THE INTERNET, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with the extent to which the use of information and communication technology can (re-)create social capital and local community in an urban environment. Will the new technologies lead to new forms of social inclusion or to the creation of a digital divide? How have social networks, social support, trust and sense of community been affected by the rapid development of the Internet? In the literature there is disagreement between writers who see the technology as a new basis for social inclusion, social capital and community (e.g. Wellman, 1997; Rheingold, 2000; Lin, 2001) and others who see it as a threat, leading to new forms of exclusion and a decline in face-to-face contacts (e.g. Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995). A combination of qualitative and quantitative data from a study in a relatively disadvantaged area of Stockholm is used to evaluate the impact of two computer projects, a Local Net and an Internet Café. Each of the projects was aimed at encouraging digital inclusion and at enhancing social contacts and the sense of community. The findings show that Local Net largely failed to achieve its goals and was abandoned two years after its inauguration. In its place an Internet Café was established, which seems to be achieving many of the goals that were set out in its prospectus. Visitors to the Café, who include many representatives of disadvantaged groups, have acquired useful computer skills. The IT-Café, with is provision of subsidised public access, informal support and training, makes its visitors feel more included in the Information Society as well as in the wider society. The visitors also have more local friends, express less social distrust, perceive less tension between different groups and feel much stronger sense of local identity than non-visitors. Most visitors regard the Internet Café as an offline as well as online meeting-place with positive impacts on social integration, and Internet use is associated with networking, exchange of support and information seeking.

Key words: community, digital inclusion, disadvantaged areas, the Internet, Internet Cafés, Local Nets, social capital, social networks, social support, and trust.

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I look back at my PhD as a fun, interesting and challenging part of my life. However, I have also gone through very difficult moments on a personal scale during this time. I have tragically lost dearly loved ones, had severe illnesses in the family and been involved in a traumatic traffic accident. These moments have made me further realise the importance of my family and friends – my social capital. The Internet has been an invaluable tool during these years. Being in Scotland, it enabled regular contact and exchange of support with my ties back in Sweden and vice versa. A great example is when I was on holiday in Mexico and my mum was in hospital, two months after her stroke. I sent her emails from Internet Cafés in remote places all over Mexico. My mum replied from the computer training sessions, as part of her rehabilitation, at a hospital in Stockholm.

I want to start by expressing my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Duncan Timms, for his generous advice and for his friendship. Although being thoroughly involved in various important duties, he always found the time for fruitful discussions, reading innumerable drafts and giving me invaluable suggestions. I also appreciate that he encouraged me to present my work at several international conferences. Without Duncan, I would not have started nor completed this thesis. I also would like to thank Liz Timms, Edinburgh University, for many inspiring discussions about community, online and offline, and for being a friend.

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To Åsa

- my mum, role model
and biggest supporter

ETT IT-CAFÉ

Ett IT-café
Är en bra idé
Som blev gjord
Till ord
Och till handling
Varpå förvandling
Skedde på en enslig ort
Som smort
Gick sedan
Integrering
Och redan
Känner många varann
Ångest försvann
Vissa till och med fann
Varandra
Och andra
lärde sig veta
dock vad grannarna heta
och även att samarbeta
och att sluta slåss
och så lite om själva datorn
förstås
Och om nätet
Och litet förmätet
Om världen därute
Som från Skarpnäck
Öppnats
För oss

Åsa Freij 11.3.02

AN IT-CAFÉ

An IT-Café
Is a great idea
That was made
Into words
And into action
After which change
Occurred in a lonely place
Like clockwork
Happened then
Integration
And already
Many knew one another
Agony disappeared
Some even found
Each other
And others
Learnt to know
The names of the neighbours
And even to co-operate
And to stop fighting
And also a bit about the computer itself
Of course
And about the Net
And a bit bolder
About the world out there
Which from Skarpnäck
Has opened
For us

Åsa Freij 11.3.02
(IT-Café user, 2002)

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

1.2 Research Aims

1.3 Research Setting

1.4 Research Design

1.5 Importance of Research

1.6 Structure of Thesis

1.1 BACKGROUND

For over a century sociologists have pondered the effects of changes in the technology of communication on community. The beginning of the twentieth century was characterised by a concern for a loss of community thought to result from rapid industrial and urban industrial growth (e.g. Tönnies, 1887; Durkheim, 1893). Nineteenth and early twentieth century writers were concerned with the possible impact of the telegraph (Standage, 1999) and the telephone (Fischer, 1992).

The beginning of the twenty-first century has been characterised by a concern for a loss of community resulting from the rapid growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (e.g. Meyrowitz, 1985). Contemporary writers have adopted either an utopian view seeing technology as the basis for the enhancement of community and social capital (e.g. Wellman et al, 2002) or a dystopian perspective, viewing ICT as leading to an even more fragmented society (e.g. Stoll, 1995).

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this research is to investigate how the use of ICT influences social capital (social networks, social support and trust) and the sense of local community in urban areas. The study focuses on the effects of computer use on people's access to the local community as well as to the wider society. Avoiding a division between online and offline environments, the research studies social capital online as well as offline, including different forms of networks: formal and informal, weak and strong, local and global ties. The impact of ICT on social capital and community is also examined on micro, meso and macro levels.

Initially the aim was to undertake a cross-cultural study evaluating two computer projects, one in Sweden and one in Scotland. However, due to slow progress and internal problems in the Scottish project[1], the focus changed to become an in-depth case study of two ICT-projects in a multi-cultural suburban area in Sweden, both of which aimed to increase social capital.

Sweden was chosen as the location of the study for several reasons. The country is usually referred to as having very high levels of social capital (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995, Putnam, 2002). Sweden is also one of the world's leading ICT countries (e.g. Townley, 2000) with an active Governmental policy on digital inclusion. The aim is to create *An Information Society for All* (Government Bill, 1999/2000). Three quarters of the households in Sweden have access to a computer at home and two thirds have Internet access at home (MMS, November 2002). However, there is also an obvious, and increasing, segregation - residential, social and ethnical – in Stockholm, including many poorer multi-cultural suburban areas (USK, 2003). It is therefore important to study the use of ICT and levels of social capital in disadvantaged urban areas in Sweden. The choice was also made out of convenience, as I, the researcher, am Swedish and obviously have a good knowledge of the language as well as the culture.

The study aims to assess the results of a number of specific interventions in the local housing area: a Local Net[2] sponsored by a housing company and an Internet Café sponsored by the local authority. The study thus has policy-related aims, but it also examines theoretical issues relating to the Internet, community and social capital. The basic question addressed in the research is:

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[1] The Scottish project and the research conducted on it are described in appendix I.
[2] A Local Net is a computer network located in physically based communities, dealing with local issues. Subsidised home access tends to be provided to the local network and to the Internet.

To what extent can the use of information and communication technology (re-)create social capital and a sense of local community in an urban environment?

1.3 RESEARCH SETTING

The research question has been investigated through the evaluation of two computer projects, a Local Net and an Internet Café, based in a local community called Skarpnäck.

1.3.1 The Local Community

Skarpnäck, a suburban area a few kilometres south of Stockholm City centre, forms the basis of the research setting. The area consists of two sub-areas called Skarpnäcksfältet and Skarpa By. The former mainly contains rented flats, the latter flats or houses owned by the residents[3].

Picture 1: The Avenue in Skarpnäck.

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[3] There is a big difference in status, with the owned flats high in status.

Skarpnäck was built in the 1980s and has been said to be well planned in terms of architecture and physical layout. Fogelström (1996) argues that no other newly built Stockholm suburb has been as well planned as Skarpnäck. The area was built as a reaction to the estates and suburbs created in the so-called 'Million Programme'[4], which has been criticised for creating monotonous and large-scale housing areas. Following the completion of the Million Programme, attention switched to the creation of attractive suburbs characterised by diversity and a sense of identity.

Skarpnäck was therefore designed to be a cohesive small-scale area, with a sense of community and local identity. Physically this aim was to be accomplished through the creation of inneryards as natural meeting-places within each block of flats and by a mixture of housing types. There is an avenue in the middle of Skarpnäck with shops, restaurants and other local services, including the Culture House, which contains a library, a cinema and since 2000 an Internet Café.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the planners, Skarpnäck can be described as physically separated, or 'spatially excluded' (Kronear, 1998), from the rest of the urban area. For example, there was no Underground connection until 1994. Skarpnäck has also been stigmatised in the media, where it has several times been described as 'problematic'. Bengtsson (1999) describes the area in *Dagens Nyheter*, one of the main newspapers in Sweden, as follows:

> Skarpnäck was to be the new suburb where one had learnt from
>
> mistakes from older suburban areas. However, reductions in

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[4] The post-war period in Sweden was characterised by a lack of accommodation. To remedy this the Swedish Parliament decided in 1965 to start the large-scale project called the 'Million Programme'. The aim was to build 100 000 new houses, every year during a 10-year period, which was accomplished. Many of the areas built during this time are characterised by their size and the speed at which they were built (Fogelström, 1996).

services, poor parking spaces etc. are mentioned as possible

reasons for increased bad conditions and criminality…

Skarpnäck is the vision that crashed. The social problems are

immense and people are fleeing the area. Still, Skarpnäck is

probably only at the beginning of its descent… Today criminality

is also a big problem. Of all suburbs Skarpnäck had the highest

number of reported crimes per inhabitants in 1996-1997…

Nowhere else is the gap between Swedes and foreign citizens as

big as in Skarpnäck (p. 3).

The description of Skarpnäck in the media is similar to that given to other stigmatised areas in Western cities, reflecting a tendency to stereotype. Ristilammi (1994) notes that in many cities suburban areas acquire a reputation based on social problems, criminality, poverty and a concentration of immigrants. According to data from the Swedish Research and Statistics Office, USK, (Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000), many residents of Skarpnäck share the negative perception of the area, expressing dissatisfaction with local safety and order, such as graffiti, vandalism, theft, burglary and violence. In the 1997 USK Report (Ivarsson, 1997), Skarpnäck had the highest percentage of respondents complaining about theft and burglaries of all 24 areas analysed.

Demographic Characteristics

According to USK data (2000), the population of Skarpnäck at the time of the study was around 8600, living in *c.* 3400 households. There is a preponderance of young people. A third the population (34%) is under 19 years old with only 8% being over 65 years[5]. The

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[5] In 1999

income level is relatively low compared to the rest of the urban area and there is considerable mobility. In 1999, the median income was 178,000 SEK[6] (cf. 205,200 SEK in the rest of Stockholm). In 1997, 1324 residents moved into the community and 1421 moved out. Ivarsson (1990; 1993; 1997; 2000) points out that the high rate of turnover is a particular feature and that many residents have lived in the area for a short period of time.

Possibly as a result of the high proportion of students living in the area, the educational levels appear relatively high, at least by British standards. A fifth of adults (19%) have elementary school as their highest educational level, 42% secondary school, and 37% have a university degree[7] (cf. 44% of the residents in the whole of Stockholm). Skarpnäck has a high percentage of residents with a foreign background (28% are foreign citizens born abroad or in Sweden or foreign-born Swedish citizens) and single parents (28% of all households with children[8]), groups generally identified as being at high risk of social exclusion (Starrin et al, 2001).

1.3.2 The Local Net

In 1997, in a conscious effort to improve social cohesion and the image of Skarpnäck, the main housing company proposed the development of a computer project designed to provide access to local facilities and communications and to address the issue of digital inclusion: a Local Net called Skarpnet. Skarpnet was one of the first Local Nets in Sweden and received considerable attention in the media, with positive reports on TV, radio and some newspaper articles.

The Aims of Skarpnet

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[6] Residents aged 25-64
[7] Residents aged 25-64 in 1999
[8] In 1998

The promotional pages state that the overall goal of Skarpnet was to increase social

inclusion, especially with reference to disadvantaged groups, such as immigrants, the

unemployed and single-parent families. The project also aimed to improve the reputation of

the area and increase social cohesion and social integration. As expressed by the Skarpnet

manager (a senior officer at the housing company):

> In Skarpnäck, there are many neighbours who meet on the stairs
>
> without talking to each other. The aim with the project is to get
>
> people engaged with one another, getting to know each other as
>
> way of creating integration.

Another part of the vision was that Skarpnet would simplify participation and everyday life

for the residents, through the provision of online access to local (and global) information and

communication services. Information and communication were to be enhanced in a simple

way on a local Web site enabling residents to learn more about their area and what services

were available.
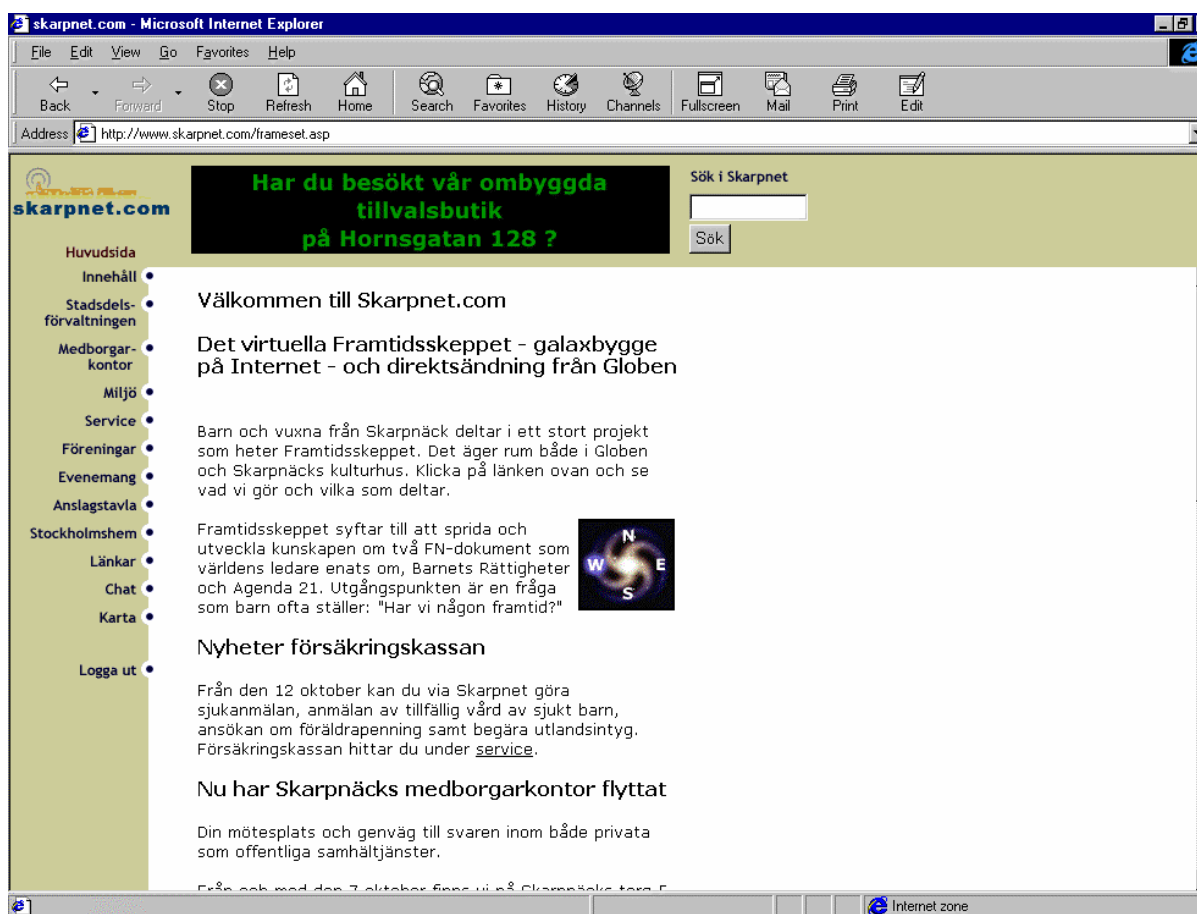
Picture 2: The Home Page of Skarpnet

Information could be found about local events, such as theatre and football fixtures, and about various services and agencies in the area, such as the police, the regional social insurance office, banks, post offices, schools and childcare facilities. The home page was a 'news page' containing local information. It was designed to show what had happened and was going to happen in Skarpnäck.

In addition to information, it was planned to make it possible to contact most services in the area through e-mail and to enable residents to chat online with local politicians. The intention was also to create local interest groups online, for example in relation to cooking or sports. The plan envisaged that residents with common interests, ideas and thoughts would create discussion groups, and would provide support services to each other.

Skarpnet was also intended to offer booking services for such facilities as the dentist, doctor, hairdresser and the communal laundry rooms (a big issue in Sweden and often the cause of arguments between neighbours). It was planned to make it possible to buy groceries from one or more local stores through the Local Net. Other services that the project manager planned to provide were distance education programmes and a web journal and an online newspaper, where the residents could give their own views of the area.

Technology and Management

The aim of Skarpnet was to enable everybody to be connected to the Local Net at home. An alternative for people without computers at home was to rent a low cost Net Computer (NC), a precursor of the set-top boxes now used by digital broadcasters. The NC was designed to be user-friendly, simple to use and maintain, which makes it particularly appropriate for networks in which many users have little or no previous experience of computers (Booth, 1998). At the time, the NC was something completely new in terms of technology and had never been tried in a natural field situation. There was one NC in the library and another in the community centre. The Local Net itself was based on a high-speed Telia Internet Cable network, which already existed in the area. Download speeds of 2Mbits per second were achievable, much faster than ordinary connections over the phone lines. Another advantage was that the telephone was not engaged when surfing. These features were unusual at the beginning of the project, in 1998.

As the purpose was to include the whole area, the project aimed to make surfing on Skarpnet as cheap and simple as possible. However, at the beginning, the price for surfing on Skarpnet was set at a fixed price of 395 SEK (*c.* £30) per month with an additional price of 20 öre per minute. It was soon realised that these prices were too high. As a result, an Intranet was created in the beginning of 1999, where users could surf for free. As long as they stayed on

the Local Net the service was free of charge. If users wanted to go outside Skarpnet and access the Internet it could be done for the same price as other users, the cost of a local telephone call. The monthly cost was also decreased from 395 SEK to 200 SEK, but a one-off fee of 1495 SEK was added instead.

The housing company tried to persuade the other housing companies in Skarpnäck to join the project, using the same technology. As first, there was considerable interest, but the interest cooled with time and they later signed a contract with a different operator. Instead of joining the Skarpnet project using cable and modem, the other housing companies chose ADSL broadband, a technology that came later and was cheaper. This meant that the project could not involve the whole area, but only the residents of the main housing company, effectively sabotaging the notion that it could be inclusive.

Access to the site was controlled through passwords and it was only the residents in a limited number of blocks and people with passwords who had access to the Local Net. When surfing the residents were anonymous, but the Webmaster (the Skarpnet manager) could obtain some personal data about users via their passwords and postings were monitored. In that way, he could keep track of people and the content of the messages, for example monitoring users who reported faults and booked the laundry room in order to prevent fake bookings and reports. A number of rules were laid down, including prohibitions on postings judged to be racist or pornographic, which had to be observed by users. In addition, and more controversially, users had to write in Swedish. Those who did not follow the rules, which were sent out to them together with the passwords, were suspended.

The Local Net reflected a community-building perspective and was intended to have a bottom-up approach. It was recognised that the creation of a successful Local Net requires the participation of all groups in the area. To help meet this goal a 'reference group' was

established, designed to be as representative of the area as possible, and scheduled to hold regular meetings. Among those represented in the group were the local council, the Culture House, the police, various voluntary associations, such as the environmental association, the sports club, the 'crime prevention' group and the tenants' association, as well as three tenants (including one who was visually disabled). The meetings turned out to be not as regular as had been hoped.

Two volunteers living in the area were also appointed as 'ambassadors' to demonstrate the Local Net system and provide general help to users. They were also expected to create an interest in ICT and recruit new users to Skarpnet and in that way try to include all residents, increasing the digital inclusion in the area. The aim was to appoint one in each apartment block. As far as can be ascertained, however, no more than two ambassadors were ever appointed.

Skarpnet was mainly run by a single enthusiast, the Skarpnet manager who was based at the housing company. Telia, the cable-TV provider in the area, and the local council became involved in the project, but in a largely passive fashion. In addition, several organisations and funding bodies, including the city council, expressed great interest in the project, but no funding was provided, which eventually led to financial problems. However, in line with the general ideology of the community networking movement, it was planned that the network would eventually be run by the community members themselves. The Skarpnet manager stressed the importance of such an approach if a Local Net was to be successful:

> We as a housing company should definitely not run a Local Net.
> It is not our role in society. It may be too much directed towards
> the interest of the housing company. It should be in the residents'
> interest.

According to the manager, the idea was that once the scheme was up and running the responsibility for the Local Net would be transferred to the local council and would have one or more persons employed to run it. The post would create an opportunity for unemployed young people to get involved in ICT. In addition, it was hoped that pupils at one of the local schools would be taught how to produce web sites. The Local Net would become part of the education in the school. The manager also wanted residents in general to support each other in terms of the Local Net: the whole idea was built upon 'self-help'. He thought the residents could help each other with the technology. For example, young computer-experienced residents could help older residents, which would encourage social integration in Skarpnäck.

The Inauguration and Demise of Skarpnet

Skarpnet went online in August 1998. In the first stage of the project 234 households were offered a free home connection to the local network by the housing company. These households were chosen as test areas or pilots. In the event only one-fifth (46 households) took up the offer and got connected to the Local Net. The pilot was to be run until May 2000. Public authorities and the majority of local industry were connected during the autumn of 1998. Skarpnet was to be financed by companies advertising on the network.

The aim was to expand the Net to include all tenants of the housing company, 1200 households in the area, and then to include the whole community of 3400 households. This depended on the involvement of the other housing companies in Skarpnäck. These ambitions failed to be achieved and by the end of 1999 there were about 200 households, all tenants of the main housing company, connected to the Local Net.

The initial enthusiasm and general optimism about the Local Net proved to be misplaced. Problems arose in terms of finance and management and in relation to the technology. According to the Skarpnet manager, it was difficult to get other people and sponsors involved. Many people and potential partners were enthusiastic at first, but in the end nobody wanted to help out or be part of the project. The manager argues that when it came to money or the commitment of time the interest weakened. It had been intended to finance the project through commercial adverts, but no companies ever advertised on the Local Net, partly due to little usage of it, which made it even more difficult to involve others in the project as well as to attract new users. The situation did not improve as the person involved in the project from the city council left without being replaced. In the end the housing company - and in reality a single manager - was left alone with all the work and the cost of the Local Net.

In addition to lack of partners and financial support, several technological problems also affected Skarpnet. The Internet provider Telia was not able to maintain the promised standards, which resulted in irritation among users. The booking system for the laundry rooms did not work properly, most of the other forms of booking never materialised and the NCs were delayed, which meant that the testing could not get started. At the end of the project, in order to include as many users as possible, the restriction on access to the Local Net, which required a specific password was eventually lifted. The Intranet-based Local Net was replaced by more general Internet access with the Local Net being available to all. According to the manager:

> Today we should never have started with an internal Intranet, but
> that was the only possible solution at the time. Today when there
> is a fixed cost and one can surf as much as one likes, the idea
> falls totally. When you work with the Internet there is no need of

an Intranet and you can include anyone despite what system they

use.

As result of the slow take-up and the problems mentioned, it was decided to close Skarpnet at the end of 2000. Although Skarpnet itself disappeared as a separate project, the interest it had aroused resulted in a further development. Phoenix-like, an Internet Café, supported by the city council, emerged from the remnants of the Local Net.

