998, in a conscious effort to improve social capital and the image of the community, the main housing company in the area (Stockholmshem) proposed the development of a local net. A local net is a computer network dealing with local issued and based within a particular area. People are generally offered access to it from home. Tenants in the local area were offered subsidised access to the network from home as well as from public access points, e.g. the Internet Café. The local net was to provide local and global information and communication services with access to the local net as well as to the Internet and e-mail. The project does not exist any more due to financial and technological difficulties.

About half of the Café sample (48%) thinks the Café will increase social cohesion in the area (cf. 33% of the Local Net sample); 8 percent do not think so. Two-thirds of the respondents agree with the statement that local identity will be increased by the Café; only 2 percent disagree. 42 percent among the Local Net respondents think the Local Net will increase local identity. Most respondents think that trust and social support will be positively affected by the Internet Café (53% and 41%); few (8% and 17%) disagree with the statements. One-fourth of the Local Net sample think trust (28%) and support (26%) will be increased in the local community by the Local Net. The vast majority (80%) agrees with the declaration that the Internet Café will make the housing area more attractive (cf. 58% in the Local Net sample); few disagree (4%). Almost every respondent (95%) thinks that the Café will increase interest in and knowledge of computers. Many (80%) think the same about the Local Net project.

The Manager's Thoughts on the IT-Café in terms of Social Capital

In confirmation of the survey results, the IT-manager also believes that the Café can increase social capital in the area. He thinks that social contacts can be increased. The average of 20 visitors a day creates meetings, which leads to people recognise and saying 'hello' to each other outside the Café. At the same time, the manager thinks social cohesion in the area is already high. He says that it is difficult to be anonymous in the area. Many people know each other, which the manager has noticed through high levels of communication between residents, e.g. on the streets and in food stores.

The manager also discusses tension in the community, especially between young and old residents. He says that the media has presented a negative picture of the area, which has influenced many people's perceptions negatively, especially people outside the area and elderly people within the area. For example, many pensioners are scared of youngsters in the community. One specific example of this is a recent fight between youngsters, which ended up in a shooting. After that, the manager noticed increased anxiety among the elderly Café users. They planned to organise a meeting through their pensioner association in relation to the incident. The manager of the Café arranged for representatives from the youth association to attend the meeting, which resulted in a positive dialogue between the two age groups.

Although the manager thinks the media picture of the local community is more negative than the reality, he acknowledges that some local residents do regard the area as problematic as described by the media. The manager himself also believes there to be some problems in the area, especially on the avenue where many youngster and pub guests hang about. Nevertheless, he believes that most residents like living in the area and that many other suburban areas have similar kind of problems. The manager does not think the IT-Café has made the area more attractive, but says that many people seem to be impressed by the fact of having an Internet Café in a suburban area.

In relation to trust, the manager perceives it generally to be high in the area. He has, however, acknowledged some levels of distrust between different immigrant groups and Swedes. He has also noticed a difference between people living in rented flats and in flats they own. In his opinion, there is less trust among neighbours living in rented flats, e.g. due to cultural clashes. The manager does not think the Café will affect trust in the area very much. Nonetheless, he says that meetings involving members from different groups in the Café may have a positive affect on trust.

Within the IT-Café itself the manager reports that there seem to be high levels of trust and visitors appear to have confidence in the manager. He also says that the only thing that has been stolen is a mobile phone that was forgotten in the Café. The thief was found by the manager and the owner got her mobile back quickly. People generally leave their bags and jackets if they leave the room for a while. If anyone forgets to pay they tend to do it at the next visit. The manager believes that some visitors are concerned about their privacy and bothered about the fact that the computers are relatively close to each other. The majority, on the other hand, seems to have no problem to work on personal things in the public space of the Café.

According to the manager, the residents, and especially youngsters, seem to feel a strong sense of identity with the area. The manager, himself, feels a sense of belonging to the community. He thinks that local identity and social capital can be created by the use of C&IT:

"I think IT can do a lot with the right instruments. I believe in a Local Net since it can create meetings in the area. The good thing with IT is that one can be anonymous and not judge anyone due to gender, ethnicity etc. There are no prejudices online. Through online communication people might realise that they should meet face-to-face, and if they live in the same area that can create really cool meetings, e.g. between an immigrant and a racist. When they eventually meet they cannot say: 'What – is it you? Get lost!'" (the IT-manager, 2001)

The manager assumes that a Local Net (see footnote on page 19 about Local Nets) and an IT-Café in are good things to gather around, to teach and help each other and to create new meetings. He argues that an Internet Café is socially very beneficial, due to its face-to-face aspect, but at the same time he points out that home access, which often is offered within a Local Net project, is very comfortable, private and flexible. One can do whatever one wants at any time.