1.3.3 The Internet Café

The Internet Café was officially opened in April 2000. At this time there had been several threats to local services. For example the citizens' office had been closed down and the Culture House, which according to Ivarsson (1997) was very popular in the area, was thought to be in danger of being closed. Ivarsson points out that of all the Stockholm areas analysed, Skarpnäck had the most residents (70%) requesting more local services. The respondents were disappointed with local services, such as banks, health services, shops and commercial businesses, and with the lack of public meeting-places.

The residents, through citizens' groups, requested more meeting-places and proposed the opening of an Internet Café. Their pleas were listened to and the Internet 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 Café consists of a single person: the IT-manager (here referred to as the Café-Manager) who is a network technician living in the area with a background as a youth worker. The Café is open daily from Monday to Friday as well as one evening a week. Visitors to the Café are offered access to computers and the Internet, with, if needed, IT-support and help from the manager. The Café also offers several computer courses for its visitors, including one specially designed for elderly users.

The Internet Café offers 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 membership card, which gives unlimited access during the opening hours of the Café (with a maximum of one hour if the Café is full). The equipment consists of 13 computers, two printers (one colour and one black and white), a scanner, a fax, a digital camera and a computer projector. In addition to computers and other equipment, the Café provides a place where residents get the opportunity to meet face-to-face. There is a small coffee area in the Café where the users can chat.

The Aims of the Internet Cafe

Several of the stated aims of the Internet Café are similar to those that characterised Skarpnet. The Internet Café has a specific focus on digital inclusion, encouraging social contacts and enhancing social integration in the area, with special reference to disadvantaged groups. The Café aims to create a sense of local community in the area. On the web site of the Café the following aims are stated (www.itcafeet.com):

> To increase knowledge about the new media and to create a place where people, old and young and from different nationalities, can meet and in that way increase communication between people in the area.

The prime aim of the Internet Café is to increase digital inclusion: interest and knowledge of the new media of ICT. The enhancement of IT-skills is accomplished through help and IT-support from the IT-manager. The Café also offers a variety of computing courses, for example word-processing and Internet courses for beginners.

The Café is making a determined effort to attract groups that might otherwise be excluded from the Information Society, such as elderly people and people with a foreign background. It does this through offering computer courses and organising special events for different groups and interests. For instance, several computer courses have been aimed at elderly people, so called 'senior courses'. The Café 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.

Finally, in addition to encouraging digital and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups online, the Café also functions as a local meeting-place, providing an opportunity for increased communication in the area. Part of the rationale of the Café is that it can bring together groups in the community that may not otherwise naturally meet and communicate, such as different age groups and people from different ethnic groups.

Community Portraits

One of the courses offered in the Internet Café was based on the Community Portraits project developed in the University of Stirling at CRDLT[9]. Community Portraits was originally designed as a medium for developing online collaboration between social workers in different countries. According to the course leader (Timms, 1999), the rationale for the three main aspects of the Internet-based version of Community Portraits is:

- The community as a context for welfare practice,
- Collaboration as a method for working and learning,
- The Internet as an enabler of collaboration/collaborative learning.

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[9] Centre for Research Development and Learning Technology.

Community Portraits was designed to be an exercise in (virtual) community building, using online collaboration among groups of people who had not previously met but who came together in order to produce a 'portrait' of their (real) communities. The aim is to enable people to learn about community through exploring their own local community, sharing the work with others on as well as offline. The participants work together in groups to explore their own community and at the same time compare it with other communities: working within as well as between communities, using the Internet. Community Portraits requires people to work collaboratively in small groups to promote a comparative portrait of their communities. The goal is to present a portrait online.

Two pilots of the programme were run, one involving groups of professional health and welfare workers in Finland (Lapland), Scotland (the Highlands) and Germany (Stuttgart) in the spring of 1999 and the other involving residents of Skarpnäck and Coatbridge in Scotland in 2001. The Skarpnäck participants were recruited through the Internet Café; the Scottish participants through a local community development project. Initial interest seemed high in both sites but, in the event, only three participants from Skarpnäck, none of whom was employed, completed the programme. Others who had been interested, all either students or in full-time employment, stated that the demands of the online activity were simply too great. One of the aims of the pilots was to investigate whether the approach used could form the basis of a credit-bearing unit but participants in the trials had no reward other than the chance to meet others online, to share perspectives and to produce a portrait of the communities in which they lived.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design contains two elements based upon the two computer projects described above. The first element is an evaluation of the Local Net project in 1999 focussing on its

impact on digital inclusion, social capital and local community. The analysis aims to identify typical users and usage of the network (such as social/asocial and local/global activities) as well as perceptions of it (attitudes, expectations, problems and usage patterns). As the Local Net project did not work out as anticipated, *actual* users and usage could not be investigated. The focus was instead placed upon *potential* users and usage of the networks as well as *expectations* of it.

A major aim of this part of the study is to evaluate how social capital and sense of community were affected by the Local Net. This is examined through questions about social networks, social support, trust and sense of local community. It had been intended to make a comparison between those who were connected and those who were not connected to the network, but as the Local Net was hardly used, this was not possible. Instead, the first part of the empirical study provides a description of the extent of social capital and sense of community in the area in 1999, enabling a comparison to be made before and after the opening of the Internet Café, which includes the next research element.

Secondly, the role of Internet Cafe is examined, enabling a comparison of home users (i.e. the Local Net users) with those making use of a public access point. The use of public access points enables an evaluation to be made of the way in which social contacts may be affected by the fact that users can meet face-to-face as well as online. As in the Local Net study, the aim is to evaluate the Internet Café's success in reaching is goals in terms of digital inclusion, social capital and sense of local community. The Café is examined in terms of visitors and usage of the Café as well as perceptions of it. Additionally, social capital (social networks, social support and trust) online and offline as well as local community are investigated. This second element also enables comparison to be made between the extent of social capital and community spirit before and after the opening of the Internet Café. Data

produced in this Café study is compared with that produced two years earlier in connection with the Local Net project.

The investigation of the IT-Café also includes the observation of online collaboration in the online course Community Portraits developed in CRDLT at the University of Stirling. As it proved difficult to recruit Scottish participants to the project, it came to include only residents in the Swedish community. This empirical study, however, enabled further observation of online collaboration, as an important part of social capital and community.

In sum, the research aims to evaluate two computer projects in the Swedish suburban area. The Local Net and the IT-Café (including Community Portraits) are evaluated in order to ascertain their effectiveness in the fulfilment of their goals to increase social capital and digital inclusion in the local community of Skarpnäck.

1.5 IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

There are several reasons why this research is important. The first is the rapid expansion of ICT and the emergence of the Information Society. As the use of ICT is expanding rapidly, it is important to study its effects on people and their relationships. In the literature, it has been argued that technological changes in post-industrial society have considerable potential for changing the way in which community and social capital are created and maintained.

There is a vast amount of literature on the topic. Most studies have dealt with the creation of community on the Internet (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; 2000; Smith & Kollock, 1998). The current research differs from studies of 'virtual communities' that look only at relationships online, but also from more traditional sociological studies of physical communities (e.g. Jacobs, 1961; Crow & Allan, 1994). It is important to investigate the combination of online and offline connections and communities.

Second, little research has been conducted on technology use in disadvantaged communities. The few studies, which have been conducted on ICT in local communities, tend to involve middle-class areas (e.g. Hampton, 2001). According to the literature (e.g. Fong et al, 2001), it is important to focus on deprived areas as many groups in them may be excluded from the Information Society, leading to an increased digital divide. The Internet could be a way of including these groups in the local area (and the wider society), but could also create differentiation between the information-rich and the information-poor. It could thus create both threats and opportunities regarding social capital and community: new forms of exclusion or inclusion.

It is also the case that not much research on social capital in general has been conducted in disadvantaged areas. Despite this, the theoretical importance of social capital for local communities, especially for deprived ones, is stressed throughout the literature (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Healy, 2001; Woolcook, 2001). The most important question to examine, according to Putnam (at the Social Capital Conference 2001), is the relationship between social capital and the increase in number of multicultural areas. What happens when people from different countries are supposed to share values and norms and work for a common good? In these circumstances, the question is whether social capital can be facilitated through the use of technology.

Fourth, as it has been argued that social capital is important, in decline and unevenly distributed (Putnam, 2000; 2003), it is essential to look at the creation of social capital and the potential role in this of ICT. This point is stressed by Glaeser (2001), who argues that the weakness of much of the existing research and theory in the field is that too much attention has being paid to the consequences of social capital, and too little to its causes. In order to

change the level of social capital, research about its formation is needed. The investigation of the use of the Internet as a potential source of social capital is therefore crucial.

Finally, the research is unusual since it a case study using mixed methods. Previous studies, with the exception of Hampton's research on Netville (2001), about the effect of the use of ICTs on social capital have relied totally on survey research (e.g. Cole, 2000; Nie & Erbring, 2000; Raine, 2000). The current study incorporates a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods. In addition, instead of analysing a sample of Internet users from the general population (Cole, 2000; Raine 2000), or limiting it solely to new or inexperienced users (Kraut et al, 1998; Nie & Erbring, 2000), this study focuses on a case study, including experienced as well as in-experienced computer users. The study aims to evaluate a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The introduction describes the background and the aims of the thesis. The research aims to investigate the impacts of information and communication technology on social capital and local community in an urban area. The chapter then describes the research setting where the research aim is investigated: two computer projects, a Local Net and an Internet Café, in a relatively deprived suburban area outside of Stockholm called Skarpnäck. The introduction chapter finally describes the research design and importance of the study.

The introduction is followed by a literature review. Relevant literature relating to the main themes of the study is referenced within the chapters, covering the concepts of community and social capital in relation to the use of the Internet. Literature on the topic is being published at an increasing rate, including a vast amount of speculation and assumptions. As the research aim is partly theoretical, the chapters aim to clarify the complexity surrounding the concepts as well as the relationship between them. The chapters present both main theories and previous work on the topic, acting as a basis for the methodology chapter, including the research questions.

The first chapter in the literature review deals with the term community. The chapter starts by describing the sociological background of the concept, paying particular attention to the classical theories by Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893). Community is a commonly used term, but also one of the most complex within the social sciences. It has been defined in many ways. The chapter provides a description of general definitions of the concept as well as a synthetic definition, including two significant elements: sense of community and social networks. Two basic forms of community are delineated: local community and community of interest. Then, three views on the state of community in contemporary society are discussed: Community Lost, Community Saved and Community Liberated (Wellman, 1979). Finally,

contemporary approaches to community are reviewed: new communitarianism (e.g. Etzioni, 1993), social inclusion (e.g. Starrin et al, 2001) and symbolic interactionism (e.g. Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969), focusing on disadvantaged and stigmatised communities.

The second theoretical chapter deals with social capital, which has become one of the most salient concepts within the social sciences during the last couple of decades and has tended to overshadow the concept of community. The relationship between the two terms, social capital and community, is discussed. Social capital is a complex concept, including several dimensions: sociological (e.g. Coleman, 1988), economic (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995) and political dimensions (e.g. Putnam, 2000), and micro and macro levels. Despite the widespread attention the topic has received, there remains much confusion about the topic. The chapter provides general definitions of the concept as it has been used by some of its main proponents, such as Putnam (2000). This leads to a synthetic definition of the term, including the elements of social networks, social support and trust. Different forms of social networks are also reviewed: horizontal and vertical networks, formal and informal networks, strong and weak ties, and bonding and bridging networks. The final section of the chapter concerns extent, consequences and sources of social capital.

The final chapter in the literature review relates the two previous ones with the development of the Internet. The chapter starts by describing the background of the Internet, including the development of the Information Society and online communities, delineating two forms: local communities (or Local Nets) and communities of interest. The state of community in the Information Society is discussed as Community Lost, Community Saved or Community Liberated (Wellman, 1979). The next section concerns the digital divide: social inequalities in terms of ICT. The use of Local Nets, and computers in general, is discussed in relation to digital and social inclusion. Then, the literature on the Internet and social capital is reviewed,

examining how the use of ICT affects social networks, social support and trust. Finally, future research is discussed.

The methodology chapter starts by presenting the research objectives, which the impact of ICT on digital and social inclusion, social capital and local community. The general research question examined is: *To what extent can the use of information and communication technology (re-) create social capital and a sense of local community in an urban environment?* The chapter then describes the methodological approach and data collection methods, including sampling techniques chosen. The research question is investigated through a case study using mixed methods. The quantitative approach is based on a number of questionnaires; the qualitative is based on a combination of documentary research, participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Finally, language issues, analysis of data and methodological issues are discussed.

Following this, the findings and analysis of results are explored in chapters six to nine. Chapter six presents the findings of the Local Net evaluation in 1999, in terms of potential users, potential usage and perceptions (attitudes, expectations and problems) of the project. Chapter seven concerns the extent of social capital and the sense of community in the area, prior to the opening of the local Internet Café. The Internet Café, which opened in year 2000, is evaluated in terms of digital and social inclusion in chapter eight. The chapter includes a profile of the visitors to the IT-Café, usage and perceptions of it. The findings and results from the investigation of the Community Portraits project are also presented in the chapter. Chapter nine deals with the extent of social capital and sense of local community in Skarpnäck from year 2000, after the opening of the Internet Café. The impacts of the IT-Café on social networks, support, trust and community is examined online as well as offline.

The discussion chapter provides a synthesis of the findings and a discussion of their relevance in relation to the literature review. The chapter starts by presenting a summary of the main results. It then moves on to a discussion of the two computer projects in terms of digital and social inclusion, including a comparison of them. Reasons for failures respective success with the projects in reaching their goals are discussed. The following section concerns the social impacts of the Internet Café, as an online and offline meeting place, on the local community of Skarpnäck. The discussion then moves onto the creation and maintenance of social capital on the Internet, focusing on online communication and online information. The chapter moves on attempting to answer the research question, concluding that the Internet Café has positive effects on community building in the local area and that the Internet can be a great source for increasing people's social capital. Finally, suggestions for further research are considered.

A list of references and appendices is included at the end of the thesis. The appendices include a description of the Local Net project in Scotland and the research conducted there, questions and results from the two studies, the Local Net and the Internet Café, in Sweden and finally a list of publications.

The Internet, Social Capital and Local Community
Introduction

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PART I:

THEORETICAL ISSUES

Chapter 2: Community

Chapter 3: Social Capital

Chapter 4: The Internet,

Social Capital and Local Community

CHAPTER 2: Community

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Theoretical Background

2.3 Definitions of Community

2.4 Basic Forms of Community

2.5 The State of Community in Contemporary Society

2.6 Contemporary Approaches to Community

2.7 Summary

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim in this chapter is to review and discuss the concept of community. The first section is concerned with some of the classical approaches to community, paying particular attention to the work of Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893). The chapter then presents general definitions of community extant within the literature. Following this a synthesised definition is given providing a foundation for the research to be presented later. Two significant elements in the definition of community, one structural and one cognitive, are stressed: social networks and a sense of community. Two basic forms of community are delineated: local community and community of interest.

The chapter then considers the state of community in contemporary society. Three perspectives are presented: Community Lost, Community Saved and Community Liberated (Wellman, 1979). The final section concerns the relevance of community in contemporary society, through the presentation of a number of recent approaches to the community, including new communitarianism, social inclusion/exclusion and symbolic interactionism.

2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of community has been a major concern of sociological research since the beginning of the discipline. The industrial revolution was associated with technological changes and urbanisation. The concept of community was introduced, at least partly, as a means of expressing anxiety about the social effects of industrialisation (Nisbet, 1967). A preoccupation of the 'founding fathers' of sociology was with the effects of the radical changes accompanying industrialisation on community. The work of Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893) is particularly relevant to the present discussion.

2.2.1 Tönnies' Theory of Community

The concept of community was given prominence by Tönnies (1887), who emphasised the impact of modernisation and the degeneration of traditional social structure on the nature of community. He regarded urban industrial society as a contrast with, rather than a continuation of, the past. The differences between pre-industrial and urban industrial societies gave rise to two types of social relations or dichotomies: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* - often translated as community and society.

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

Gemeinschaft can be translated as 'community', but the German word has richer connotations than the English, suggesting moral unity, rootedness, intimacy and kinship (Broom & Selznick, 1973). The pre-industrial Gemeinschaft community is homogeneous with social conformity as the norm. Tönnies (1957/1887) described Gemeinshaft relationships as local, cohesive, enduring, intimate and face-to-face:

> The Gemeinschaft of blood, denoting unity of being, is developed
> and differentiated into Gemeinschaft of locality, which is based on a
> common habitat. A further differentiation leads to the Gemeinschaft
> of mind, which implies co-operation and co-ordinated action for a
> common goal… All three types of Gemeinschaft are closely
> interrelated in space as well as in time (p. 42).

The spatial and temporal coincidence of kinship (Gemeinschaft of Blood), locality (Gemeinschaft of Place) and shared meanings (Gemeinschaft of Mind) create a strong sense of community. Tönnies argued that industrialisation would result in the destruction of Gemeinschaft and an increase of Gesellschaft relations.

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Gesellschaft is often translated as 'society' or 'association'. It refers to large-scale, impersonal and calculative relationships, which tend to be weak and non-kinship based. In Tönnies' model, the change from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft involves a change from the personal, the emotional and the traditional to the impersonal, the rational and the contractual. The two dichotomies of social relations are ideal types and Tönnies suggested that both could exist in rural as well as in urban settings. Gemeinschaft was, however, believed to be more common in rural areas. The rise of urban industrial society was related to an increase of Gesellschaft at the expense of Gemeinschaft interpreted as leading to a loss of community.

Loss of Community

The notion of a loss of community was central to Tönnies' (1887) work and reflects his general pessimism about the impact of modern society. He believed that many of the virtues and morality of the traditional community had disappeared as a result of the changes brought about by the process of industrialization and feared the breakdown of social order which the new social forces of Gesellschaft might cause. Tönnies (1957/1887) argued that the social classes would become segregated and people, in general, isolated from each other and from their communities:

> In the Gesellschaft… everybody is by himself and isolated, and
> there exists a condition of tension against others (p. 65).

Many theorists have been influenced by Tönnies' theory of loss of community (e.g. Wirth, 1938; Stein, 1964; Suttles, 1972). According to Sennet (1978), the rise of industrialisation was accompanied by the development of mass society: people became atomised and the social order was anomic. In *Urbanism as a Way of Life,* Wirth (1938) describes urban relations as large-scale, dense and heterogeneous, and the urban patterns of behaviour as

'impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental' (p. 12). According to him, the urban

life includes:

> … the substitution of secondary for primary contacts, the
>
> weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social
>
> significance of the family, the disappearance of the neighbourhood,
>
> and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity
>
> (Wirth, 1938: 20-21).

The loss of community was described as a decline in relations between kin and

neighbours, bounded by geography, tradition and solidarity. The latter element, solidarity,

was thoroughly investigated by Durkheim (1893) a few years after Tönnies's (1887)

initial formulation. Like Tönnies when investigating the effects of the industrialisation,

Durkheim introduced a dichotomy illustrating traditional versus modern social relations –

in terms of two forms of solidarity.

2.2.2 Durkheim's Forms of Solidarity

Durkheim was interested in what held society together. In his doctoral thesis, *The

Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim introduced a distinction between two

dimensions of solidarity: mechanical and organic solidarity. The former is based upon

similarities and shared location, the latter upon differences and shared interests.

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

To Durkheim (1893), pre-industrial society was integrated by mechanical solidarity,

characterised by a set of values common to the tribe. Mechanical solidarity is based upon

resemblance: individuals are alike, at least on some levels, and experience similar

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feelings. By sharing and reinforcing each other's feelings, a sense of commonality is developed. Under such circumstances, people could become subservient to the collective, and, to a certain extent, lose their own will. Hence the term mechanical solidarity (Österberg, 1991).

Durkheim (1893) believed that as society became more complex, through an increase in the division of labour, mechanical solidarity was replaced by a new kind of solidarity. Modern societies, he claimed, require the development of organic solidarity, in which values stress individuality. Specialised parts of society work together and people become mutually dependent on each other. Thus people are parts of a differentiated totality. The best analogy is represented by the organs of a body. Hence the label organic solidarity (Österberg, 1991).

Anomie and Anomia

A rapid transition from mechanical to organic solidarity could, according to Durkheim (1893), create a state of anomie. When social change is too fast for regulation of norms society can become anomic. Lack of regulation leads to a breakdown of control, a reduction in social trust, a collapse of norms and a weakening of social bonds. The anomic society is one characterised by normlessness, lawlessness, lack of structure and general mistrust.

The term anomie was further developed in Durkheim's study of *Suicide* (1897), where he looked beyond the individual act, exploring the social factors involved. Anomie was argued to be one of four causes of suicide. According to Durkheim, anomic suicide occurs increasingly in societies characterised by organic solidarity, especially at times of economic depression or economic boom. Without the regulations for appropriate behaviour, life becomes aimless and the individual is more prone to commit suicide.

At this point, anomie becomes almost a psychological state of disorder and meaninglessness. Based upon Durkheim's (1897) theory, Srole (1956) explored the psychological or individual aspects of anomie, which he termed anomia. He defines the concept of anomia as social malintegration and interpersonal alienation and develops a scale to measure different dimensions of the concept.

2.3 DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNITY

Community is still a central concept within the social sciences. It has especially been examined within sociology (e.g. Lee & Newby, 1983; Wellman, 1979; Etzioni, 1993; Crow & Allen, 1994), but also in disciplines, such as social anthropology (e.g. Cohen, 1993) and psychology (e.g. Orford, 1992; Markova, 1997).

2.3.1 General Definitions of Community

Community is one of the most elusive and vague terms in the social sciences and has been given many different meanings. Indeed, some scholars (e.g. Stacey, 1969) have argued that the term has so many meanings that it becomes almost meaningless. According to Hillery (1963): 'As an element in the sociological vocabulary, this term has been used in so many ways that it has been described as an omnibus word' (p. 779). Attempts to provide a specific definition of community have generated a vast amount of literature, but little agreement.

In a much-quoted attempt to assess the extent of agreement on the meaning of the term in sociological research, Hillery (1955) analyses the components of community used in 94 studies. He reports that the only component universally present is that community concerns people. There are, however, a number of other elements, which are included in to more than two-thirds of the studies analysed:

> … of the 94 definitions, 69 are in accord that social interaction,
>
> area, and a common tie or ties are commonly found in community
>
> life (ibid: 18).

In a more recent study, Poplin (1979) notes that the above elements were still present in 125 of the sociological definitions of community. These analyses, therefore, stress three main components comprising a community: area, common ties and social interaction.

Following these studies, it is here argued that community is based upon or created by *social interaction* or communication. However, as in the change from Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, it is maintained in the thesis that *area* is no longer a crucial element in the definition of community. The existence and recognition of *common ties,* as highlighted by Hillery (1955), is claimed to be the core element within the concept. In this research, this element is referred to as solidarity or a sense of community.

2.3.2 Synthesised Definition of Community

Based upon the general definitions in the classical and contemporary literature, this research regards a *sense of community* and *social networks* as defining elements of the concept of community. Hence, the term community refers to both structural and cognitive elements. Structural elements are related to behaviour and include social networks. Cognitive elements are related to values and include the *sense* of community.

Sense of Community

Solidarity, or a sense of community, is the core element in the definition of community adopted in this research. Solidarity has for long been a central element in the definition of community and has been stressed throughout the sociological literature (e.g. Parsons,

1951; Hillery, 1955; Broom & Selznick, 1973; Clarc, 1973; Lee & Newby, 1983; Etzioni, 1993). Parsons (quoted in Marshall, 1998) refers to community as a wide-ranging relationship of solidarity over a rather undefined area of life and interests. Österberg (1991) describes solidarity as relationships between people who acknowledge that they have something in common, that they consequently *feel* a sense of commonality and solidarity. Community is in this context closely related to terms such as social cohesion and sense of commonality.

Etzioni (1993) captures the essence of this approach in his description of community as the positive connotations of togetherness and community spirit. He defines community as 'webs of social relations that encompass shared meanings and above all shared values' (Etzioni, 1998: xiii). However, the term solidarity, associated with features like strong community spirit and shared meanings, has sometimes been criticised for being a romanticised view of community. Some writers (e.g. Puddifoot, 1995) associate it with the traditional view of community as a small and dense geographical area, as represented, for example, by a pre-industrial village. My opinion is that solidarity in contemporary communities does not have to be associated with elements typical for the traditional community, such as strongly shared values and ideas, but rather with a feeling of attachment to the community: a sense of community.

Many writers (e.g. Lee & Newby, 1983; Willmott 1986) continue to stress the importance of solidarity in contemporary society, emphasising the significance of identity, belonging and attachment. Beamish (1995), for example, argues people must feel and be conscious that they are part of a community in order for it to exist. Based upon this argument, it is in this research argued that for a community to exist members need to feel a sense of attachment to it. People have to acknowledge the area they live in for it to exist, if they deny the area it cannot be labelled a community.

As indicated by Hillery's study (1955), geographical area has for long been stressed when defining community and, still today, most people seem to understand community as people living together in a common locality, for example a village or neighbourhood. However, according to many recent writers (e.g. Wellman et al, 1988; Etzioni, 1993; 1998; Castells, 2001), including the present author, area is no longer a crucial component of a community. In this research, it is argued that the component of area need not be included in the definition of community. In the literature, there has recently been a shift from area to social networks in the definition of community (e.g. Wellman, 1997). Castells (2001) suggests that networks have replaced locality as the basis for sociability and common identity:

> So, people do not build their meaning in local societies, not because
> they do not have spatial roots, but because they select their
> relationships on the basis of their affinities… networks substitute
> for places as support of sociability both in suburbs and societies (p.
> 127).

Social Networks

Simmel (1908) was the first social theorist who explicitly tried to analyse society in terms of social networks. He described society as a social network of innumerable relations (Österberg, 1991). The most influential scholar who has investigated community through the study of networks in recent years is Wellman (e.g. 1979; 1981; 1999), who emphasises the role of social networks in his definition of community:

> … networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support,
> information, a sense of belonging, and social identity (2001:2).

A social network consists of individuals linked together by one or more social relationships (Marshall, 1998). Wellman (1981) describes a social network as a set of nodes, most typically people, connected by a set of ties. Likewise, Castells (1996) defines the concept of network as 'a set of interconnected nodes' (p. 170).

According to Abercrombie and Warde (1988), to become a community the links between individuals' relationships need to be manifold, extending beyond the original context to encompass many areas of concern, such as relations based upon being neighbours as well as having children in the same school or football team. In this perspective, a community is composed of individuals who are linked together by overlapping social relationships, forming a multiplex social network. A community will thus consist of many different kinds of social networks, forming what Fischer et al (1977) describe as an 'intricate latticework' (p. 17).

The definition of community in terms of social networks does not restrict the concept to physical space based upon area, since social space based upon social networks can also be the basis for solidarity. It generally argued that these multiplex networks develop a sense of solidarity, community and identity. Research (e.g. Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974) has shown that attachment to a community is closely related to the amount of interaction between residents including informal visiting of neighbours and formal participation in community organisations and networks. It can therefore be argued that the creation of solidarity and attachment, and hence community, is dependent upon communication.

2.2.3 Community and Communication

It is generally argued that communication, defined by Fiske (1990) as social interaction through messages, is an essential element in the development of a community. Putnam (2000) argues that communication is a prerequisite for community.

Communication is required to organise, structure and network the community. Simmel (1908) argued that society exists where a number of individuals enter into interaction and emphasised communication in his view of society as a complex network of relations. Within this overall network, communication is not random, but structured into complex sub-nets or communities.

Fernback and Thompson (1995) note that the words 'community' and 'communication' stem from the same Latin root word, *communis*, which means common or togetherness. As Hunter (1974) notes:

> The close association among the words 'common', 'communication',
> and 'community' is no accident. The ability to exchange meanings
> through a shared set of symbols has long been recognised as an
> integral part of community (p. 67).

An emphasis on communication as the exchange of meanings is central to the approach of symbolic interactionism (e.g. Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). This perspective focuses on the role of symbols and language in human interaction. The process is driven by communication with oneself and with others. An important feature of the theory is its emphasis on the role of interaction in the formation of identity. Mead (1934) argues that an individual's identity and mind arise through communication. Cohen (1993) extends the notion to encompass the identity of communities:

> People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a
> repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity (p. 118).

Community identity is developed through the exchange of meanings in the act of communication. As previously argued, one of the defining features of a community is shared meanings and solidarity. People who fail to communicate do not develop shared meanings and are therefore not a community. The exchange of shared meaning and symbols within communication is a crucial prerequisite of community. Community is built on communication, but at the same time shared meanings are derived from community (Garrod & Doherty, 1995).

In sum, this research argues that the definition of community involves two main elements: *social networks* and a *sense of community,* which are created through the act of communication. Community is organised and structured into complex networks of relationships. In order to become a community certain qualities and content within the relationships, in terms of solidarity or a sense of community, are also needed. People get to know each other through participating in social networks, which leads to a broader sense of self. This in turn constitutes a community identity, solidarity and belonging. A sense of community, at the same time, leads to increased interaction between people and facilitates the creation of social networks. If these solidarity networks of interaction are locally based they form a local community; if they are independent of place they form a community of interest.

2.4 BASIC FORMS OF COMMUNITY

It is generally argued that the concept of community, here consisting of solidarity and networks, can be divided into two basic forms: local community and community of interest. These two forms, based upon either locality or interests, are influenced by Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim's (1893) distinctions between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, mechanical and organic solidarity. Local communities operate within physical boundaries based upon common location; communities of interest operate within

social boundaries based upon common interest. Both forms of community provide a foundation for a sense of community and social networks.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │       COMMUNITY         │
                    │  (Sense of Community and│
                    │    Social Networks)     │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                        /                \
                       /                  \
      ┌──────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────┐
      │   LOCAL COMMUNITY     │   │  COMMUNITY OF INTEREST    │
      │   (Common Locality)   │   │    (Common Interest)      │
      └──────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────────┘
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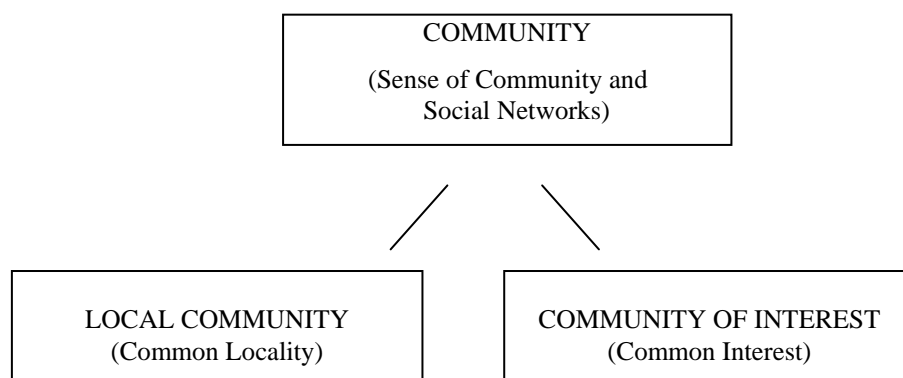
Figure 1: Basic forms of community

In the author's opinion, people can belong to a local community or to a community of interest, or, indeed, to both. For instance, people can belong to the residential (local) community where they live as well as to a community of interest, such as a gay community and/or a football community. People may also be members of communities that overlap physical and social space. One example of an overlapping community could be a local branch of an interest group, such as an immigrant group living in a particular area; another could be a 'Local Net', which is the combination of a local community and an Internet community (e.g. Beamish, 1995; Schuler, 1996; Hampton, 2001).

2.4.1 Local Community

A focus on locality as the basis for community relates the term to physical space. It refers to networks of social relations in a given geographical area. This form, which is related to the geographer's use of the term, is the most common use of community. The emphasis on locality was also common in discussions of the traditional community, such as Gemeinschaft communities (Tönnies, 1887) or folk villages (Redfield, 1941). Although

area is no longer a crucial element in the definition, physical location is still what most people think of when they refer to community.

It is the emphasis on common locality, and to a lesser extent on solidarity and networks, which has encouraged the identification of community with neighbourhood (Lee & Newby, 1983; Wellman, 1999). It is the single factor of common residence that is often used as the main feature of the 'local community'. However, it is simply assumed that the features of community, solidarity and social networks, will follow. The residents are perceived as a social network possessing common values and feelings of belonging to one another. Individual identities, as perceived and constructed by self and others, are closely entwined with those of place. According to Webber (1964):

> The idea of community has… been tied to the idea of place.
> Although other conditions are associated with the community –
> including a 'sense of belonging', a body of shared values, a system
> of social organization, and interdependency – spatial proximity
> continues to be considered a necessary condition (p. 108).

However, as mentioned earlier proximity is no longer regarded as a necessary condition for community. As communities recently are defined in terms of networks, they can also be based upon interests and hence be dispersed social networks.

2.4.2 Community of Interest

An alternative, more recent and less common, approach to community does not rely upon conceptualisations of physical space, but, rather, on ones of social space. This form of community refers to networks based upon shared interests (Wellman, 1999). The use of the term 'community of interest' has frequently been extended to include commonalities of

social attributes, which may reflect social, ethnic, or religious features, such as the Jewish community. It is here argued that this form of community is built upon common interests either in pursuits or in social characteristics.

It can be argued that local communities are based on the shared interest of common residence but, more generally, communities of interests are thought of in non-geographical terms (e.g. a fan club). Willmott (1986) argues that the distinction between local and interest based community is important since it recognises that the latter *may* be geographically dispersed. In general, however, the distinction between local community and community of interest is actually that the latter is independent of physical location while the former depends upon it.

As with the local community, for a community of interest to become a community, a *sense* of community is also needed within the network. Rheingold (1993) and Wellman (1999), amongst others, point out that these networks can provide a basis for the development of a solidarity, identity and belonging. People may even have a stronger sense of solidarity within networks of interest because they are based on consciously shared interests rather than on what may be the accident of shared location (Michaelson, 1996). The networks may form a cohesive community that pays scant regard to geographical location.

2.5 THE STATE OF COMMUNITY IN CONTEMORARY SOCIETY

In the literature there is a division between writers in relation to the state of community in contemporary society. Some argues that there has been a loss of community in urban areas (e.g. Meyrovitz, 1985; Oldenburg, 1989); while others argue that the urban local community still exists (e.g. Crow & Allan, 1994; Timms, 1999). There is also a third approach, which argues that the concentration on *local* community misses the point, since

community is now primarily based upon social networks in which the relation with geography is almost accidental (e.g. Hampton, 2001; Wellman, 2001).

2.5.1 Community Lost or Saved?

Since the 1960s many authors have argued that there has been a widespread loss of community in urban areas, caused either by changes in the social organisation of the population or by physical development (Lee & Newby, 1983). Cohen (quoted in Bauman, 2001) names 'urban violence' as a threat to community as it creates insecurity, anxiety and unhappiness in urban areas. Meyrowitz (1985) argues that globalisation, new media and technologies have decreased the significance of place in the contemporary world, and so too threatened the physical basis of community.

Oldenburg (1989) approaches the loss of community in terms of the decline of the 'great good place' or the 'third place': public arenas where people can meet, celebrate ties and develop a collective identity. London (1997) argues that the lack of public places is especially evident in many newer suburbs, which are characteristic of a separation of people not only physically, but also on the basis of age, income and sets of interests. This can be related to Bech's (quoted in Bauman, 2001) argument that residents in urban areas have become strangers to each other. Wellman (1979) refers to this argument that community has largely disappeared in urban areas as the 'Community Lost' perspective.

However, many scholars argue that the local community still exists in urban areas. They dispute the 'Community Lost' argument by identifying and empirically demonstrating that supportive relationships continue to exist in urban areas (e.g. Jacobs, 1961; Gans 1962). The argument is that community may have been weakened, but that it has been saved from the social effects of modernisation. As noted by Crow and Allan (1994):

> …despite the repeated pronouncements of its inevitable decline in
>
> the modern world, community life is still very much a part of our
>
> social existence (p. xxi).

Although significance of place in the definition of community is less salient, one must not forget that the local community exists and plays an important role in contemporary society (Crow & Allan, 1994). It remains a place where people live and work, for instance where they go shopping, meet neighbours and make use of local services. More significant, however, the community in urban areas is still regarded as an important source for support and identity (e.g. Timms, 1999). Crow and Allan (1994) stress the significance of local community since it mediates between the personal and the institutional, between household and large-scale social structures. This argument, that local communities continue to exist and flourish, is called the 'Community Saved' perspective (Wellman, 1979).

Hampton (2001), however, warns that this perspective ignores the existence of weak and non-local ties in the investigation of community. This is the essence of the third approach regarding the contemporary state of community: the 'Community Liberated' or social network perspective (Wellman, 1979).

2.5.2 Social Networks and Community Liberated

The Community Liberated approach explores the existence of community regardless of locality. In this perspective, community is defined on the basis of shared locality, rather than in terms of social networks. As such, the belief is that 'non-local, personal network communities' still exist and flourish (Wellman, 1996: 348).

In this approach, community is defined and examined through social network analysis (Mitchell, 1969; Rice, 1994; Wellman, 1997). Fisher (1975) stressed the relevance of this approach to the study of community in modern urban areas, which he characterised as being based upon dispersed and heterogeneous networks. In *The Urban Mosaic*, Timms (1972) notes that the urban area is highly differentiated and less dependent on location:

> The geographical framework of the city provides the basis for the
> emergence of a mosaic of social worlds. The increasing movement
> characteristic of modern society has almost certainly lessened the
> salience of location in the day-to-day lives of city-dwellers (p. 250).

Social network analysis and the Community Liberated approach also seem to fit Bell and Newby's (1974) description of contemporary social networks well:

> Traditional notions of community may be subsumed under the label
> of 'locality bound, close-knit network'. One of the changes that
> may be occurring for many, but not all, social groups is not so much
> the 'eclipse of community' as that their social networks are
> becoming less locality bound and less close-knit (p. 1)

Harper (1992) argues that, in contemporary society, the boundaries of location rarely correspond with people's sense of community. In this perspective, through their emphasis on social network analysis, Wellman and his colleagues (1988) develop the notion of 'personal communities'. They suggest that individuals have their own personal communities rather than necessarily belonging to the same one as those around them. Thus, it is possible to belong to more than one community. Wellman (1997) later describes contemporary community as:

> … specialized, with different ties providing different types of
>
> resources; sparsely knit, so that most of the people in the network
>
> are not strongly connected with each other; fragmented, so that
>
> most people are members of a number of specialized multiple
>
> communities rather than being engulfed in a single all-embracing
>
> community (p. 185).

Wellman's description of contemporary community resembles Tönnies' Gesellschaft. Wellman (2001) argues that security and control based on local communities have changed into 'network individualism' with people being involved in narrowly defined relationships with changing sets of network members. In a similar line of thought, Etzioni (1998) argues that the contemporary community is:

> … part of a pluralistic web of communities. People are, at one and
>
> the same time, members of several communities, such as
>
> professional, residential and others (p. xiv).

Although it is argued that people can belong to several communities, in this research it is argued that in order for a community to exist there also has to be a *sense* of community within the network, which may not always be the case in a very loosely knit social network. As such, it is argued that sometimes community is used as a buzzword, when what exists is actually solely a network with no feelings of attachment.

2.6 CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY

The extensive discussion about the state of community in contemporary society illustrates a renewed interest in community. The renewal of interest is associated with the new communitarian school espoused by Etzioni (1993) and his followers. One of the reasons

for the rediscovery of community is the emphasis in recent political discourse on the social inclusion of disadvantaged communities.

2.6.1 New Communitarianism and Community Revival

Communitarianism is based on the belief that social policies should be developed to encourage a resurgence of community. Etzioni (1993) notes that the 1980s were focused on individualism, whereas, he argues:

> Now it is time to push back the pendulum. The times call for an age
> of reconstruction, in which we put a new emphasis on 'we,' on
> values we share, on the spirit of community (p. 25).

In the literature, community tends to be described as something entirely good. It is often described as a safe, cosy and comfortable place. Lee and Newby (1983) argue that the search for community represents a longing for security, identity and authenticity. In a similar vein, Bauman (2001) describes community as another name for 'paradise lost'.

Professionals - architects, planners, social workers and political activists – are therefore engaged in the creation of a sense of community (Lee & Newby, 1983; Timms, 1999). Willmott (1989) argues that the concept of community has been very influential in social policy in recent decades. For example, in Britain it is apparent in areas such as community care, community work, community policing, community development, community education and community politics. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, speaks emotionally of community as sharing and working together (Etzioni, 1993).

Nevertheless, the search for community in contemporary society has also been criticised. For example, Bell and Newby (1974) argue that most descriptions of community reflect what it should be rather than what it is. Wellman (1999) later argues that the traditional community was not 'as romantic and good' as often described. As Lee and Newby (1983) put it:

> There is a constant danger of nostalgia in contrasting the past with the present a tendency to take a highly selective and somewhat rose-tinted view of the 'good old days', which can convey a mis-leading account of the actual changes which have occurred (p. 52).

In this research, it is argued that one must also acknowledge the negative aspects, which are rarely mentioned in the literature, of communal relationships, for instance in terms of pressures of conformity, moral obligations and social restrictions. Bauman (2001) argues that although a community might provide its members with security, it can also deprive them of freedom and the right to be themselves. Likewise, Harris (2002) points out that local communities can be intolerant and stifling, especially for excluded groups such as gays, disabled people and ethnic minorities.

Many people may therefore prefer the modern life with its increased individualism, anonymity, privacy and freedom. Community might in that sense be an old-fashioned notion (Puddifoot, 1995). Ferris (1985) argues that: 'to use terms like Gemeinschaft, community, or mutual loyalty in the context of the modern nation state is simply ideological and mystifying' (p. 58). In this sense, Sweden can be seen as an interesting example as the word 'community' does not exist in the Swedish language. Instead of distinguishing between community and society, the term *society* refers to both community and society.

In academic writings, however, a distinction is made between community and society labelled as *närsamhälle* or *lokalsamhälle* and *samhälle*, which can be translated as 'near society' or 'local society' and society. Local society and near society are technical terms implying a geographical aspect of community, e.g. the concept of neighbourhood. The latter involves more of community sense, as the term 'near' within near society may imply a feeling of closeness more than the more formal term of local society (Jansson, 2001).

Although the word community itself is not used within the Swedish language, the English word 'community' has recently been used in discussions about community creation in Sweden. For example, there have recently been many community initiatives in Sweden involved in a search for community, which have used the actual word 'community' in relation to their projects. Examples include the local computer projects (Local Nets) in the Swedish suburban areas of Skarpnäck and Nacka (Hübinette, 2001).

2.6.2 Community, Social Inclusion and Exclusion

One of the reasons for the rediscovery of community is the emphasis in recent political discourse on social inclusion. Room (1995) notes that the term social inclusion and social exclusion are rather recent and seem to have been introduced into European policy as a way of overcoming the stigmatising and unequal features associated with poverty. During the 1980s and 1990s the concern of policy makers shifted from an emphasis on the distribution of resources, i.e. poverty, to one stressing social inclusion and social exclusion within the context of local communities.

From a sociological perspective, social inclusion can be defined as participation in the encompassing community and society. At the community level, social inclusion involves being included in a complex network of different relationships. This combination of

interlocking and different solidarities – e.g. neighbours, kin, friends, workmates - provides a sense of participation. In a local community, involvement may also entail making use of local services, such as post offices and libraries (Crow & Allan, 1994).

Social inclusion can be seen as a process within a community. Community membership involves a distinction between 'insiders' or the included and 'outsiders' or the excluded. The community boundary serves to define members from non-members. The concept of community is hence defined not only by relations between members, but also by the boundary between members and non-members (ibid).

Thus, the concept of social inclusion implies its opposite: social exclusion. Starrin et al (2001) apply the label 'socially excluded' to groups lacking a protective community, e.g. single parents, immigrants and residents in disadvantaged suburbs. There may also be tensions between socially excluded groups and 'others' within a community, e.g. between different social classes (e.g. Elias & Scotson, 1965), flat owners and tenants (Saunders, 1990) and different ethnic groups (e.g. Henderson & Karn, 1987).

Social exclusion may also have geographical referents. In addition to individuals being excluded from a local community, a whole community may be excluded from the rest of the society. Timms (1972) demonstrates that social differentiation is closely connected to residential differentiation. He claims that different areas are identified with different people, different opportunity structures and different reputations. Kronear (1998) refers to people living in segregated areas as 'spatially excluded' communities. According to the Scottish Office (2001) the effects of social exclusion are most evident when they affect a whole community. It involves particular problems since the factors behind the exclusion reinforce each other within individual families as well as in the wider surroundings of the local community.

When analysing communities, it is therefore important to reference the social context in which inclusion and exclusion is being considered. Individuals may be included in their local community, but at the same time excluded from the wider society. For example, people in disadvantaged communities may feel discriminated against and excluded from the wider society and may, in turn, disengage (Suttles, 1972; Foundations, 1999).

One way to include disadvantaged communities in the wider society is by working together to build interlocking networks that can help address problems that transcend local boundaries. Morris and Hess (1975) refer to the 'outward movement,' which is about inter-connecting communities throughout the world. It is argued in this thesis that community members could discuss community issues through the 'outward movement' with people in other communities. They would learn more about their own community and about other communities, which creates a wider sense of social inclusion and identity. Timms (1999) argues that since identity is constructed by self and others, it is important for members to present their own views of the community and share them with others. These ideas are central to the 'Looking-glass self' argument within the theory of symbolic interactionism.

2.6.3 Symbolic Interactionism and The Community Image

The 'Looking-glass self' argument, developed by Cooley (1902), suggests that the self-image is derived from the imagined perception of the self by others:

> A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the
> imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination
> of his judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling,
> such as pride or mortification (p. 184).

The looking-glass self is based upon the second element in Cooley's quote that the self, based on an imaginary mirror, depends on the perceived responses of others. In *The Social Construction of Communities*, Suttles (1972) extends the notion to encompass the identity of communities: 'the identities of local neighbourhoods exist in tenuous opposition to one another' (p. 247).

The image of a community, especially a disadvantaged one, is sometimes negatively described from outside the community, for example by the media. Ristilammi (1994) argues that the media tend to describe suburbs in general in relation to social problems, criminality, poverty and a concentration of immigrants. Moreover, Ristilammi claims that these images influence other journalists, politicians and, of course, the residents themselves, which can lead to development of stereotypes and stigma.

Stigmatised Communities

Timms (1972) argues that different communities are associated with different reputations. A community with a bad reputation or stigma becomes the subject of social disapproval and discredit. Goffman (1968) describes stigma as 'an undesired differentness' (p. 15). Ivarsson (2000; 2003) argues that there is a relationship between stigma or level of attraction of the area and strength of local identity: the lower the social status or attraction of a housing area, the weaker is its sense of local identity. Thus, a stigmatised community tends to be characterised by little sense of community.

The members of a stigmatised community cannot always ignore other people's stereotypes about them. In the best case they could rebel against them and in the worst case they could live up to them (Ristilammi, 1994). In his analysis of inner-city areas, Suttles (1972) suggests ways in which the symbolism of community may be used by stigmatised

groups as a means of defending themselves against insults. One strategy is the formation of defended neighbourhoods, set off symbolically from the external environment.

In *From Moorepark to 'Wine Alley',* Damer (1989) examines a stigmatised community in Glasgow. He argues that once a community has been stigmatised it is difficult for the community to change its negative image. Although the criminal and cultural features of the Moorepark community are no different from the surrounding area of Govan, the stereotypes of Moorepark still persist. According to Damer (1989):

> … there are just enough junkies and villains in the scheme to ensure
>
> that at least some of the tenants are in collusion with the stigma
>
> imposed upon it from outside. If Moorepark was tenanted tomorrow
>
> with Yuppies, it would still be called the 'Wine Alley' in Govan (p.
>
> 172).

Janovitz (1967) suggests that one way of changing community image could be through the use of the *local* media. Community studies include the search for social indicators of the images of the community, which reflects its underlying values. Janovitz notes that the local press can be seen as such an indicator as its content is designed to help individuals to orient themselves in the local community by building and maintaining local identification. The author further argues that:

> The imagery of the community newspaper in the mind of its
>
> readers, which is built on and in turn contributes to local social
>
> solidarity is a significant underlying element in accounting for its
>
> impact (Janovitz, 1959: 606).

The local press can be regarded as a means of shared communication contributing to local identity, prestige and solidarity. There has recently been an increased interest in local newspapers on the Internet and the rather similar notions of Local Nets (e.g. Hubinette, 2001), which are regarded as ways of creating local as well as global sense of community. In accordance with Blanchard and Horan (1998), the hypothesis in this research is that the use of a Local Net, the creation of an online community within a local community, can create a strong sense of community and social capital.

2.7 SUMMARY

Community is a commonly used term, but also one of the vaguest within the social sciences. It has been defined in many ways. In this thesis, the concept includes two significant elements: sense of community and social networks. It is argued that networks are crucial to organise the community, but in order to become a community certain qualities, in terms of solidarity or community spirit, are also needed. There are two basic forms of community: local community and community of interest. The former is based upon common locality, the latter upon common interest.

Community has been studied within sociology since the beginning of the discipline. The traditional definition of community, e.g. made by Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893), emphasises residents living together in a geographical area. It was, however, argued that the social effects of industrialisation created a loss of physical space and hence a 'loss of community'. This expression remains a common complaint in contemporary society. Some writers argue that here has been a widespread 'community lost' in modern urban areas, for example due to lack of meeting-places (e.g. Meyrowitz, 1985; Oldenburg, 1989); whereas others maintain that the local community has been 'saved' and continues to thrive (e.g. Jacobs, 1961; Crow & Allan, 1994).

The third perspective, 'community liberated' stresses a shift from geographical area to social networks in the definition of community, with people seeking companionship and support from others regardless of geographical area (e.g. Hampton, 2001; Wellman, 2001).

There has recently been a revival of interest in community and many professionals have been involved in a search for community. One of the reasons for this renewed interest in community is the emphasis, in recent communitarianism and political discourse, on social inclusion and the exclusion of local communities. Disadvantaged and stigmatised communities may, for example, be excluded from the wider society. Since the media sometimes create a negative picture, people in disadvantaged communities may feel discriminated against and excluded from the wider society. The community can become socially excluded and even stigmatised.

CHAPTER 3: Social Capital

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Theoretical Background

3.3 Definitions of Social Capital

3.4 Different Forms of Social Networks

3.5 The Extent of Social Capital

3.6 Consequences and Sources of Social Capital

3.7 Summary

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years discussions of community have been overtaken by those relating to social capital, which is the focus of this chapter. Like community, social capital is a complex and vague term. The first part of the chapter refers to the background of the term social capital, focusing on its sociological dimension distinguishing it with the concept of community. Economic and political dimensions as well as micro and macro levels of social capital are also discussed.

The chapter then moves into definitions of the concept as it has been used by some of the main scholars in the field, with particular attention being paid to the work of Putnam (1993; 2000). The synthesised definition used in this research contains the following elements: social networks, social support and trust. The chapter then distinguishes different forms of social networks: horizontal and vertical networks, formal and informal networks, strong and weak ties, and bonding and bridging networks. Finally, the extent, consequences and formation of social capital are discussed.

3.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social capital has recently become one of the most popular terms in the social sciences (e.g. Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; 1990; Woolcook, 1998; Lin, 2001). The concept can be defined as resources accessed through social connections. According to Wacquant and Wilson (1989), social capital is the opposite of social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation may be seen as the absence of a place in an accepting community and loneliness as the perception of the lack of network and social support (Weiss, 1973).

Although the explicit use of the concept of social capital is recent, recognition of the phenomenon is not. The idea originates from the nineteenth-century. From the beginning

of the discipline, sociologists have discussed the ideas of social capital, even though the term itself has not been used. As demonstrated previously, Tönnies (1887), Durkheim (1897) and Simmel (1908), amongst others, investigated social isolation, social relations and community a hundred years ago.

3.2.1 Social Capital and Community

The concept of social capital is closely related to many familiar sociological terms. According to Lin (2001) it captures the essence of concepts such as social support, solidarity, social cohesion and community. Putnam (2000) refers to social capital and community as 'conceptual cousins' (p. 21) arguing that there is positive relationship between the two. In the literature, however, there has been no theoretical or conceptual discussion in terms of similarities and differences between the two terms, which is something this thesis aims to do.

The earliest studies of social capital originate from community studies (Smith, 2001). The first explicit reference to the term was made by Hanifan (1920), who refers to it as:

> ... those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit… The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself… If he comes into contact with his neighbours, and they with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potential sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will

find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy,

and the fellowship of his neighbours (p. 130).

Hanifan's (1920) idea of social capital in the context of local communities was reinvented by Jacobs (1961) in her analysis of urban communities. In her famous book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs (1961) describes social capital as informal neighbourhood networks: 'Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow' (p. 72).

Jacobs (1961) argues that informal contacts, such as regular contact with the local grocer and neighbours, as well as the presence of street fairs and parks, develop a sense of continuity and responsibility in local residents. According to her, in urban communities with much informal contact between neighbours, streets are safer, children are better taken care of and people are happier with their surroundings. In a similar manner, Field (2003) much later refers to social capital as a way of conceptualising the intangible resources of community, shared values and trust upon which we draw in everyday life.

In other words, it can be argued that high levels of social capital create a strong sense of community in urban areas. My opinion is that if a local community consists of people living in a defined area then social capital is what creates community out of them (i.e. a group with relations and local identity). Social capital is the essence of community, as social connections are the aggregations that develop community, sense of identity and belonging. Whether people living together in a geographical area have enough social capital to become a community becomes an empirical question.

Moreover, it is argued in this thesis that it can also be the other way around. The question then is whether people in a geographical area with a strong sense of community can create

social capital. According to Wellman et al (2002), when people have a strong sense of community and sense of belonging they will mobilise their social capital more willingly and effectively. Community can be seen as the arena where social capital can be created and maintained. Thus, the concepts of social capital and community are closely related and mutually reinforcing.

Social capital and community overlap and share complexity and an attraction to social scientists as well as to politicians. Social capital is increasingly used by academics and policymakers as another way of describing community. For example, OECD's definition of social capital resembles many recent definitions of community: 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups' (Healy et al, 2001: 41), in particular Wellman's (2001) recent definition of community (see page 38 in this thesis). Social capital seems to be closely related to Wellman's notion of personal communities and communities of interest. It can be argued that the more personal communities an individual has, the more social capital he or she possesses.

However, following the Performance and Innovation Unit (2002), it is here argued that there is a difference between the 'conceptual cousins':

> … community is just one of many forms of social capital. Work-
> based networks, diffuse friendships and shared or mutually
> acknowledged social values can all be seen as forms of social
> capital (p. 10).

It is here argued that social capital is a wider concept containing several dimensions, where community can be regarded as one of them. Whereas community consists of dense and overlapping networks, there are many different forms of social networks within social

capital. Woolcook (2001) argues that the idea of social capital, contrary to many other sociological concepts, is simple and clear, and therefore reaches many different people. According to Woolcook (2001), 'social capital gives classical (and contemporary) sociological themes a voice they would not otherwise have' (p. 14).

3.2.2 Economic and Political Dimensions of Social Capital

In addition to sociology, the term social capital is also popular in other disciplines, such as economics (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995) and politics (e.g. Putnam, 1993; 1995; 2000). The concept is not only popular among academics, but also among economic organisations and policy makers. For instance, the World Bank (2001), the OECD (Healy et al, 2001) and politicians make regular use of the term. The popularity of the concept of social capital in different areas provides evidence of one of its major benefits: it facilitates communication and understanding between different disciplines (Woolcook, 2001).

Lin and his colleagues (2001) suggest that the popularity of the term may be due to the appreciation that as capital, the concept shares commonalities with other forms of capital in its focus on a payoff. Coleman (1990) mentions three types of capital: physical, human and social. He describes physical capital as investment in material resources, such as factories, buildings, infrastructure and machines; human capital as investment in individual resources, such as skills and knowledge; and social capital as investment in social relations, such as networks, support and trust.

To understand the concept of social capital, it is necessary to consider the concept of capital, which has always been a central issue in the social sciences, especially in economics. The classic definition is given by Marx (1867) who defined capital as the surplus value that can be used to create further profit. In a similar way, Lin (2001) describes capital as an investment of resources with expected returns. Hence, like all other

forms of capital, social capital can be described as a resource into which other resources can be invested with the expectation of future returns (Adler & Kwon, 2000).

In addition to its economic heritage, the term social capital also has roots in politics. The work of de Tocqueville (1835) in the seventeenth century, which stressed the relation between associational life and democracy, is closely related to and influenced by research about civil society. In his classic work *Democracy in America* (1835), de Tocqueville investigated the tendency of Americans to join together to address mutual needs and common interests.

Much of the current usage of the term social capital is recognisably Tocquevillian in inspiration. The most well-known neo-Tocquevillian is the political scientist Robert Putnam (Edwards & Foley, 1997), who is one of the most influential contemporary social capital scholars. Like de Tocqueville (1835), Putnam (1993) investigates the relation between associational life and democracy. He claims that social capital, and particularly associational life, facilitates political participation and good governance (Lin, 2001).

3.2.3 Micro and Macro Levels of Social Capital

The sociological, economical and political dimensions of social capital are closely related to the levels of social capital. In the literature, two main perspectives can be identified: one emphasising individual characteristics, the other stressing collective aspects. The first school focuses on how individuals access social networks to gain returns, e.g. in terms of job opportunities and social support. This school is most often found among sociologists, particularly in social networks analysis, such as work by Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1990), Wellman et al (1988) and Lin (2001) (Ostrom & Ahn, 2001).

Over time, the concept has been expanded to include some other factors operating at a collective level, for example on a community level (Putnam, 1993), which may explain economic and political performance too (Ostrom & Ahn, 2001). The central interest of this perspective is to explore the elements and processes within the concept of social capital: how networks, norms and trust are essential in the production and maintenance of the collective asset (Lin et al, 2001). In this school, social capital is understood as allowing people to solve dilemmas of collective action more smoothly. Bourdieu (1985) and Coleman (1988; 1990) have discussed this perspective and Putnam's empirical work (1993; 1995; 2000) is exemplary.

The fact that social capital may be analysed at different levels has created theoretical and methodological confusion in the literature (Lin, 2001). Further confusion arises from the way that some scholars (e.g. Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1990) have flowed between levels in their discussions. One major controversy generated from the different schools is whether social capital is a collective or an individual good (Portes, 1998). In common with most scholars who have considered the question (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Lin et al, 2001), this thesis argues that social capital relates to both the collective and to individuals.

3.3 DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is a complex concept with a large and rapidly increasing literature. Yet, despite the widespread attention the concept has received, the theoretical understanding of social capital is still in its infancy. This section concerns general definitions of the concept, as presented by some of the main scholars. A synthesised definition, as adopted in this research, is also presented.

3.3.1 General Definitions of Social Capital

Like community, social capital is a vague concept, which sometimes is described as an umbrella-term. A number of influential definitions have been offered in the literature, notably by Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988; 1990), Fukuyama (1995; 1999) and Putnam (1993; 2000).

Pierre Bourdieu

What may be regarded as the first contemporary analysis of social capital was made by Bourdieu in the 1980s. In *The Forms of Capital* (1985), he differentiates between three forms of capital – economic, cultural and social. Bourdieu (1985) describes the relation among the different forms of capital as follows: 'economic is at the root of all other types of capital' (p. 252). Bourdieu's concept of social capital is a means by which people get access through social connections to economic and cultural resources. This definition of social capital provides an explanation of the formation and maintenance of wider economic inequalities: as one class has more economic capital, they also have higher social capital.

Bourdieu (1985) defines social capital as:

> … the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are
>
> linked to possession of a durable network of more or less
>
> institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and
>
> recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which
>
> provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-
>
> owned capital (p. 248).

According to Bourdieu (1985), the concept of social capital contains two elements: the social relationship itself with its resources and the amount of quality of those resources. He agues that 'the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible' (ibid, p. 249). Bourdieu examines *individual's* social capital, which is determined by the size of his or her network, the resources, and how successfully the individuals can use these resources. At the same time, he views social capital as a form of *collective* asset possessed by the members of a network.

James Coleman

In the late 1980s Coleman's theory of social capital became very influential, especially in sociology. Coleman (1988; 1990) focuses on the relationship between social capital and education. In *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital* (1988), he explores relations between social capital and human capital arguing that they tend to be complementary. Like Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988) regards social capital as a source of educational advantage. However, while Bourdieu used social capital to demonstrate how elite groups used their contacts to reproduce their privilege, Coleman (1990) extended the concept to include the social relations of non-elite groups.

Coleman (1988) provides the following definition of the term:

> Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Like physical capital and human

capital, social capital is not completely fungible but may be specific

to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable

in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for

others (p. S98).

Following Bourdieu, Coleman (1988) defines social capital in terms of two aspects: an aspect of social structure and the facilitation of actions in the structure, performed either by individuals or collectives. Like any other form of capital, Coleman (1990) argues that social capital is productive. He regards social capital as a resource gained from relationships through processes such as obligations, expectations, trustworthiness, information channels, norms and effective sanctions.

Robert Putnam

Although not the first writer on social capital, Putnam (1993; 1995; 2000) is the best known contemporary social capital scholar. Putnam has broadened the concept to a community level and his work has created interest in the concept all over the world. Few scholarly books have generated so much discussion, acclaim and criticism in recent years as Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000).

Putnam (1995b) acknowledges that social capital can take many forms, but his analysis mainly focuses on those forms concerning civic engagement: 'people's connection with the life of their community' (p. 665). The collective character of Putnam's (1993) version of the concept is evident in the following sentence: 'Working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital' (pp. 35-6). According to Putnam there are high levels of social capital when a community is characterised by rich associational life.

Putnam (1993; 2000) argues that those community relationships constituting social capital are associated with dense and horizontal social networks. It is involvement in these associations that leads to high levels of trust, reciprocity and positive community identity. This, in turn, helps in the resolution of dilemmas of collective action and smooth economic and political negotiations.

Putnam (1995a) gives the following definition of social capital:

> By analogy with notions of physical and human capital - tools and training that enhance individual productivity - social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit (p. 67)

The definition includes three conceptually different elements: networks, norms, and trust. As in descriptions of traditional community (e.g. Tönnies, 1887; Durkheim, 1893), Putnam (1995a) emphasises dense networks in his description of social capital, which can be described as solidarity networks. The norms that he discusses are more specifically norms of generalised reciprocity, which occur when a community member helps another and eventually is rewarded by help in return though not necessarily from the original beneficiary. Social trust means having confidence in and trusting other people, even those people one does not know.

According to Putnam (1993), the combined parts - networks, norms of reciprocity and trust - are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Dense networks build robust norms of reciprocity and social trust. In agreement with Putnam, it is argued here that the elements exist in a mutually reinforcing system. It is difficult to see how social networks can be created unless there is trust to begin with. Networks build their success and

efficiency on the existence of trust and reciprocity. Reciprocity as a social norm strengthens trust, which in turn strengthens reciprocity as a norm. Trust and reciprocity strengthen the creation and efficiency of different kinds of social networks and in these networks trust and reciprocal behaviour are created.

Putnam has been criticised for the circularity in his definition: networks, norms and trust produce social capital, which enhances networks, norms and trust (e.g. Portes & Landolt, 1996; Woolcook, 1998; Edwards & Foley, 1997). It is argued that the disadvantage of several sub-concepts in the definition is that it can be difficult to determine the causal relation between the elements in social capital. Some writers on social capital (e.g. Woolcook, 1998) have preferred to avoid the use of values or cognitive aspects, such as trust, since they risk importing too much into the concept and definition. It is argued that definitions of social capital should focus mainly on its sources rather than its consequences.

Francis Fukuyama

In contrast to Woolcook (1998), Fukuyama (1995) stresses the necessity of trust, which he uses as a measure of social capital. He investigates the links between trust and economic success arguing that social capital represented by trust will be as important as physical capital in economic development. According to Fukuyama, economic success is influenced by the level of trust in the society: economies whose citizens have high levels of social trust – as synonymous with high social capital – will dominate the twenty-first century.

In *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995), Fukuyama defines social capital as the ability of people to work together for common purposes. Later Fukuyama (1999) defines the concept as follows:

> Social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes
>
> cooperation between two or more individuals (p. 1).

Like Putnam, Fukuyama (1995; 1999) investigates social capital on a macro or national level. He divides nations into low-trust cultures and high-trust cultures. He considers that cultures with high levels of trust create more social capital and exhibit greater economic growth. In high-trust societies, there are wealthy economies organised around large corporations. By contrast, in low-trust societies businesses are family-owned. These businesses tend not to trust outsiders and choose family members instead of professional managers to run the enterprise. The question then is how these differences in trust influence collaboration in a multi-cultural community.

In sum, each of the examined authors views social capital in a slightly different way, but they have the common denominator that they regard the notion as a resource arising through social relationships. In general terms it is seen as an investment in social relations, with the expectation of returns. Most definitions of the concept include two elements, structural and cognitive ones, revolving around networks, norms of reciprocity and trust, which are believed to facilitate collaboration. Putnam (2000) refers to reciprocity as an important part of social capital. Although the acts of reciprocity are not often defined, it is assumed that they refer to information exchange and other forms of support (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). Wellman (1981) refers to these acts as social support, which is also how they are labelled in this research.

3.3.2 Synthesized Definition of Social Capital

A synthesis of the theoretical framework provides the basis for the definition of social capital used in the present study. This thesis includes three interrelated and mutually reinforcing elements, networks, support and trust, in the concept of social capital. As

social capital is a complex concept that includes many dimensions, my argument is that this should be reflected in the definition. All three elements, networks, support and trust, are believed to be essential components of the concept. Thus, as with community, social capital consists of both structural (social networks and support) and cognitive (trust) elements.

Although the elements are believed to be interrelated and equally important, social networks and social support are considered to be the foundations of social capital. Trust is regarded as a resource or emergent feature of social networks and social support. Participation in social networks and the existence of support develop trust. At the same time people can learn about the trustworthiness of others through social interaction, which eases collaboration and the creation of a sense of community. The concept is here defined as *social networks, social support and trust,* which creates a *sense of community.*

Social Networks and Social Support

It is generally believed that the structural aspects of social networks and social support are crucial in the definition of social capital. For example, Putnam (2000) and Woolcook (1998) argue that social participation is the core element within the concept of social capital. Putnam (2000) has recently changed focus from trust to social networks in his definition of social capital. Moreover, Bourdieu (1985) argues that social capital resides in relationships and that they are created through exchange. Based upon these arguments, social networks and social support are here regarded as the core elements in social capital.

Social networks and social support are closely related. Putnam (2000) argues that social networks involve, almost by definition, mutual obligations or social support since they are not interesting as mere contacts. Similarly, Fischer et al (1977) note the mutual relationship between networks and support by arguing that social networks are crucial for

social support: a helping hand, companionship or a shoulder to cry on. Cobb (1976) refers to social support as the help, guidance, comfort and information one receives from one's social network. Likewise, Wellman and Frank (2001) claim that social support comes from networks. According to them people wonder:

> Where can I get help from? Is my network large enough,
> coordinated enough, and containing enough of the right kinds of
> people to give me someone – or perhaps, several people - who can
> babysit, lend me money, provide marital understanding, or help
> when I am ill? (p. 235).

There are different forms of support including information exchange, emotional, instrumental, financial and social support. Exchange of information is in this thesis regarded as a fundamental form of support within the network and, as such, a crucial mechanism in social capital. It can be argued that social capital is based upon information exchange between network members. As put by Coleman (1990):

> An important form of social capital is the potential for information
> that inheres in social relations… A person who is not greatly
> interested in current events but who is interested in being informed
> about important developments can save the time required to read a
> newspapers if he can get the information he wants from a friend
> who pays attention to these matters (p. 310).

Trust

Trust is the third element in social capital. It is a cognitive element characterising values or attitudes and is often regarded as a consequence of participation in social networks and the exchange of support. In the literature there has been an extensive debate whether values, such as trust, should be part of the definition of social capital or not. For example, Woolcook (1998) considers trust as important in its own right, but sees it as an outcome of social capital and therefore excludes it from the definition. According to him, social capital should be defined by what it is rather than what it does.

However, most sociologists stress the dual significance of the cognitive as well as the structural aspects. Healy (2001) argues that if social capital is to be understood as shared behaviours and dispositions, as in the definition provided by the OECD (Healy et al, 2001), then values should be included in the definition. While Woolcook (1998) excludes trust in his definition of social capital, Fukuyama (1995) stresses its role for social capital. According to Fukuyama, a nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is dependent on the level of trust inherent in the society. Fukuyama (1995) defines trust as:

> … the expectations that arise within a community of regular,
>
> honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared
>
> norms, on the part of other members of that community (p. 26).

Uslander (2001) regards the value of trust as a *moral* value. He argues that moralistic trust is based upon a view in which the world is a good place with good people. As an opposite of anomic people, Uslander describes trusting people as having an optimistic view of the future with control of their own fates. These people believe things will get better and that they can influence it by their own actions. According to Uslander differences in social

capital are dependent on the level of economic inequality: countries with low levels of trust have high levels of economic inequality.

In a similar way, Wilkinson (1996) writes in his book *Unhealthy Societies: the afflictions of inequality*, that egalitarian societies are more supportive of their members, who are consequently healthier. These societies have more social capital and are characterised by higher levels of trust among their citizens than unequal ones (Campbell et al, 1999). As will be discussed later, Sweden is often referred to as a society entailing high levels of trust and social capital (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995; Rothstein, 1998; Stevrin, 1998; the Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002).

3.4 DIFFERENT FORMS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

There are many different forms of social networks within the complex concept of social capital. It is important to distinguish between them since they have different consequences for social support, trust and community. Many of the differences reflect variations in the underlying networks of social relations, which provide the foundation of social capital. Although the dimensions are conceptually different, in reality there are, of course, many overlaps between them.

3.4.1 Horizontal and Vertical Networks

The first distinction in the literature is between horizontal and vertical networks. Putnam (1993) has for long argued that the horizontal networks, such as voluntary associations, are crucial for social capital since interaction in those networks is equal. He claims that a horizontal network 'brings together agents of equivalent status and power', which facilitates co-operation; whereas a vertical network ' links unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence' (ibid, 1995a: 173). According to Putnam (1995a)

civil society is organised around horizontal bonds of solidarity rather than vertical bonds of dependency, such as characterise the church or the Mafia.

Woolcook (2001) also includes a vertical dimension in his view of social capital, which he labels 'linking social capital'. In common with Woolcook, it is argued here that connection with people in positions of power is an important element of the concept. Linking social capital can be related to the concept of empowerment, a theme relatively little explored in social capital research (Social Capital Conference, Exeter, 2001). If individuals were linked to people in power in the community (and of course outside the community), such as local politicians and civil servants, they would feel part of the decision-making and the sharing of information about their community. Woolcook maintains that linking ties lead to an increase in mutual respect, support and involvement in the local community.

3.4.2 Formal and Informal Networks

The second network distinction is between formal and informal networks. In his early writings, Putnam (1993) concentrated on civic engagement or formal networks focusing on membership in organised groups such as choral societies, neighbourhood associations or sport clubs along with activities such as voting and newspaper readership. Formal participation builds civic skills and provides access to information and formal support, such as support from various service agencies in the community, e.g. childcare and medical services.

Putnam has been criticised for his early focus on formal networks when looking at social capital. The general literature on social networks (e.g. Wellman et al, 1988) suggests that more informal networks, such as those involving neighbours, friends, family and colleagues, should also be considered in analysing social capital. Newton (1997) argues

that these connections generally do not build civic skills as effectively as involvement in a voluntary association, but that they are important in sustaining social networks and providing sources of informal social support.

The distinction between formal and informal networks is closely related to political and social trust. Political trust, which is related to formal networks, is concerned with trust in the formal system, e.g. the political, tax or judicial system; whereas social trust can be characterised as trust in other people and is related to informal participation (Stevrin, 1998). The former form of trust is in this thesis labelled institutional trust as it is argued that it includes trust in the whole system and not solely in politicians. It is important to distinguish the different dimensions of trust, as they are not always related. For example, it is possible to trust people in general, but at the same time, to mistrust the formal system. As Putnam (2000) expresses it: ' One could easily trust one's neighbour and distrust city hall, or vice versa' (p. 137).

3.4.3 Strong and Weak Ties

One of the most familiar dimensions of social networks is Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong and weak ties. Strong ties are connections with people emotionally close to oneself, such as immediate family and close friends. These ties tend to be multi-stranded, frequently maintained and intimate. It is argued that strong ties were common in traditional communities. Weak ties are connections with people emotionally distant to oneself, e.g. acquaintances. These ties are generally single-stranded, infrequently maintained and non-intimate. It is argued that these ties have become more common in modern society.

In his famous article *The Strength of Weak Ties,* Granovetter (1982) stresses the importance of weak ties as they enable people to seek out new resources. Most scholars

(e.g. Wellman & Wortley, 1990; Putnam, 2000), however, stress the importance of *both* strong and weak ties for the maintenance of social capital in local communities. Hampton (2001) argues that social capital lies in the balance of weak and strong ties: 'a large social network of both strong and weak ties is an indicator of strong social capital in a local community' (p. 6).

It is argued that strong ties tend to provide social support, emotional aid and companion-ship; whereas weak ties are more likely to provide access to diverse information and resources. For example, Putnam (2000) argues that:

> Strong ties with intimate friends may ensure chicken soup when
>
> you're sick, but weak ties with distant acquaintances are more likely
>
> to produce leads for a new job (p. 363).

In addition to support, strong and weak social ties are also related to trust. Thick trust is related to strong ties and the traditional community. It is generated by intensive, daily contact between people, often of the same tribe, class or ethnic background (Coleman, 1988). However, it is argued that modern society is based on thin trust, which is related to weak ties. Thin trust can be described as a broader, but weaker and more abstract form of trust than thick trust. Luhmanm (1988) argues that as the modern world is full of complexity, uncertainty and risk, abstract or thin trust makes it more manageable. In an extension of this model to the Information Society, virtual or online communities may be seen as being built upon abstract trust (Miztal, 1996).

3.4.4 Bonding and Bridging Networks

Within the recent literature of social capital there has been a tendency to confuse the distinction between strong and weak ties with that between bonding and bridging social

capital. Although the two sets of terms are similar, it is here argued that they are not synonymous. Based upon Putnam (2000) and Woolcook (1998), the argument in this thesis is that while strong ties refer to people that are emotionally *close* to oneself; bonding ties refer to people *similar* to oneself, for example similar in interests, demographic factors or locality, and weak ties refer to people emotionally *distant* from oneself; bridging ties refer to people *different* from oneself.

Even if close friends are often similar to each other, it is not essential. A network based on close friends can consist of people from different backgrounds, e.g. in terms of ethnicity, gender, political beliefs and physical locality. In the same vein, although there is a greater possibility that distant associates are different to each other and hence cross more boundaries than a network based on strong ties, again it is not inevitable.

Bonding networks are homogeneous, based upon similarities, while bridging networks are heterogeneous, based upon differences. The latter refer to networks inclusive across different groups. The former is, on the other hand, more exclusive in nature including only people similar to each other. This distinction is closely related to Tönnies and Durkheim's well-known dichotomies introduced over a hundred years ago: Gemeinshaft and mechanical solidarity, which are based upon similarities, and Gesellschaft and organic solidarity, which are based upon differences.

Barr (1998) refers to bonding networks as 'protection networks' and bridging networks as 'innovation networks'. As Putnam (2000) puts it "bonding networks are good for 'getting by,' whereas bridging networks are crucial for 'getting ahead' "(p. 23). As with strong and weak ties, bonding networks tend to provide protection, e.g. informal social support and bridging networks tend to create innovation, such as access to a wider set of information. For example, to receive formal support like medical services, individuals must gain information about what is available and how to get it.

Local and Non-Local Networks

The focus in this research lies on bonding and bridging networks in terms of locality or local and global networks. Stone (2001) argues that the ability to discriminate between social relations at local community and other geographic scales form an important part of the study of social capital. Despite this, most social capital research focuses solely upon local communities (e.g. Kreuter et al 1997; 1999; Onyx & Bullen, 1997; 2000), with little attention to relations beyond it. It is therefore argued that it is important to investigate bridging and bonding social capital in terms of locality: the difference between local and global networks.

As previously discussed, as social networks are becoming increasingly global there is a risk of a decrease in local networks. Increased globalisation may be a threat to local networks and hence to local communities. On the other hand, there are many stigmatised or deprived local areas, which lack bridging (non-local) connections with the wider society and hence can become bonding and isolated in nature. As Gilchrist (2001) notes: 'Communities which are too homogenous and insulated from the outside world lose their ability to assimilate new ideas and adapt to changes' (p. 151).

This argument has been replicated and expanded by other researchers interested in social mobility. It has been suggested by some writers (e.g. MacLeod, 1985; Woolcook, 1998) that bridging weak ties have an especially strong impact on the fortunes of people at the margins: for disadvantaged areas, which tend to lack global connections, it is important to have bridges that reach outside the local community.

3.5 THE EXTENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In the literature it is argued that there is an uneven distribution of social capital in society, for example in different areas. In addition it is also argued that there has been a decline in social capital in recent decades.

3.5.1 Distribution of Social Capital

Like other forms of capital, there is considerable evidence to suggest that there is an uneven distribution of social capital in society, organised along such dimensions as social class, gender, age ethnicity and locality (e.g. Edwards & Foley, 1997; de Souza, 1997). It is generally argued that privileged groups posses higher levels of social capital than more marginalised ones (Putnam, 2002). Disadvantaged groups, such as immigrants, poor people, the poorly educated, those with disabilities and elderly people, may feel socially excluded due to little or no social capital. It is therefore especially important to investigate disadvantaged areas, as they tend to include many of these groups.

One of the strongest correlates of social capital is education: well-educated people tend to possess more social capital than those who are poorly educated. Moreover, Putnam (2000) notes that people engaged in community involvement tend to have higher incomes than those who are not. He also notes a connection between ethnicity and social capital arguing that, in the US, white people tend to possess more social capital than members of other groups. However, Putnam stresses the need of more research on the relationship between the two. At the Social Capital Conference in Exeter in 2001, he emphasised the importance of the question of how a multicultural society affects the notion of social capital: What happens when people from different countries are supposed to share values and norms and work for a common good?

There is also an unequal distribution of different forms of social capital. Poor people and deprived areas tend to have much bonding social capital, but little bridging social capital (e.g. Woolcook, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Wilson (1987) argues that poor people are socially isolated since they often lack social connections, which may result in lack of job networks and resources that would help them to escape poverty. Putnam (2000) points out that poor areas often lack bridging social capital. According to him, when entire areas are under pressure they may pull together and cease to develop bridging social capital. In this situation they will turn inward ceasing to trust those outside the boundaries. People in an excluded community, lacking bridging capital, can therefore lose opportunities elsewhere (e.g. in terms of job opportunities and access to other vital information). According to Healy (2001) communities experiencing economic and social disadvantage may be able to leverage better outcomes through access to bridging social capital.

There is also an unequal distribution between different countries. As mentioned earlier, Fukuyama (1995) divides nations into low-trust cultures and high-trust cultures. He equates cultures with high levels of trust with high levels of social capital. According to Fukuyama (1995), Turkey and the whole of Latin America are low-trust societies. By contrast, Germany, Japan, Sweden and the United States are examples of high-trust societies. Sweden is often cited as one of the countries with the highest levels of trust and social capital (e.g. at the Social Capital Conference in Exeter, 2001). According to the SOM-report (1997), Swedes trust each other more than citizens in other countries (Stevrin, 1998). Later research, conducted by the Performance and Innovation Unit (2002), shows that 60% of the Swedes are reported as saying that most people can be trusted compared to 31% in the UK, 23% in France and 3% in Brazil.

3.5.2 Decline in Social Capital

Like the early loss of community argument (Tönnies, 1887), one of Putnam's (1993; 2000) main arguments suggests that, at least as far as the United States is concerned, the latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a decline in social capital. He argues that this period has seen a decline in socializing, trusting, joining groups, voting, keeping informed of the news, and, in particular, joining community organizations. The decline results in increased isolation with people paying little attention to their communities. As the title of Putnam's book *Bowling Alone* (2000) suggests, even when people go bowling, they do it as individuals rather than as groups.

Putnam (1995) argues that the decrease in social capital has largely been caused by the privatisation of leisure time, especially by television viewing. He presents strong evidence concerning the erosive effects of television on social capital. When television gained popularity, the younger generations were no longer interested in participation in social building activities in the community. Like Norris (1996), however, it is argued in this thesis that this view is too categorical and simplistic, treating all viewers and programmes as homogeneous.

Most discussions and research on the subject of social capital refer to the US. The discussion, nevertheless, does not only concern the US, but the whole westernised industrial world. Many scholars (e.g. Bennich-Björkman, 1999; Fukuyama, 1999) argue that the industrial western world shows many general similarities with the US. For example, Inglehart (1997) shows, in his studies, that all advanced industrial countries in Western Europe and North America are now moving into a more prominent post-industrial situation, characterised by a trend of increased mistrust (Stevrin, 1998).

Rothstein (1998) draws the conclusion that while social capital is decreasing in the US, this is not the case in Sweden. Instead, his data shows that Swedes are more active than ever in organisations and community activities. At the same time, the high level of trust between people, which historically has characterised the Scandinavian societies, is lasting and even increasing compared to the early 1980s. However, institutional trust has declined considerably during the last two decades (Pettersson & Geyer, 1992). As such, Rothstein's data shows that social trust is stronger than institutional trust. According to Bennich-Björkman (1999) this finding is worrying in relation to democracy.

In contrast to Rothstein's (1998) data, a report from the Democracy Council (Peterson, Westholm & Blomberg, 1989) shows a decline in Swedish associational life during the previous ten years. The decline is said to have occurred in memberships within organisations, associations and political parties as well as in the level of community activity, mainly among younger people. For example, youth union memberships decreased from over 220,000 in 1972 to 50,000 in 1995 (Bäck & Möller, 1997). The data also shows that more than ever before, people mistrust others to follow the 'rules' or norms of society. According to Bennich-Björkman (1999), this data demonstrates that Sweden shows essential similarities with the U.S in terms of the decline in social capital.

3.6 CONSEQUENCES AND SOURCES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

A question is whether it matters if there has been a decline in social capital. According to the literature, the idea behind the concept of social capital is that social connections have a positive value. Variations in social capital have been used to explain differences in health and well-being (e.g. Veenstra, 2001), levels of crime and disorder (e.g. Sampson et al, 1997), educational achievement (e.g. Hanifan, 1920; Coleman, 1988; 1990), economic performance (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995) and democracy (e.g. Putnam, 1993; 1995; 2000). This research focuses on the effects of social capital on the local community.

3.6.1 Positive Consequences for the Local Community

As previously mentioned, most scholars believe that social capital is beneficial for both individuals and communities. For instance, Putnam (2000) argues that high stocks of social capital make people 'smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy' (p. 290), and high levels of social capital keep communities 'together, healthy, crime-free and livable' (p. 127).

As Jacobs (1961) pointed out, Putnam (2000) argues that communities with high levels of social capital are safe and productive: 'In high-social-capital areas public spaces are cleaner, people are friendlier, and the streets are safer' (p. 307). It is generally believed that communities with established patterns of networks, support and trust have fewer social problems, more vigorous economies and effective governments. Thus, it can be argued that high stocks of social capital create a strong sense of community in local areas.

Low levels of social capital, on the other hand, have often been connected with a variety of social problems, especially crime levels (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson & Moreonoff, 1997). Most of the early work among criminologists focused on differences between areas in terms of, for example, vandalism, graffiti and street crime. Social disorganisation, the equivalent of low social capital, was thought to be one of the main causes of deviant behaviour. Putnam (2000) writes that:

> Such disorganization marked many urban communities where
> population turnover was high, neighbors anonymous, ethnic groups
> uneasily mixed, local organizations rare, and disadvantaged youths
> trapped in 'subcultures' cut off from the adult world (p. 307).

In others words, it can be argued that low levels of social capital are related to little sense of community, tension between different groups and little social participation. Many writers, including the author, think that social capital represents an important resource for local areas, and especially disadvantaged ones (e.g. Putnam, 2000: Healy, 2001). Woolcook (2001) suggests that areas with high levels of social capital can cope better with poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes, and/or take advantage of new opportunities.

In the same vein, the World Bank (2001) states that social capital can reduce problems for poor areas, such as violence, through the presence of shared values and norms; increase business opportunities by reducing transaction costs and providing informal access to credit, and improve access to health services and the quality of education. As expressed by Putnam (2000):

> Precisely because poor people (by definition) have little economic
> capital and face formidable obstacles in acquiring human capital
> (that is, education), *social* capital is disproportionately important to
> their welfare (p. 318).

3.6.2 Negative Consequences for the Local Community

Much has been written about the positive consequences of social capital and most writers refer to it as something entirely positive. However, in contrast to the term community, several writers have actually identified a dark side of social capital (e.g. Levi, 1996; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Portes, 1998). The same social ties, which for instance enable community members to work together to reduce problems, can, like any other form of capital, have negative outcomes for social capital in the encompassing society. There is a danger that if communication is restricted to the local community it may encourage

localism, pressures to conform and harmful outcomes, and hence weaken social capital overall.

Localism and Pressures of Conformity

Levi (1996) accuses Putnam's early work of romanticism. She argues that social networks can support localism, which is often extremely resistant to change:

> Neighbourhoods are a source of trust and neighbourhoods are a
> source of distrust. They promote trust of those you know and
> distrust of those you do not, those not in the neighbourhood or
> outside the networks. Historically, there is a reason to believe that
> maintenance of close networks blocks innovation and reinforces
> traditionalism, generally in form of closed economies (ibid: 51).

According to Levi's (1996) argument, the denser the networks, the greater the risk of localism, exclusion and general mistrust of 'outsiders'. She suggests that social capital may be the cause of conflicts between people inside and outside the network or the community. As well as organising people to achieve collective goals, it can also group them into categories of 'us' and 'them'. In their study of local communities and outsiders, Elias and Scotson (1965) argue that an established group tends to attribute bad characteristics to 'outsiders.'

Putnam (2000) later acknowledges this risk in his work by arguing that 'Social capital, particularly social capital that bonds us with others like us, therefore often reinforces social stratification' (p. 358). He points out that networks and norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive. According to Putnam (2000) bonding social capital is good

for creating solidarity and community, but it also tends to be inward looking and reinforce social exclusion.

In addition to localism and social exclusion, Portes and Landolt (1996) argue that strong social capital can bring demands for conformity and pressure within the network itself, restricting freedom and cutting off access to needed resources and information that are available elsewhere. High levels of bonding social capital and strong ties can hence lead to reduction in the availability of information and the capacity for innovation for a community. Putnam (2000) also discuss the potential pressures for conformity through strong ties:

> My closest friends and kin – my 'strong ties' – are likely to know the
> same thing as I do and hear of the same opportunities I do (p. 319).

Harmful Outcomes

The same kind of social ties that sometimes produce public goods can also produce public 'bads' among groups such as Mafia families, prostitution rings, drug cartels and youth gangs. For all their negative connotations, inner-city youth gangs, for example, are also social networks that provide access to resources. Membership in a gang may be the only way to obtain self-respect and material goods for ghetto teenagers. Portes and Landolt (1996) note that in the long run, however, the pressures from these groups may hold them down rather than raise them up.

Inner-city gangs can be seen as an attempt by members of an excluded group to develop a high degree of bonding social capital and a strong sense of community through an emphasis on exclusivity and internal bonding. These forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous

groups. Members of these groups may be unable to test the veracity of their own views, which may lead to harmful outcomes for society, such as criminality, racism, corruption and violence (Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam, 2000).

According to Putnam (2000), 'it is important to ask how the positive consequences – mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional efficiency – can be maximised and the negative manifestations – sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption – minimized' (p. 22). The question then is how positive social capital can be maximised in a local community. To increase social capital it is necessary to know about its antecedents.

3.6.3 The Creation of Social Capital

Since it has been argued that social capital is unevenly distributed, is in decline and has positive values, it is essential to look at the creation of social capital. This point is also stressed by Glaeser (2001), who argues that the weakness of much of the existing research and theory in the field is that too much attention has being paid to the *consequences* of social capital and too little to its *causes.* In order to change the level of social capital, research about its formation is needed.

In the literature, it is argued that social capital is created through social exchange. According to Bourdieu (1986), repeated exchanges strengthen mutual recognition and boundaries to confirm the collectively owned capital and each member's claim to it (Lin, 2001). Bourdieu (1986) stresses the fundamental need for 'an unceasing effort of sociability' (p. 250) and argues that social capital is formed when people continuously invest in social relationships.

Putnam (2000) argues that, as within a community, communication is a fundamental precondition for the creation and maintenance of social capital. Likewise, Nahapiet and

Ghosal (2000) claim that social capital is created and sustained through the process of communication. They argue that if there is no interaction in the network the relationships die out: 'Unlike many other forms of capital, social capital increases rather than decreases with use' (ibid: 143). As such, social capital is created from the myriad of everyday interactions between people.

However, Putnam (2000) stresses the difficulty of building social capital, especially in disadvantaged areas. Disadvantaged areas are often characterised by a downward spiral, low levels of trust leading to higher levels of crime, which lead to even lower levels of social capital, especially bridging social capital. Moreover, Healy (2001) argues that the greatest challenge to policy makers and others is how to bring about bridging social capital. Establishing links across different groups is a key challenge in societies undergoing transition towards pluralism and diversity (e.g. multi-ethnic diversity).

In order to address these problems, Putnam (2000) suggests that: 'social-capital-intensive strategies may help to 'unwind' this negative spiral, but they are challenging strategies to pursue' (ibid, p. 317). The question then is how these 'social-capital-intensive strategies' can be performed in a local community. Onyx and Bullen (2000) suggest that social interaction, and social capital, can be created in local communities as follows:

> Undertake activities that develop the essential human capital pre-requisites, e.g. self-esteem, communication skills.
>
> Work to increase the material well being of the group through advocacy, social policy development and material assistance.
>
> Work to develop physical infrastructure – meeting rooms, public spaces etc. (p. 30).

Thus, like Oldenburg (1989), Onyx and Bullen (2000), as well as the present author, stress the importance of local public meeting places or 'third places' for strengthening community and increasing social capital. It is argued that it is important to undertake local projects aiming to increase communications, well-being and physical infrastructure in local communities. A good example of this may be an Internet Café (e.g. Aldridge, 2000). The question is whether it can be regarded as a good 'social capital strategy', as suggested by Putnam (2000), and a new form of 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1989).

Since social capital and community are created through communication, my argument here is that it is important to study the new forms of communication, for example, computer-mediated communication (CMC) and how it affects social capital and community. As communication and information exchange are crucial mechanisms within social capital, the relationship between information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social capital in local community becomes an interesting research topic. The question is to what extent the use of ICT can re-create social capital in local communities.

3.7 SUMMARY

Discussions of community have recently been overtaken by those relating to social capital, which has become one of the most salient concepts within the social sciences during the last couple of decades. Social capital is popular within several disciplines, most prominently sociology, economics and politics. Although the explicit use of the concept of social capital is recent, recognition of the phenomenon is not. The ideas of social capital has for long been investigated in sociology, for instance by Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893), and the earliest studies of social capital itself originate from community studies. The two concepts are often used synonymously. Social capital is a complex concept including several dimensions, sociological, economic, political, micro and macro.

Despite the widespread attention the concept has received, theoretical understanding of it is still in its infancy and there remains much confusion about the topic. Various definitions of the concept have been presented in the literature, for instance by Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988; 1990), Putnam (1993; 1995; 2000), and Fukuyama (1995; 1999). All these writers regard the concept as a resource arising through social relationships. As with community, most definitions include two elements, structural (e.g. networks) and cognitive (e.g. trust), which are believed to facilitate collaboration. The synthesised definition presented includes the following elements: social networks, social support and trust. In this thesis, it is argued that these elements facilitate the creation of a sense of community.

Unlike community, which is based upon overlapping networks, social capital can be based upon many different forms of social networks, such as horizontal and vertical networks, formal and informal networks and support, strong and weak ties, and bridging and bonding social capital (including the dimension of local and global networks). It is important to acknowledge the different forms, as there may be differences in distribution and consequences between different forms. As with other kinds of capital, there is an unequal distribution of social capital along social class, gender, ethnicity and locality dimensions. For example, it is argued that deprived areas tend to posses bonding social capital, but lack bridging social capital, which is essential for obtaining new information and resources.

As with community, it has been argued that there has been a decline in social capital from the 1960s. This is significant as the concept has many positive values for local communities. For example, variations in social capital have been used to explain differences in democracy, health, well-being, levels of crime and disorder. However, there is also a downside of social capital as too much of bonding social capital and community can, for example, lead to localism, exclusion and mistrust of others. It is essential to look

at the creation of positive and bridging social capital too. In general, it is claimed that it is difficult to create social capital, especially in disadvantaged areas. As social capital and community are created and maintained through communication, the importance of meeting-places and projects initiating communication in local communities is stressed.

CHAPTER 4:

The Internet, Social Capital and Local Community

4.1. Introduction

4.2 Theoretical Background

4.3 Online Community

4.4 Digital and Social Inclusion

4.5 The Internet and Social Capital

4.6 Future Research

4.7 Summary

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the concepts of community and social capital in relation to the development of the Internet and the Information Society. The chapter starts by considering the growth of online communities. Two forms of online community are delineated: online communities of interest and online local communities or Local Nets. The chapter then considers the state of community in the Information Society, distinguishing three approaches: community as lost, saved or liberated (Wellman, 1979).

The following section concerns the digital divide. The relationship between digital inclusion and social inclusion is also presented, through a review of Local Net and general computer use: social and asocial activities, and local and global activities. Finally, the relationship between the Internet and social capital is reviewed. Different elements of social capital online are examined, such as online networks (including different forms of online networks), online support and trust online. The chapter ends with a discussion about future research in the field.

4.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It was argued that changes in urban industrial society created a loss of community in traditional communities at the end of the nineteenth century (e.g. Tönnies, 1887; Durkheim, 1893; Wirth, 1938). From the 1960s, it has been argued that there has been a decline in social capital and community in urban areas primarily due to television viewing (Putnam, 1995) and a lack of meeting-places (Oldenburg, 1989). More recent societal changes in post-industrial society, including the development of the Internet, have been seen as having considerable potential for changing the way in which community and social capital are created and maintained.

4.2.1 The Information Society

There are many different labels and descriptions of today's society, such as post-industrial society, network society and information society. Bell (1974), using the first label, argued that information would be the key resource in this new society. However, many scholars point out that there is nothing new about the importance of information (e.g. Castells, 1996), but that 'what is new is how you get access to information, and to much more' (Dutton, 1999: 4).

Similarly, Stevrin (1998), using the label 'information society', claims that contemporary society is characterised by a focus on information, knowledge and competence together with increased use of information and communication technologies (ICTs): 'all those technologies that enable the handling of information and facilitate different forms of communication among human actors, between human beings and electronic systems' (Unrisd, 2002:1). Castells (2001), using the label 'network society', argues that contemporary society is characterised by increased use of ICTs leading to 'networked individualism' as the dominant form of sociability. As he puts it: 'a new social form, the network society, is being constituted round the planet…' (p. 275), which is 'built around the communication networks on the Internet' (p. 276).

Healy (2001) emphasises the benefits and importance of ICTs in today's society - especially in deprived areas - in terms of social inclusion. He argues that they provide powerful opportunities for people to enhance their lives and change them for the better. Healy (2001) suggests that improved access to the Internet helps people to 'develop new skills, improve their employability and confidence, and to regenerate their communities' (p. vii). In terms of its effects on communication, the most influential form of ICT is the Internet. According to Castells (2001), it is 'the fabric of our lives… the Internet is the

technological basis for the organizational form of the Information Age: the network'
(p.1). He notes the significance of the Internet and the danger of being excluded from it:

> In a global economy, and in a network society where most things
> that matter are dependent on these Internet-based networks, to be
> switched off is to be sentenced to marginality… (ibid: 277).

4.2.2 The Internet

The Internet had its origins as an academic and research network in the 1960s. Its growth
in the past decade has been characterised as a revolution (Lin, 2001). In the *Oxford
Dictionary of Sociology*, it is described as the greatest technological innovation of the
twentieth century (Marshall, 1998). Barlow et al (1995) find no parallel in recorded
history for the advent of the Internet[10]:

> With the development of the Internet, and with the increasing
> persuasiveness of communication between networked computers,
> we are in the middle of the most transforming technological event
> since the capture of fire (p. 40).

Being an important part of the Information Society, one of the Internet's most
characteristic features is the provision of *information.* The information is easily provided,
wide-ranging, up-to-date and low cost, allowing immediate access to information about

---

[10] The spread of the Internet has been so fast and broad that the language used to describe it is still
evolving. It is customary to refer to the use of the Internet as being online. The terms online, the Net and
cyberspace will in the following be used as synonyms for the Internet.

practically anything and everything. Lin (2001) points out that: 'Information is freer and more available than ever before in human history' (p. 216).

There is, however, a down side with this as access to 'bad' information can be easily provided too, such as child pornography, racist topics and criminal organisations. According to MacKinnon (1995):

> Pornography in cyberspace is pornography in society - just broader,
>
> deeper, worse and more of it (p. 165).

In addition to the provision of information, the Internet also provides a new means for interpersonal communication. Anyone across the globe who has an Internet connection can communicate with other people online. Strangelove (1994) notes that this online communication creates new possibilities for the development of community:

> The Internet is not about technology, it is not about information, it
>
> is about communication – people talking with each other, people
>
> exchanging e-mail… The Internet is mass participation in fully
>
> bidirectional, uncensored mass communication. Communication is
>
> the basis, the foundation, the radical ground and root upon which all
>
> community stands, grows and thrives. The Internet is a community
>
> of chronic communicators (p. 11).

Online communication or computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become increasingly important in everyday life. In their latest book *The Internet in Every Day*

Life, Wellman & Haythornwaite (2002) demonstrate how CMC[11] has become an integral part of daily work and home life. CMC is a relatively new phenomenon, yet it is already clear that it can have a significant impact upon community and social relations. As communication is a fundamental prerequisite for community, it is important to investigate the relationship between *computer-mediated* communication and community.

4.3 ONLINE COMMUNITY

Putnam (2000) stresses the potential positive association between CMC and community, arguing that the Internet can enhance community substantially, perhaps even dramatically. As Haythornthwaite et al (1998) succinctly put it:

> Virtual communities extend the possibilities for communities; just
>
> as CMC extends the possibilities for communication (p. 213).

Many researchers and community activists observe that communities can be developed through computer-mediated communication (e.g. Baym, 1995; Schuler, 1996; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). According to Lapachet (1995), the key to a virtual community is the human *communication* that is fostered online. The term virtual community[12] has become wellknown, particularly due to Rheingold's (1993) groundbreaking book with the same name. Rheingold (1993) describes them as:

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[11] Many forms of CMC exist, but the most common ones today are based upon the use of text-based systems such as email, bulletin boards and chat rooms.
[12] The term 'virtual' actually stems from technical computer programming. Virtual refers to an effective working replacement and does not necessarily have any implications of mere approximation, although it can imply 'substitute'. Because of potential misunderstanding and the researcher's belief that a virtual community is a 'real' community it will from now on be referred to as an online community.

> Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the
>
> Net when enough people carry on… public discussions long
>
> enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal
>
> relationships in cyberspace (p. 5).

This definition incorporates the two elements that define community according to this thesis: social networks ('webs of personal relationships') and a sense of community ('sufficient human feeling'). In addition to social networks, Rheingold (1993) stresses the importance of a *sense* of community: 'technical linkage of electronic personae is not sufficient to create a community' (p. 64). According to him, affinity is what draws people together in online communities.

4.3.1 Basic Forms of Online Community

As with any kind of community, it is possible to distinguish between two forms of online community: local communities and communities of interest. As described earlier, the distinction between the two forms is simply that the former operates within physical boundaries based upon common location and the latter within social boundaries based upon common interest.

Online Community of Interest: The Virtual Community

The first and best known form of online community is based upon common interests. It is often referred to as 'the virtual community' (Rheingold, 1993; 2000). As one of the most distinguishing features of the Internet is that it is free of physical barriers, most communities online are based on interest rather than geography. The online community of interest is typically geographically dispersed and is brought together through diverse CMC tools, such as mailing lists and chat groups. Members of this community may never

meet face-to-face. Their interactions may be limited to the topics or interests that brought them together (Blanchard & Horan, 1998), such as politics or football.

Much research has been conducted into this form of online community (e.g. Reid, 1995; Rheingold, 1993; 2000; Turkle, 1995). The focus in this research, however, is the more recent and less researched form of online community: the Local Net. The aim is to investigate community online as well as offline.

Local Online Community: The Local Net

The second and more recent form of online community is based upon physical location. This type is frequently referred to as a community network or community net (Schuler, 1994; 1996). The difficulty with this usage is that the term has wider sociological connotations, referring to social networks that have a community base regardless of the means by which they are maintained. Therefore, it is here termed *Local Net*.

Local Nets are computer networks located in physically based communities, dealing with local issues. Schuler (1994) describes them as an attempt to use computer network technology to address the needs of the community. Guy (1996) defines them as public CMC systems designed to serve the general needs of geographically based communities. However, it should also be noted that connection to the Internet also tends to be provided within the scheme. Local Nets may therefore provide the infrastructure for the development of geographically dispersed communities of interest as well as physical ones.

The Association for Community Networking (http://bcn.boulder.co.uk/afcn/cn) provides a good description of the general aims and features of Local Nets:

Community Networking (CN) projects bring local people together

to discuss their community's issues and opportunities, learn about

Internet technology, and decide upon and create services to address

these community needs and opportunities. CN is comprised of a

wide variety of groups that make up a community (e.g. libraries,

Universities, . . . schools, local government, businesses, media,

individuals), with special focus on including those who are

traditionally left out of community decision making in general, and

technology decision making in particular (e.g. low-income,

minorities, senior citizens). CN projects value collaboration and

participation, and are usually noncommercial.

Similarly, Beamish (1995) has identified three features that distinguish Local Nets from
other types of commercial networks and bulletin boards: *local issues, universal access
and community development*. Based upon the features identified by Beamish, Local Nets
are in this thesis described by the following main characteristics:

Local (and Global) Focus: The most distinctive feature of Local Nets is their focus on local
issues. A prime purpose is to provide local information and communication services
(Morino, 1994), such as community information and local chat groups. The Local Net may
serve as a public forum to organise people with interests in similar issues, such as
vandalism or childcare. However, as Local Nets also tend to provide their members with
access to the Internet, the global aspect is also included in my description of a Local Net.
Thus, Local Nets tend to raise the issue of local versus global use (e.g. Morino, 1994;
Schuler, 1996).

Digital Inclusion: The second characteristic of Local Nets is the effort to include all
members of the community and not just traditional computer users. Morino (1994) points

out that disadvantaged groups, like low-income families, immigrants and the disabled, must also be included. Residents in areas served by Local Nets are therefore often provided with free or heavily subsidised access to the Net, either in community centers, Internet Cafés, or in their own homes. Beamish (1995) labels this feature *access,* but it is here termed digital inclusion, as access is only one aspect of digital inclusion. Other aspects, such as computer support and training, have also been stressed recently in relation to digital inclusion (e.g. Fong et al, 2001; Healy, 2001).

Community and Social Capital: The final feature relates to the role of Local Nets in community development and social capital. It is believed that Local Nets can strengthen and vitalise existing communities by increasing the sense of community (Guthrie et al, 1990; Morino, 1994). Doheny-Farina (1996) points out that to be effective in community building Local Nets must do 'what commercial providers find difficult to do well: represent local culture, local relevance, local pride, and a strong sense of community ownership' (p.126).

According to Guy (1996), one of the more specific aims is the reinforcement of a sense of community in today's fractured society, by providing an open forum for the private pursuits of individuals. Many supporters of Local Nets assume that electronic networks can be used to bring fractured communities together providing a base for collaboration for solving problems and the re-creation of a sense of local identity. Local Nets are believed to increase social contacts and collaboration, hence social capital, in the community. In a widely-reported speech on *Studying the Internet & Society*, Morino (1994) asserts:

We believe that the local community is where our toughest social

problems - crime, inadequate education, under employment - will

be solved, by the grass-roots efforts of people who have the most

personal stake in their solution. It is here that community

networking takes on such relevance in helping people solve

problems and addressing the needs of their day-to-day lives.

Clearly, community networking is an emerging phenomena (sic)

with the potential to effect societal transformation

([www.morino.org-inda_sp_asse.asp)](www.morino.org-inda_sp_asse.asp).

4.3.2 The State of Community in Information Society

The development of online communities and Local Nets has renewed the century-old

debate about the nature of community. Accompanying the recent revival in discussions

about community, for example in terms of new communitarianism (Etzioni, 1993), there

has been much speculation about whether the new forms of communication can

counteract the loss of community identified by Tönnies (1887) and Wirth (1938).

Community Lost or Saved?

In the literature there is a division between writers who see the use of the Internet as a

vehicle for creating community (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Lin, 1999a; Wellman, 1999;

Putnam, 2000) and others who see it as a threat (e.g. McClellan, 1994; Stoll, 1995; Nie &

Erbring, 2000). Two polarised views are extant: the Internet will either lead to the

destruction of the local community or the creation of a completely new form of

community – on the Internet. These views can be compared to the 'Community Lost' and

'Community Liberated' arguments discussed by Wellman (1979) and Hampton (2001).

An emerging majority regard online communities as satisfying the defining criteria for being considered 'real' communities (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Baym, 1995; Reid, 1995; Kling, 1996; Curtis, 1997). For example, Shelton and McNeely (1997) maintain that 'virtual community' is a synonym for real community on the Internet. Haythornwaite et al (1998) assert that committed users of email, bulletin boards and chat lines tend to feel a strong sense of belonging and identity with their online community. This is supported by Wellman et al (2002) who have found that high email use is associated with a great sense of online community.

Authors taking this view argue that the only difference between online communities and physical communities is in the mechanisms of communication used, not the meaning of the relationships involved, the social process they encompass or the effect they have on their members. As Rheingold (1993) puts it:

> People in virtual communities… exchange pleasantries and argue,
> engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange
> knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm,
> gossip, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt,
> create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual
> communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we
> leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can
> punch you on the nose, but a lot can happen within those
> boundaries (p. 3).

In contrast to this, however, some critics argue that communities developed and maintained on the Internet are not 'real' communities, but, rather, should be considered as pseudo communities or as metaphors (e.g. Harasim, 1993; MacLaughlin et al, 1995). For example, Beniger (1987) argues that online community is not real since it tends to

be based upon insincerity, lack of personal commitment and authenticity. Online communities tend to be less dense than face-to-face communities, more casual and easier to disrupt. Wellman (1996) notes that CMC is operated by people at the centres of personal communities, switching rapidly and frequently between groups of ties. This more individualistic behaviour may weaken solidarity and the sense of community that comes from being in a dense and bounded group.

In the literature, while utopians like Rheingold (1993; 2000) argue that the Internet provides a new form of community, dystopians in general argue that the Internet takes people away from their physical or local communities (e.g. Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995; Schiller, 1996; Nie, 2001). According to the negative voices, the use of the Internet for communication will replace face-to-face contact and lead to more isolation, resulting in a further atomisation of society. Stoll (1995) claims that 'computer networks isolate us from one another, rather than bringing us together' (p. 58), pointing to the danger that people who use computers may lose the ability to interact spontaneously with 'real' people. Similarly, Nie (2001) argues that although the Internet can foster global interactions, it keeps people indoors, staring at their computers, neglecting interactions in the local community. According to McClellan (1994), writing in the *Observer*:

> Rather than providing a replacement for the crumbling public realm,
> virtual communities are actually contributing to its decline. They're
> another thing keeping people indoors and off the streets. Just as TV
> produces couch potatoes, so on on-line culture creates mouse
> potatoes, people who hide from real life and spend their whole life
> goofing off in cyberspace (p. 10).

More recent writers (e.g. Wellman, 1999; Hampton, 2001) have criticised this either/or debate in the literature. They criticise the investigation of online or offline communities as

unique entities. Wellman et al (2002) instead suggest that emphasis should be placed on how online communities become integrated with physical communities. This is the essence of Wellman's (1979) 'Community Liberated', approach, which informs much of the research reported here.

Social Networks and Community Liberated

In contrast to the 'Community Lost Approach', the 'Community Liberated Approach' (Wellman, 1979) argues that online community does not necessarily lead to a reduction in offline community. According to Wellman (1997):

> Computer supported social networks are not destroying community
>
> but are responding to, resonating with, and extending the types of
>
> community that have already become prevalent in the developed
>
> Western world (pp. 185-6).

As there has been a shift from emphasis on physical space to social space in the definition of community, Wellman et al's (1988) description of 'personal community' seems to fit in the Information Society. Most Internet users belong to several online communities and an individual's personal online community may be scattered around the world. Moreover, these personal communities may be based upon online as well as offline communication.

Wellman and his colleagues (2002) argue that the Internet is used as a complement to other forms of communication, which leads to an overlap between online and offline interactions. For example, Agre (1998) argues that offline interactions will always be indispensable for cementing relationships, but the online interaction is valuable before and after those meetings. This is echoed by Castells (2001) who argues that:

> Individuals build their networks, on-line and off-line, on the basis
>
> of their interests, values, affinities, and projects… what we observe
>
> in our societies is the development of a communication hybrid that
>
> brings together physical place and cyber place (p. 131).

Although early research focused on the formation of community on the Internet (e.g. Rheingold, 1993), it has become clear that most relations online continue in physical space or vice versa; leading to new forms of communities characterised by a mixture of online and offline interactions (e.g. Müller, 1999; Rheinghold, 2001). Fukuyama (1999) contends that the advantages of technology are not in creating communities of interest, but in strengthening local communities. It is therefore especially important to examine the combination of online and offline communities, which are based on shared locality: Local Nets. Many commentators suggest that Local Nets can provide the basis for a re-creation of community identity (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Slevin, 2000). As Local Nets increase the chances of online relationships overlapping with physical communities (Blanchard & Horan, 1998), networks become dense, providing the basis for the development of a strong sense of solidarity and identity.

In addition, in accordance with symbolic interactionism, as community identity is constructed through the exchange of meanings locally and globally in the act of communication (e.g. Suttles, 1972; Cohen, 1993), Local Nets may provide a basis for the creation of local identity. For example, a Local Net may be ideal for the community members, especially in stigmatised areas, to create their own web pages presenting their own area for a local as well as global audience. Examples of this are the websites created by local residents in Tensta, an outer-city area of Stockholm, and in Brixton, London. In both cases local young people have created websites where residents present their own views about their communities.

Despite the enthusiasm of their protagonists' positive views on the impact of Local Nets are largely speculative. There have been few studies of the effects of online community on offline community in terms of sense of community, solidarity and local identity. A recent study, however, suggests that while high Internet use is associated with a greater sense of *online* community, it is not related to either higher or lower sense of overall community offline (Wellman et al, 2002). In other words, this research suggests that the Internet and Local Nets influence neither community nor alienation in local areas. This is, therefore, a topic for further investigation.

4.4 DIGITAL AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The question then is whether Local Net projects and Internet technology in general can increase social inclusion in the community. To tackle this question it is necessary to investigate the relationship between digital inclusion (here defined as participation in the computer world) and social inclusion (here defined as participation in the local community/wider society). The general hypothesis is that digital inclusion has become a prerequisite for social inclusion in contemporary society. It is also argued that the digital divide and social exclusion can be decreased through the use of Local Nets.

4.4.1 The Digital Divide

One of the biggest fears concerning the development of the Internet and its associated technology is that it will not include the whole society, but will instead be confined to traditional computer users, such as young well-educated men from high social classes (e.g. Castells, 1996; Fong et al, 2001; Steyaert, 2002). As Dutton (1999) puts it:

> A key concern is that new technology erects barriers for disadvant-
>
> aged groups to gain access to the information and communication
>
> resources available to others. In this way, technological change will
>
> not only perpetuate inequalities, but widen gaps in tele-access between
>
> the haves and the have-nots (p. 238).

It is argued that inequality in computer use will lead the development of a new form of exclusion creating a 'digital divide'. Fong and his colleagues (2001) describe the digital divide as 'substantial differences between groups in computerization' (p. 3). Castells (1996) argues that:

> … because access to computer-mediated communication is
>
> culturally, educationally, and economically restrictive, and will be
>
> so for a long time, the most important cultural impact of computer-
>
> mediated communication could be potentially the reinforcement of
>
> the culturally dominant social networks (pp. 363-4).

Castells (1998) later refers to the digital exclusion of poor countries and neighbourhoods as 'technological apartheid'. Lin (2001) points out that as rich countries and actors gain greater access to capital on the Internet, poor countries and actors are largely excluded from the online community. For example, Internet usage differs between countries within Europe. As of 2002 (Townley, 2002), the proportion of Internet users in the Scandinavian countries is the highest. Sweden leads with 53% of the population of 15 years and older that had been online in the last 14 days. In the UK that number is around one third of the total population. In Spain and Portugal less than 8% of the population had been online in the last 14 days.

As with most forms of social exclusion, digital exclusion is organised along demographic lines. Steyaert (2002a) argues that 'technology does not create a new social divide, but replicates the existing social stratification' (p. 200). Research shows that groups at greater risk of being excluded from the Information Society include women, elderly people, single parents, immigrants and those who have lower incomes, less education and blue-collar jobs (Fong et al, 2001). Aldridge (2000) particularly stresses demographic factors, such as income and age, in relation to the digital divide:

> Income is one of the biggest factors, it divides who can and cannot
>
> have access… The technology is also very complicated, which has a
>
> deterrent effect… A barrier to many older people is fear, fear that
>
> the equipment will fail the user, and fear that the user will fail
>
> themselves (pp. 7-8).

The literature mainly focuses on the digital divide in terms of demographic factors. However, there is also a geographical element with people in deprived areas being subject to what Reddick (2000) terms the 'dual digital divide'. Fong and his colleagues (2001) have also investigated the digital divide in terms of spatial variations. They found that not only do poorer people have less access to effective computer use, poorer people in poorer areas are particularly ill equipped because they do not have as much formal training or informal mentors available to provide computer skills. The authors suggest that documenting this dual digital divide should provide guidelines to government as to how to target learning, training and mentoring activities.

4.4.2 The Internet, Local Nets and Digital Inclusion

Putnam (2000) asserts that the digital divide must be challenged directly if social capital is to be created. He argues that if the Internet is to be seen as a kind of 'twenty-first-

century public utility' (p. 175), it is essential to provide inexpensive, subsidised access in libraries, community centres or private residents. According to Aldridge (2000), 'Public points of access such as high street Internet cafés, libraries, kiosks at stations etc. offer a chance to sample the technology for those who are still unsure of it' (p. 8).

Recent discussions suggest that it is important to go beyond questions solely about access in the creation of digital inclusion (e.g. Fong et al, 2001; Healy, 2001). Steyaert (2002) writes that the digital divide is not about access to the Internet, but about accessibility of information, relevance of information and information literacy. Similarly, Fong and his colleagues (2001) argue that the digital divide is based upon inequalities in computer access *and* on abilities to make skilled and effective use of computers. Healy (2001) also stresses the importance of going beyond questions of access, and of focusing on how to engage people in *using* the technology. In accordance with these writers, my opinion is that the provision of subsidised computer courses and computer support is as crucial as the provision of subsidised computer access in the creation of digital inclusion.

In order to counteract the risk of a digital divide, there are many projects in deprived areas providing residents with computer training and subsidised access to ICT. The hypothesis in this research is that a local computer project, providing subsidised computer access and training, can be a way of increasing social capital in a disadvantaged local community.

To promote inclusion in the Information Society, access is often provided from public access points, such as community centres, libraries and Internet cafés. More recently there have also been Local Net projects offering subsidised access in people's homes. There are many Local Nets in North America and Scandinavia located in disadvantaged communities. In Sweden, the lead in their creation has frequently been taken by municipalities and housing associations, which offer citizens or tenants subsidised

connection to the network. The explicit goal is generally to make the area a more attractive place to live and work, but social aims, including the increase of social capital, especially in relation to disadvantaged groups, such as immigrants, the elderly and single-parent families, are also common. Swedish Local Nets often try to provide access at home as well as from public access points for everybody, capitalising on the high proportion of households with computers[13].

There have been fewer Local Nets in Britain aiming to provide access in people's homes. Instead, access has been provided in kiosks and/or local community centres, such as libraries, and the emphasis has been on information provision rather than on communication. The British government aims to encourage Internet access for everyone in that way. For instance, 'UK Online Centres', tailored to local needs, have recently been introduced in Britain and will, according to Healy (2001), have a positive impact on communities, particularly for those in the most deprived ones. The development of local computer projects in deprived areas may challenge the digital divide through the provision of community connectedness.

4.4.3 Computer Use and Social Inclusion

The question is whether these computer projects and computer use in general can increase social inclusion and enhance social capital. To what extent does the use of ICT increase social participation in the local community and/or the wider society? The relationship between digital and social inclusion becomes an empirical question.

In this thesis it is argued that the Internet makes it possible for people who may have difficulties in taking part in face-to-face conversations (because of disability, shyness,

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[13] In 2000, more than half of all Swedes aged 12-79 years have a connection to the Internet (MMXI Nordic, 2000).

time or place etc.) to participate more fully. A single mother, for example, could do her shopping, get in touch with the schoolteacher or other community members and meet friends for a chat online at any time. It also enables community members to reach the wider society, search for information and talk to people locally as well as globally. In the literature, it is generally argued that the Internet can increase social inclusion as it enables participation despite the barriers of time and place (e.g. Rheingold, 1993). Lin (2001) points out that: 'These 'virtual' connections allow users to connect with others with few time or space constraints' (p. 215).

In order to investigate whether digital inclusion can lead to increased social participation, computer use must be further analysed. What are computers used for: social or asocial activities, local or global activities and how are different activities related to social inclusion, social capital and community?

Social and Asocial Activities

There has been much speculation about whether computer use can counteract the decline in social participation and the privatisation of leisure time identified by Putnam (1993). Critics see a parallel with television in the impact of the Internet on social participation (e.g. Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995; Nie, 2000). Internet use is believed to be an even more unsociable activity than television watching, as people tend to sit alone in front of computers and often engage in solitary use like browsing for information and playing computer games (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991), which may increase their feelings of loneliness.

Although critics fear that the Internet will be socially alienating, the most frequent Internet use is socially integrating and active: sending and receiving emails, which is very different from the passive one-way broadcast television (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). A

study of 'SeniorNet' shows that, over a four-month period, the most heavily used

activities were social uses, such as email, 'forum' and 'conferencing', while more formal

and solitary activities, such as 'news,' 'library' and 'database', were the least used

(Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Rheingold (1993) also argues people are not interested in

entertainment and information as much as forming relationships and communicating with

other people.

Similarly, Wellman (1997) argues that many people see the Internet as a blessing for the

alienated and isolated, who will no longer be passive spectators sitting in front of their

television screens. Rather, video screens have become communicators enabling people to

use online discussion groups and bulletin boards and the like to make meaningful contacts

around the world with newfound friends. Wellman et al (2001) divide online activities

into two categories a) social activities, such as email and chatting that promote

interactions and b) asocial activities, such as web-surfing and reading the news.

Wellman and his colleagues (2002) further point out that future analyses need to focus on

the types of activities performed online and their effects on social capital. Like Norris'

(1996) arguments about television viewing, Wellman et al (2002) argue that:

> When the Internet engages people primarily in asocial activities,
>
> then even more than television, its immersiveness can turn people
>
> away from community, organizational and political involvement,
>
> and domestic life. By contrast, when people use the Internet to
>
> communicate and coordinate with friends, relatives, and
>
> organizations – near and far – then it is a tool for building and
>
> maintaining social capital (p. 16).

In accordance with this quote, it is argued in this thesis that too much engagement in so-called 'asocial activities' may draw people away from social relations and the local community. However, my argument is that these activities, e.g. information search, can have positive influences on social capital as information is an important part of the term social capital (e.g. Coleman, 1990) and regarded as the most important form of support on the Internet (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Schuler, 1996). Web sites with information may be seen as part of an act of information exchange between Internet users, which can increase their human as well as their social capital.

Local and Global Activities

As pointed out in Wellman et al's (2002) quote above, the Internet may be used to communicate 'near and far' – for local and global activities. The Internet is, by definition, a global rather than a local network. It is a revolutionary tool as it enables global activities regardless of physical location. For example, the Internet may make members of a local community feel more included in the wider society as they can use the Internet to reach information and people outside their local area.

Although the Internet enables communication to take place globally, some of the most interesting findings relate to how access to CMC affects social relations at the local level. A study by Wellman and his colleagues (2002) found that although the Internet helps people to maintain ties over a great distance, physical proximity still matters. Those people who see each other often or work near each other email each other more often. In these circumstances, the use of a Local Net would be ideal as its prime aim is to provide *local* information and communication services.

However, in his book *The Wired Neighbourhood,* Doheny-Farina (1996) asserts that many members of Local Nets appear to be interested primarily in 'getting out of town' to pursue entertainment activities and dispersed communities of interest:

> If usage statistics show little local use, with subscribers spending
> their time elsewhere, local agencies and businesses may cease to
> maintain the data files and the community system will be like a
> dying mid-town shopping center where shoppers drift away to out-
> of-town shopping malls (p. 152).

Thus, there may also be a problem with the provision of Internet access as it may encourage users to bypass local activities in favour of more glamorous opportunities elsewhere. The question then becomes one of whether Local Nets can survive in an environment with people who are connected to the Global Net.

Blanchard & Horan (1998) note that simply providing electronic access to communities and even setting up local forums does not mean that community members will use them. It is crucial to make Local Nets attractive and interesting for their users. Cisler (1995) argues that the prerequisite for a successful Local Net is to provide interesting services, so that residents *want* to use it for local information, to exchange emails and participate in discussions with fellow residents. Blanchard and Horan (1998) stress the importance of forums for communication that enable community members to establish ongoing connections with other residents in the creation of social capital.

For further analysis of the relationship between the Internet and social capital in local communities, the effects of ICT on networks, support and trust that comprise social capital, must be reviewed.

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4.5 THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

There has been considerable speculation in the literature about the relationship between the Internet and social capital (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Wellman, 1997; Lin, 2001): social networks, social support and trust online.

4.5.1 Social Networks, Social Support and Trust Online

This section aims to review the ongoing debate in the literature and the question to be addressed is how the Internet may influence the networks, support and trust that comprise social capital. It concerns the creation and maintenance of social capital *on* the Internet, but also discusses its effects on social capital in local communities, especially in relation to Local Nets.

Social Networks Online

The Internet can be described as a series of networks connected to other networks that comprise a huge network (e.g. Baym, 1995; McLaughlin et al, 1995). Wellman (1997) argues that computer networks are synonymous with social networks: 'When a computer network connects people, it is a social network' (p. 179). As social networks constitute the basis for social capital it is important to investigate online networks. Putnam (2000) describes the relationship between the two as follows:

> Social capital is about networks, and the Net is the network to all ends (p. 171).

Similarly, in his book *The Rise of the Network Society,* Castells (1996) points out the relationship between networks and ICT by arguing that:

> Our exploration of emergent social structures… leads to an
>
> overarching conclusion: as a historical trend, dominant functions
>
> and process in the information age are increasingly organized
>
> around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology
>
> of our societies… While the networking form of social organization
>
> has existed in other times and spaces, the new information
>
> technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive
>
> expansion throughout the entire social structure (p. 469).

Many scholars, including the present author, believe social capital can be created through developing networks online (e.g. Lin, 2001; Wellman et al, 2002). There is, according to Lin (2001), strong evidence that this already happens with increasing numbers of people involved in the new form of social networks. Harasim (1993), for example, argues that computer networks have come to be experienced as *places* where people *network*. As providing a new means of communication, the question is whether these *cyberplaces* can serve as a new form of public sphere, substituting for Oldenburg's (1989) 'third places' and overcoming the lack of sense of place, cited by Meyrowitz (1995).

Wellman (1997) notes that although there may have been a reduction in the use of third places, this does not necessarily mean that there is a reduction in the extent of public spaces. He argues that contemporary community has moved from the public to the private arena. Wellman (1999) describes cyberspace as a new form of public space in which people can participate while still being physically in a private place, perhaps in their own home. Instead of relying on unplanned contact in third places, users can seek out companionship regardless of physical propinquity, in spaces created through the use of new technologies. Similarly, Fortier (1997) emphasises the Internet's function as a public sphere by arguing that it contributes to a more vibrant society in the same way as the French cafés did in the nineteenth century.

However, online communication may not always be a public space organised into networks of interaction. According to Kollock and Smith (1999), the Internet is rather characterised by anarchy or dictatorship. They argue that there may be either a lack of rules or of influence, which may both lead to a feeling of anomia among its users:

> It is widely believed and hoped that the ease of communicating and
> interacting online will lead to flourishing of democratic institutions,
> heralding a new and vital arena of public discourse. But to date,
> most online groups have the structure of either an anarchy [if
> unmoderated] or a dictatorship [if moderated] (p. 13).

One online network that tends to be moderated is the Local Net, and hence, according to Kollock and Smith (1999) has the structure of a dictatorship. However, Local Nets are most argued to be well-designed for networking, complementing other forms of contact, without increasing or decreasing it (Beamish, 1995; Hampton, 2001; Wellman et al, 2002).

In his influential study of the Local Net 'Netville,' Hampton (2001) found that the use of the Local Net had positive effects on social capital in the local community. He points out that the use of CMC encourages public participation, the growth of local networks, the connectivity of local social ties and the spatial dispersion of local networks. The study indicates that rather than isolating people in their homes, online communication encourages visiting, surveillance, neighbourhood recognition and the maintenance of local social ties.

In this thesis, it is argued that if people can use a Local Net to get to know their neighbours better online, this should lead to an increase in face-to-face contact and encourage greater participation in the community. Contacts create circles of increased

trust, favouring further interaction (Åström, 1998; Hampton, 2001). The effect will be an increase in social capital: the denser the networks, the more likely that members of a community will co-operate for mutual benefit (London, 1997). As the overlap between online networks and face-to-face networks in the local community increases, so too will social capital.

Social Support Online

Social support is here considered to be another vital part of social capital. The evidence that it occurs online is substantial (Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Social support is relatively easy to provide from the comfort of one's computer. It does not require major investments of time, money or energy. Since the costs of helping are low, people can easily obtain support from others when the network is large.

An interesting phenomenon that occurs online, and not offline, is that a single act of supporting can be more easily viewed by the entire network (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). The Internet has made the process of exchanged support more accessible and more visible to others (Abbott, 1998). 'Lurking', when users read messages without participating in the discussion, presents an interesting unresolved norm of behaviour. Lurkers may be breaking norms of reciprocity (Kollock & Smith, 1994), but it is a way for them to receive support and information without participating at that moment. Simply observing a helpful act may influence the whole network's concept of itself as being supportive. Another norm, which may be damaging for social support, is 'flaming' or uninhibited behaviour online (e.g. Joinson, 1998; Reid, 1998).

Online support ranges from the provision of formal (and informal) information to the comfort of more informal emotional support. Information is seen as a primary form of support that is exchanged online (Rheingold, 1993; Schuler, 1996). As indicated earlier,

the provision of information is a larger component of online communities than of offline ones. Users can ask questions online that may be answered immediately by others. For example, Wellman and Gulia (1999) note that members of the BMW car network get their requests for advice answered very rapidly and widely, since they reply to the entire network when answering a question.

Users may also exchange other forms of social support (Baym, 1995; Jones, 1995), such as emotional support. Many Internet users get help online or through self-help groups for social, physical, and mental problems (King & Moreggi, 1998) along with information about treatment, practitioners and other resources. One example of a support group that has attracted much attention in the media is parenting support (Ryan, 1996).

Even when online networks are not designed to be supportive, they tend to be. As social beings, those who use the Net seek not only information, but also support in terms of companionship. Moreover, online support can be exchanged at any time (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). For example, while the majority of elderly users of 'Senior Net' reported joining it to gain access to information, nearly half of them also joined to find companionship and the most popular activity was chatting with others. One member of SeniorNet says that 'if I am unable to sleep at night, all I have to do is go to my computer and there's always someone to talk to, laugh with, exchange ideas' (Furlong, 1989: 149).

Critics (e.g. Stoll, 1995) are sceptical about the quality of online support stressing the importance of face-to-face support. Slouka (1995) argues that:

> On the Internet… people would put words like 'grin' or 'smile' or
> 'hug' in the parentheses in a note. It's a code meaning cyberhugs,
> cybersmiles, cyberkisses. But at bottom, that cyberkiss is not the

same thing as a real kiss. As bottom, that cyberhug is not going to

do the same thing. There is a big difference (p. 42).

Barlow et al (1995) contest this as follows:

Yes, there is a difference. But I wasn't without the warmth of my

friends. I got a lot of hugs during that period, and I still get them.

My community was around me. I mean, it wasn't a case of either/or.

I didn't have to give up the human embrace in order to have this

other, slightly larger form of human embrace, a kind of

metaembrace. One supplemented the other (p. 40).

Following Barlow and his colleagues (1995), it is argued here that the Internet is used as a

complement to other forms of communication rather than as a substitute. This view is

supported by Wellman and his colleagues (2002), who stress that the Internet tends to be

used as an important complement to other forms of support mechanisms. Kling (1994)

argues that online support groups are important supplements to regular attendance at real

life meetings of recovery groups.

Trust Online

Trust is regarded as the third vital part of social capital and an interesting concept on the

Internet. According to a large study in Sweden (Nordfors & Levin, 1999) there is little

social trust online. Three quarters of the Swedes claim they trust people in general,

whereas less than one fifth trust people on the Internet. Similarly, a later study about

Internet use in Vietnam by Good (2001) shows that users trust other people less on the

Internet than face-to-face.

Some writers argue that the distinguishing feature of anonymity online may encourage superficial relationships, which may in turn discourage the creation of trust. For example, Galston (quoted in Putnam, 2000) notes that if entry and exit is too easy online, commitment, trust and reciprocity will not develop. Fukuyama (1995) argues that the anonymity and lack of rules have a negative impact on trust since freedom provided online is easily abused. For example, online users can play a role and gain a whole new identity if they wish. Turkle (1995) points out that people sometimes change their gender or a major personality trait when they go online. As the caption in the famous New York cartoon puts it: "On the Internet no one knows you're a dog" (quoted in Steiner, 1993: 61).

To reduce the possibility of deception and mistrust, some online communities do not allow anonymous communications and try to keep participants honest about their identities (Harasim, 1993; Rheingold, 1993). Extreme dishonesty may be less likely in Local Nets, where the chances of being caught are higher due to information flowing through face-to-face networks (Van Gelder, 1991).

However, for some people anonymity may be beneficial in terms of trust. Examples are quoted in the literature of people who use alternative identities to overcome problems of shyness (Myers, 1987), age (De Leon, 1994), social isolation (Brennan et al, 1992) and physical disability (Bock, 1994). As CMC reduces the formation of prejudices, disadvantaged groups may find it easier to develop trust online than in offline situations. As Rheingold (1993) says:

> People whose physical handicaps make it difficult to form new
> friendships may find that virtual communities treat them as they
> always wanted to be treated as thinkers and transmitters, not carnal

vessels with a certain appearance and way of walking and talking

(or not walking and talking) (p. 26).

Although at one point it was believed that lack of trust online would prevent the development of social relationships on the Internet the evidence is that it has not (Walther, 1992). The Internet with its anonymity and the privacy of being in one's own home contribute to a different sense of social trust. As Wellman and Gulia (1999) put it:

Net users tend to trust strangers, much like people gave rides to

hitchhikers in the flowerchild days of the 1960s (p. 175).

Stoll (1995) argues that it may be easier to contact strangers on the Net because there is less concern about rude intrusion or interpersonal risk. Again, another factor may be that it is easier to leave an online encounter than a face-to-face meeting (Wellman & Gulia, 1999), which may encourage people to take greater risks. Kollock (1998) suggests that the presence of some risk online may actually be useful in terms of trust:

Without risk, online communities will be dull and will not provide

the possibility of high levels of trust (p. 93).

On the Internet trust is more abstract (e.g. Miztal, 1996) and thin. Good (2001) points out that trust is not necessarily needed in the same way as in face-to-face communication. According to her findings, Internet users are not as dependent on other people being trustworthy and well-meaning online as offline. She writes that the majority of those who had experience from making new contacts on the Internet considered they could trust their online fellows enough.

4.5.2 Different Forms of Online Networks

In order to understand fully the relationship between the Internet and social capital, different aspects of social networks on the Internet must be examined. For example, it is argued in the literature, that the Internet is especially well designed for certain forms of social capital, such as weak, interest-specific (bonding) and global (bridging) ties (e.g. Wellman, 1997).

Horizontal and Vertical Networks Online

One of the earliest research findings about networks online has to do with status and equality. Research has shown that online discussions tend to be more frank and egalitarian than face-to-face meetings (Kiesler et al, 1984), partly due to the lack of visual cues and anonymity. Relations of power and hierarchy, e.g. between women and men, seem to be less salient online (Reid, 1999). For example, studies show that women are less likely to be interrupted in Internet discussions (Constant et al, 1999; Putnam, 2000) than in face-to-face ones.

On the Internet, demographic factors matter less and people have an enhanced opportunity to feel at ease with others. CMC is reduced to its elemental state of the exchange of ideas and concept (Kling & Moreggi, 1998). Online communication tends to develop flat hierarchies and horizontal interaction, which, according to Putnam (1993), is crucial for the creation of social capital. As a result, it is believed that CMC can increase social capital as it fosters equality of status among members (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993).

The equal power relations online also have the potential to empower many different categories of people who may otherwise find it difficult to make their voice heard. The lack of cues online about social status promotes socially heterogeneous connections across hierarchical and other forms of status barriers (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). The Internet may facilitate connections with people in power, such as politicians, which

constitutes an important opportunity for greater social inclusion. Hence, the use of CMC may lead to an increase in *linking* social capital too, which, according to Woolcook (1998), is especially crucial for poor and disadvantaged communities.

Informal and Formal Networks Online

The Internet can be used for informal as well as for formal networking. Hampton (2001) notes that: 'it is increasingly possible to socialize, shop, work, learn and participate in leisure activities, all from within the private residence' (p. 2). Email, for instance, is useful for maintaining contacts with informal ties, such as friends and family near and far. According to studies by Wellman et al (2002), the Internet increases informal networks through adding another medium for communication with friends and relatives. A Local Net provides a forum for informal networking between neighbours (Schuler, 1996).

The use of ICTs can also create *new* informal contacts through, for example, interest groups, such as groups discussing soap operas (Baym, 1997). Online interest groups are believed to be important in the creation of social capital (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). Chat also seems to be a forum mainly for the creation of informal contacts: the word 'chat ' itself implies a not very serious conversation about this and that (Good, 2001). The atmosphere in online networks tends to be informal. London (1997) argues that online networks:

> … can serve as public spaces for informal citizen to citizen
> interaction, they can support rational dialogue and, in some cases,
> deliberation, and they can promote social connectedness, trust and
> cooperation that constitute social capital (p. 2).

In sum, the Internet is believed to be a perfect place for informal networking with old as well as new friends. Internet users can, for example, send online greeting cards to relatives, play computer games with other people and 'hang out' with new friends in chat-rooms. It is also possible to 'go' to online parties, bars, weddings and funerals. As demonstrated by Putnam (2000): 'Mourners could attend virtual funerals and weddings over the Web' (p. 170).

In addition to informal participation, ICT use has also great potential for civic engagement. There are many formal networks online, such as political networks, community organisations, sports clubs and other forms of voluntary associations. Other civic activities include reading newspapers, attending meetings and conferences (e.g. through video-conferencing) and voting. Additionally, ICTs provide an enormous amount of formal information and discussion forums: one can easily follow politics around the world as well as discuss community issues in a bulletin board through a Local Net.

Contact with offline formal networks is also facilitated through email. Most formal services can be contacted through email, e.g. the Government and medical services. A Local Net often provides contact in terms of email with local agencies and services, such as the school, the police and the library. Some Local Nets also provide chatting facilities with local politicians. Wellman and his colleagues (2002) argue that at a time of declining civic engagement, the Internet provides a tool for people to increase their engagement. It supplements participation in formal offline networks: organisational involvement, political activities and engagement.

Weak and Strong Ties Online

Another distinguishing feature of the Internet is that it expands the range of possible networks (Wellman, 1997). It is easy to connect with large numbers of people online, and,

as such, it is argued that the creation of weak ties is much easier online than offline (e.g. Garton & Wellman, 1995; Pickering & King, 1995; Wellman, 1997). The willingness to communicate with strangers online contrasts with offline situations where bystanders are often reluctant to intervene and help strangers (Latane & Darley, 1976).

The potential to increase the number of weak ties online is important in the creation of social capital. Weak ties can build social capital by spreading information about people's trustworthiness. At the same time, according to Putnam (2000), many ties online tend to be single-stranded as members of electronic networks tend to be connected to each other only in terms of that topic. Weak ties may not serve the same purpose on the Internet as face-to-face (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). The spread of information will only happen if some ties are multi-stranded and over-lapping.

This overlap is much more likely to occur within Local Nets than in 'virtual communities' or geographically dispersed ones. By linking computer networks to physical communities in Local Nets, new public spaces are created, where people can interact with their physical (and virtual) neighbours. Offline and online places may be combined. If residents can access the Local Net through an Internet Café a face-to-face aspect is added to the virtual one, making relationships multi-stranded.

Even if weak ties seem to flourish online, the question remains whether strong ties can be maintained. Some analysts argue that the comparatively low social presence of CMC cannot by itself sustain strong ties because of the lack of physical and social cues and immediate feedback (e.g. Beniger, 1987; Jones, 1995). For instance, Stoll (1995) worries that intimacy is solely illusory without emotional closeness online:

> Electronic communication is an instantaneous and illusory contact
>
> that creates a sense of intimacy without the emotional investment
>
> that leads to close friendships (p. 24).

However, others have argued that strong ties can be created and sustained online. A number of empirical studies have shown that despite the more limited social presence of CMC, online relationships are often strong and intimate (e.g. Garton & Wellman, 1995; Walther, 1995). Reid (1995) argues that people often feel free to express themselves in an unrestrained manner online, which may facilitate intimacy.

According to Walther (1995), the only difference is that the process is slower online than offline. He argues that when online interactions eventually develop they are as sociable and intimate as offline ones. In a study by Hiltz and Turoff (1993), some participants argued that they came to feel that their closest friends were members of their electronic network, whom they never or seldom saw. The creation of strong ties can also be demonstrated by research on social support and self-help groups online (e.g. King & Moreggi, 1998).

Not all online relationships are sustained principally online. Wellman (1997) points out that much online contact is with people who see each other in person, e.g. at work or in the community. The Internet is especially used to maintain ties with existing strong ties, such as close friends (Wellman, 1999). CMC provides a convenient, affordable and powerful supplement to telephone and face-to-face contact.

As with any kind of network, online networks can be based upon *both* strong and weak ties. Lin (2001) contends that networks on the Internet can be expansive and at the same time intimate, based upon weak as well as strong ties. Similarly, Wellman and Gulia (1999) maintain that:

> Computer-supported social networks sustain strong, intermediate,
>
> and weak ties that provide information and social support in both
>
> specialized and broadly based relationships… (p. 188).

Bonding and Bridging Networks Online

A final distinctive feature of online relationships is the ease with which the Internet enables a search for others who share specific interests (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). People are more likely to find others who share interests when they can search a broader population. The Internet hosts thousands of interest groups. The topics range from the political (e.g. feminist groups), technical (e.g. computer hardware and software groups), to the social (e.g. abuse recovery groups, singles groups) and recreational (e.g. book reviews, hobby groups and sexual fantasy groups).

Although people are more likely to find others who share highly specialised interest in communities of interests, it is also possible to find others with similar interests through a Local Net (Michaelson, 1996): for example parenting groups (Schuler, 1996). In this respect, Local Nets also have the potential to enhance local social networks, providing new grounds for the development of relationships based on choice and shared interest as well as location (e.g. Schuler, 1996; Wellman, 1997).

The ability to search for people with similar interests does, of course, also facilitates the creation of negative bonding networks producing 'public bads.' It is easy for people to meet who share interests in, for example, child pornography, drugs, criminality, violence and racism. Metha and Plaza (1997) point out that the Internet enables the exchange of any information, including hate literature, instructions on how to make and use weapons and pornographic material.

Moreover, as online networks often focus on very specific topics, relationships tend to be quite homogeneous (Lea & Spears, 1992) and narrow (Wellman & Gulia, 1999) in terms of interests, values and access to information. These networks may be potentially threatening to bridging social capital and even increase segmentation in society (Putnam, 2000), as they may create pressures of conformity cutting off access to resources and information available elsewhere. Another threat to bridging social capital, argued in this thesis, is that the digital divide may lead to the development of segregated networks, with a majority of those connected being from relatively advantaged groups. As succinctly put by London (1997):

> ... virtual communities lack […] the confrontation with people
>
> whose lifestyles and values differ from yours (p. 4).

In contrast to the belief that the Internet may lead to segmentation it should also be pointed out that people sharing a common interest may be different in terms of demographic factors. Although certain chat rooms, for instance, host discussions on particular areas of interest, which in one sense implies a degree of bonding social capital, on the other hand, participants in an interest-specific network tend to come from diverse backgrounds, and, as such, increase bridging social capital on many levels.

Most writers (e.g. Lea & Spears, 1995; Wellman, 1997), including the present author, claim that the Internet facilitates the creation of bridging ties. As CMC increases the range of social networks, it also increases the diversity of people encountered. Hampton (2001) points out that computer networks tend to connect people in bridging ties: 'that blindly extend beyond characteristics of ethnicity, religion or national origins' (p. 2). As the World Bank (2001) puts it:

> Information technology has the potential to increase social capital –
>
> and in particular 'bridging' social capital, which connects actors to
>
> resources, relationships and information beyond their immediate
>
> environment (p. 3).

This quote illustrates the important aspect of bridging networks in terms of locality. According to the World Bank, the Internet enables connections beyond the local area. As mentioned previously, it is an excellent tool for the creation of bridges between resources and people on a global level.

The Internet, and especially Local Nets, may embody many of the tensions between the local and the global, which have accompanied the development of modern society (Morino, 1994; Schuler, 1996). The construction of a Local Net, including the drawing of more-or-less rigid boundaries between the local community and the wider world, may support local identity and a sense of belonging, contributing to bonding social capital. However, there is a danger that if communication is restricted to the local area, this may encourage the further fragmentation of society and weaken social capital overall. In that sense, it is important that Local Nets provide access to the Internet and resources in the wider society. The Internet may in that way provide bridging social capital, which is often lacking in disadvantaged areas.

As demonstrated earlier, the Internet has the potential to increase *both* local and global networks. For example, Timms (1999) describes how the Internet can be used in the creation of local as well as global networks. She suggests that a Local Net can lead to users getting to know their neighbours better as well as extending their social networks outside the local community. If the Internet can expand and increase access to members of our social networks, both locally and globally, it potentially increases access to social capital. Hampton (2001) terms the combination of global and local connectivity that may

be facilitated by CMC as 'glocalisation'. It can be argued that Local Nets, with their access to local as well as global networks, would be ideal in the creation of glocalisation and hence overall social capital as they have the potential to expand local as well as global networks.

4.6 FUTURE RESEARCH

Most studies so far have focused on the formation of community and social capital *on* the Internet. However, many writers (e.g. Fukuyama 1999) contend that the advantages of technology are not in creating social capital and community online, but in strengthening physical communities. It is therefore especially important to examine the effects of the Internet upon offline or local communities. To date, few studies have been conducted on the topic.

Blanchard and Horan (1998) stress the importance of more research on Local Nets. They point out that the lack of research on Local Nets is unfortunate since they may have a particularly important contribution to make to the creation of social capital:

> … virtual communities will have the most positive effect on social
>
> capital when they can increase network density and facilitate the
>
> spread of information. This increase is more likely to occur with
>
> physically based communities than with dispersed virtual
>
> communities (pp. 297-8).

The hypothesis put forward by Blanchard and Horan (1998) is that the combination of locality- and interest-based communities provides an especially effective foundation for the development and maintenance of social capital. By linking virtual communities of interest to physical communities, new public spaces are created where people can interact with their physical (and online) neighbours.

Putnam (2000) notes the potential of ICT, in general, for the creation of social capital, but also stresses the need for more empirical research on the topic:

> Very few things can be said with any confidence about the
> connection between social capital and Internet technology… For the
> moment, I conclude that the Internet will not automatically offset
> the decline in more conventional forms of social capital, but that it
> has that potential. In fact, it is hard to imagine solving our
> contemporary civic dilemmas without computer-mediated
> communication (pp. 170, 180).

Despite the fact that there has been considerable polemic interest in the relation between the Internet and social capital in general, there have been very few empirical studies. According to a review by Wellman and Gulia (1999), the area is dominated by anecdotes and assumptions rather than empirical studies. The effect of ICT on social capital in local communities provides a critical area for evaluating the relative validity of the two opposite views in the literature regarding the relationship between the Internet and social capital in local communities.

4.7 SUMMARY

In the literature, it is argued that we have moved into a new kind of society: the post-industrial society, which is characterised by increased individualism and technology use. The Internet has been described as one of the greatest technological innovations of the twentieth century. The most characteristic features of the Internet are the provision of information and communication. The significance of technology, and especially CMC and the Internet, is stressed as digital inclusion has become a prerequisite for social inclusion in contemporary society.

It is argued that CMC has the potential to create communities online. In the literature, there is a division between writers who argue that the Internet will lead to the creation of completely new forms of communities – virtual communities - and others who think it threatens to destroy the physical (and online) community. A third and more recent approach argues that the Internet creates a new form of community based upon online *as well as* offline communication. As with any community, there are two different online communities: the online community of interest and the local online community or the Local Net.

The Local Net can be described as a computer network dealing with local issues in a geographically based area, which aims to increase: 1) local (and global) information and communication, 2) computer access and skills, and 3) a sense of community and social capital. Local Net projects are often based in disadvantaged areas in an attempt to overcome the digital divide; inequality in computer use.

In the literature, it is generally argued that the use of the Internet can increase social inclusion as it enables participation despite barriers of time and place. However, whether computer use can increase social participation depends on what the Internet is used for:

social or asocial, local or global activities. Many writers argue that the Internet can be used for the creation of social capital. The Internet is then viewed as a new form of meeting-place where people network and exchange support and information. It is argued that the Internet especially facilitates the creation of weak, interest-specific (bonding) and global (bridging) ties.

Due to lack of physical cues, networks online tend to be based upon horizontal interactions. The anonymity on the Internet also has a great influence on trust. Some writers argue that it decreases trust, while others argue that it just makes it more abstract. Many writers argue that the ideal for the creation of social capital and community is the combination of online and local communities, such as the Local Net, since the overlap between online and offline interaction is great. In order to address these issues it is necessary to move from the theoretical to the empirical and to study the impact of Local Nets on the ground.

PART II:
METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Chapter 5: Methodology

CHAPTER 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Research Objectives

5.3 Research Questions

5.4 Methodological Approaches

5.5 Methods of Data Collection

5.6 Language Issues

5.7 Analysis of Data

5.8 Methodological Limitations

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concerns the methodology and methods used in the research. It starts by describing the research objectives and questions, which blend interests in information and communication technology (ICT), inclusion, social capital and community. Then, a description of the methodological approach undertaken is outlined: a case study using triangulation: a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The qualitative methods used include in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations and documentary analysis. The use of questionnaires represents the quantitative method. Operationalisations of the main concept social capital are also described. Finally, methodological limitations are discussed.

5.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of the research is to investigate the effects of the use of ICT on social capital and the sense of local community in an urban area. This is conducted through the evaluation of two computer projects: a Local Net and an Internet Café, in Skarpnäck: a marginal housing area in Stockholm.

There are two main objectives in the project evaluations:

- To explore how the use of ICT influences digital and social inclusion.
    - To identify typical users and usage of the computer projects.
    - To investigate perceptions (expectations and attitudes, problems) of the projects.

- To investigate how the use of ICT affects social capital and local community.
    - To examine networks, support and trust online and offline.

- To investigate sense of local community.

The first objective involves an investigation of whether the computer projects have reached their goals in terms of digital inclusion. This is conducted through questions about users, usage and attitudes about the projects. In the evaluation of the Local Net in 1999, the sample connected to Skarpnet and the sample not connected to it are compared. In the evaluation of the Internet Café in 2001, a sample of Café-visitors is compared with a sample of residents connected to the Local Net in 1999. This enables a comparison of the success of the Local Net, providing home access, and the Internet, providing public access. Some comparisons with the population as whole are conducted and the statistical data is enhanced by qualitative material gathered in interviews and focus group discussions.

The second objective deals with the effects of the computer projects on social capital and the sense of local community in Skarpnäck. It is studied through questions about social networks, support, trust and sense of community. Again, the Local Net study involves a comparison of connected and non-connected residents. In the second study, Café-visitors are compared with non-visitors (the non-connected Local Net sample from 1999). This enables a comparison between the extent of social capital and sense of community in 1999 and in 2001 - before and after the opening of the Internet Café. Some aspects of community are compared with earlier studies in Skarpnäck carried out by the Statistics Bureau (USK, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000). The statistical data is again balanced by material obtained through interviews and focus groups.

In short, the evaluation includes four sub-objectives:

1. An evaluation of the Local Net in terms of its success in creating digital inclusion (Skarpnet connected versus non-connected residents in 1999).

2. The impacts of the Local Net on social capital and sense of local community in Skarpnäck (Residents connected to Skarpnet versus non-connected residents in 1999).

3. An evaluation of the Internet Café in terms of its success in creating digital inclusion (Café-visitors in 2000-1 versus residents connected to Skarpnet in 1999).

4. The impacts of the Internet-Café on social capital and sense of local community in the area (Café-visitors in 2000-1 versus non-connected Skarpnet residents in 1999).

5.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to address the research objectives, the research question to be examined is:

To what extent can the use of information and communication technology
(re-)create social capital and a sense of local community in an urban environment?

A number of more specific sub-questions are investigated. The sub-questions to be examined can be categorised into the following two sets: digital and social inclusion, and social capital and local community.

5.3.1 Digital and Social Inclusion

Does the use of ICT lead to new forms of inclusion or to new forms of exclusion? Who are at risk of being on the right or the wrong side of the digital divide? How can computer projects help in increasing general computer skills in a disadvantaged area? To what extent can the use of computers increase social participation, in the local community and in the wider society? These questions are operationalised as follows:

- Who are the users of the information and communication technology?

    - Who is connected to the Local Net?

    - Who is visiting the Internet Café?

- What is the ICT used for?

    - What was the desired usage/actual usage of Skarpnet?

    - What are the reasons for visiting the Internet-Café and what is it used for?

- What are the perceptions of the computer projects?

    - What are the attitudes, expectations and problems with a) Skarpnet /

      b) the Internet Café in terms of digital and social inclusion?

5.3.2 Social Capital and Local Community

To what extent can the use of ICT counteract the trend of declining social capital and loss of community in urban areas? Does the use of ICT lead to an increase in social contacts or lead to further isolation? How is support and trust affected by the increased use of computers? How does the use of technology affect local participation versus participation in the wider society? These questions are operationalised as follows:

- How does the use of ICT influence social networks (formal and informal, bridging and bonding, local and global, weak and strong ties) online and offline?

- What is the relationship between computer usage and social support (formal and informal) online as well as offline?

- To what extent can use of ICT provide its users with trust (social and institutional) online and offline?

- Can the use of ICT generate a sense of local community? What effects does technology have on the identity of a deprived and stigmatised community?

5.4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The research questions are examined through the evaluation of a Local Net (Skarpnet) and an Internet Café in Skarpnäck. The methodological approach is a case-study, using triangulation or mixed methodologies.

5.4.1 Case-study

The case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not easily distinguishable from its context, like a project in an evaluation study (Yin, 1993). The case study, as defined by Yin (1984/1989), investigates a 'contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, addresses a situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and uses multiple sources of evidence' (p. 23).

5.4.2 Triangulation

As suggested by Yin (1984), the case study uses multiple sources of evidence: the methodological approach of triangulation. The approach, described by Denzin (1978), aims to employ multiple methods to reveal multiple aspects of a single reality. The variety of research methods and research levels enables each to complement and verify

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each other in order to achieve a fuller picture (Silverman, 2000). Within this context, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods can be perceived as alternative and complementary ways of approaching the same research problem.

While quantitative research is the primary method used, data triangulation through the use of a variety of qualitative research methods helps increase the validity of this study. The quantitative research is used to provide a general description of the computer projects in terms of patterns of behaviour, but also to investigate attitudes, expectations, personal experience and preferences. The qualitative research, on the other hand, is used to provide a deeper understanding of individuals' perceptions regarding ICT, social capital and the sense of community. It also aims to interpret some of the correlations found through the quantitative results and to further explore more complex concepts, such as trust, stigma and local identity.

5.5 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

This section will explore the different ways in which various data collection methods have been used, including documentary research, participant observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

5.5.1 Documentary Research

The current research was inspired by reading about Skarpnäck and the Local Net project in the media in 1998. Documentary research, including public records (such as statistics), media articles and project descriptions, has been used to provide an introduction and background to the research. It has also served as a complement to other forms of methods throughout the research.

5.5.2 Participant Observation

I became involved with Skarpnäck from the start of the Local Net project in 1998. Access to the projects was gained after a couple of meetings with the project managers, first the Skarpnet manager and later the Internet-Café manager, who were both happy to collaborate with my supervisor and myself. I spent a considerable amount of time during four years in Skarpnäck, especially in the Internet Café, which helped me become familiar with the area and the people there. The residents treated me kindly and respected my decision to study their housing area.

The techniques used in the participant observations included informal interviews, direct observation and informal discussions. I kept in frequent contact with both project managers through email, visits and lunches, participated in several meetings and had informal conversations with them about the projects. In addition, social lunches were held with people working in the area, such as youth workers and staff from the school as well as informal discussions with young people at the youth club (age 13-16) and the youth café (age 16-20) during several evenings. Obsersvations were also conducted in the library where a local senior resident had informal computer classes for other residents.

Informal visits to the Internet Café included observations of its visitors, including interaction between visitors, common activities, sites and time spent online. Direct observations were also made in five computer classes for seniors. The observations in the Café, and generally, also allowed for informal discussions about the research topic. Additionally, an informal group interview was held with members of the Spanish-speaking association who used the Café weekly.

The general form of participant observation tended more to rely on observation than participation. Participation in meetings was limited to general conversation and observation. However, as pointed out earlier, the research also included some more participatory activities in terms of informal conversations with residents and IT-Café users. The approach was overt, since from the beginning I stated who I was and what my research aimed to do.

Participation in Skarpnäck allowed me to discover the everyday practices of residents providing an overview of the case study. Norms, values and beliefs in the area in general could be observed, but also in relation to the computer projects including how residents used the technology in the Internet Café. Additionally, the insights gained through participant observation helped in the development of questions asked in the surveys, interviews and focus groups. Visibility in the area was good for participation in the study. Through participation in Skarpnäck, my social network expanded, facilitating access to subjects for research through the technique of snowball sampling. For example, it facilitated the recruitment of participants to the Community Portrait project.

5.5.3 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were used as preliminary research prior to the questionnaire and focus groups as well as later as a way of *understanding* the patterns identified in the survey. The interviews allowed me to participate in a personal interaction with the participants and, therefore, to obtain deep and personal answers about the topic.

The interviewees themselves chose the place to meet, such as a favourite café, their home or the Culture House. Each interview lasted about one hour, with the exception of one three-hour interview, and was conducted like an informal conversation. The interview guide contained some few general points - the computer projects, the Internet in general, inclusion, social capital and local community - which often came up naturally during the discussion. The discussions were dependent on the responses from the participant and allowed for a fair amount of individual adjustment. Most of the users were keen to talk and provide their opinions and they often gave examples to clarify their answers.

The sample consists of 19 in-depth interviews, including 17 interviewees: nine men and eight women between 31 and 68 years old. The interviews about the Local Net and the extent of social capital in 1999 were mostly conducted in 1999. Interviews were carried out with four residents connected to the Local Net and five not connected to it. In addition to an informal interview conducted with the Local Net manager at the beginning in 1998, an in-depth interview was carried out with him at the end of the project in 2002.

The first interviews were conducted with 'key people'; the two 'ambassadors' who voluntarily worked with the Local Net project and the Skarpnet manager, to get a general idea about the area and the project. The final interview with the Skarpnet manager concerned problems with the Local Net and speculations about its failure. These interviews were unstructured and open-ended, almost like conversations, using a very broad topic guide. Later, more structured interviews were conducted with connected and non-connected residents, to explore more complex concepts, such as trust and solidarity, and investigate issues raised through the questionnaire, such as correlations worth a more in-depth study.

In 2000-2, interviews were conducted relating to the Internet Café and the extent of social capital and community from 2000 – after the opening of the Café. Just before the opening of the Internet Café in 2000, the Café manager was interviewed to get a general idea about the plans for the Café. Another in-depth interview was conducted with him two years later. The relationship between use of the Internet Café, digital inclusion, social capital and local community was also investigated through in-depth interviews with five (current or previous) Café visitors, including three visitors who also participated in the Community Portraits project. The co-ordinator of Community Portraits was also interviewed in 2002.

About half of the in-depth interviews, the ones conducted with 'key-people', such as the project managers, were selected by natural choice. The rest were selected by 'snowball sampling', which is generally used for samples of small number of participants. According to Gilbert (1993), snowball sampling is recommended: "…when the target sample members are involved in some kind of network with others who share the characteristic of interest" (p. 74).

5.5.4 Questionnaires

The questionnaire survey aimed to evaluate the computer projects in terms of their success at creating digital inclusion and their effects on social capital and the sense of local community in Skarpnäck. It was chosen as a method to establish a general description of the projects in terms of patterns or regularities, especially in order to find typical users and typical usage of computers, but also to investigate attitudes, personal experience, preferences and behaviour. The quantitative method also explored causal relations between the use of technology and different aspects of social capital and community, and, through a large sample, enables generalisations of the data.

Questionnaire Design

The Skarpnet questionnaires were developed from March - May 1999, designed in

Pinpoint. A considerable amount of time and effort was put into the surveys in terms of,

for example, design, questions and operationalisations of the concepts. The questions

were based upon the initial in-depth interviews and participant observations, as well as

upon the literature review, previous studies, and previous questionnaires used in other

studies (e.g. Srole, 1956; Ivarsson, 1993). Some of the questions used in the survey, for

example about social cohesion and local identity, had been used in previous study of

Skarpnäck by USK: the Stockholm Office of Research and Statistics[14] (Ivarsson, 1990;

1993; 1997; 2000). This enables comparison over time.

The questionnaires were accompanied by a covering letter explaining the purpose of the

questionnaire, ethical issues (confidentiality), the importance of participation etc.

Residents who were not yet connected to Skarpnet were given information about it, along

with an application for connection. Pre-paid envelopes addressed to Stockholm

University were used and reminders were sent out within a week. Two reminders were

delivered (one short card after three days including a letter and another questionnaire

after a week).

The surveys were piloted on about 20 Swedish people. Feedback on the questionnaires

was provided by people at Stockholm University, the Skarpnet manager and the Café

manager. The feedback led to a small number of changes, including the addition of a

question about handicap in the Café survey as the Café specifically aims to reach that

group. The Café manager also suggested the use of a shortened version of the Skarpnet

questionnaire in the Internet Café as the Skarpnet survey was rather long (approximately

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[14] USK, Stockholm Office of Research and Statistics, is Stockholm's institute for statistics, prognoses
and statistical surveys. Considerable amounts of data about Stockholm and its sub-areas and the
Stockholm region are published in the Statistical YearBook of Stockholm.

50 questions). As a result, the Internet Café questionnaire contains fewer questions than the Local Net version.

Three different types of questionnaires were designed for the following groups in relation to the Local Net: 1) residents not yet offered a connection to the Local Net, 2) residents connected to the Local Net, and 3) residents who did not wish to be connected to it. From the official opening of the Café in April 2000, a similar, but shorter, version of the Local Net survey was put in the Café for visitors to fill in. Postal questionnaires were sent out to visitors who had bought membership cards at some point.

Samples

The sample population for the Local Net study consisted of tenants of the main housing company in the area, which is also the main sponsor of the project. The Skarpnet sample consists of 450 tenants, divided into three groups; 200 randomly selected tenants not connected to the network, the 200 tenants connected to the network and 50 residents who turned the offer down. Of these 187 questionnaires were returned (90 from the non-connected, 87 from the connected and 10 'refusers'); 62 of the questionnaires were among the ones put in the Café for the visitors. In the second Café study, which was conducted in October 2001 among a population of 90 visitors who at some point had bought membership cards; 33 surveys were returned.

The response rate is regarded as satisfactory in relation to the high mobility and number of different languages spoken in the area. Moreover, many surveys have been conducted in the area, for example by the Swedish Research and Statistics Office (USK), which have made residents fed up with filling in surveys. Comparison with statistics from USK (2000) suggests that the Local Net and the Café sample are generally representative of the overall characteristics of the area's population (see table 1 page 169-170 and table page 238).

Questions

The questions used in the questionnaires are presented in Appendices II and III. The questions have been formulated to allow all respondents to interpret them in a similar way. For example, the question about close friends is further is explained by saying that close friends are anyone you can talk to with about everything. Most questions include single fixed-choice response categories, but there are also some open questions. The

fixed questions mainly include single-choice answers, but some are also multiple-choice ones. Most attitudinal questions contain the response category 'either/or' or neutral. The questions in the Local Net survey contain the following topics:

- Digital and Social and Digital Inclusion
  - Demographic factors (e.g. education, age, gender, ethnicity)
  - Computer experience (e.g. number of years, confidence in computer usage)
  - Patterns of Usage of Computers and the Local Net
  - Perceptions (attitudes, expectations and problems) of the computer project

- Social Capital and Sense of Local Community in Skarpnäck
  - Social Networks (e.g. membership in voluntary associations, spare-time activities, satisfaction with number of meeting-places and number of close friends)
  - Social Support (five dimensions of support, such as emotional and financial, and questions about local information)
  - Trust (e.g. social and institutional trust using Srole's anomia scale)
  - Sense of Community (e.g. social cohesion, tension between different groups and local identity).

Operationalisation of Social Capital

Despite its historical roots and the considerable contemporary debate surrounding the theoretical conceptualisation of social capital has raced ahead of the development of tools for operationalisation (e.g. Paxton, 1999). In order to achieve theoretical rigour in social capital measurement, a clear understanding of the concept is needed.

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Social capital is a complex concept containing several dimensions. Newton (1997) stresses the importance of distinguishing and identifying the various dimensions involved. Despite this, most studies of social capital rely on unidimensional measures of the concept. Notable among these studies are those using a single item measure of trust, often drawn from the *World Values Survey*, as an indication of social capital as a whole (Knack & Keefer, 1997).

This research attempts to measure a number of different dimensions of social capital. Following Steyaert (2002c), social capital is investigated on *three* levels: micro, meso and macro. The first level, the micro, is measured through questions about the individual's participation in social networks and feelings of loneliness. The meso level is operationalised through questions about relations between different groups, such as young and old or different ethnic groups. The final level, the macro, is investigated though questions about participation in the local community and in the wider society, such as voting, attending local meetings and participating in voluntary associations. A number of questions are addressed to respondents as individuals (as in singular 'you') as well as about the whole area (as 'do you think there is strong cohesion in the area').

Different elements within the concept of social capital are measured. The synthetic definition is used as a basis for investigation by looking at both structural (social networks and social support) and cognitive elements (trust). A number of network characteristics are studied: horizontal and vertical relationships, formal and informal networks, weak and strong ties as well as bridging and bonding networks (local and global networks and social integration).

Since social participation is claimed to be a core element in social capital (e.g. Woolcook, 1998; Putnam, 2000), most questions in the survey concern participation in

social networks. Conceptualising social relations as networks enables us to identify the structure of social relations as well as their content (Nadel, 1957). Social network analysis is in many ways concerned with those aspects of networks, which are necessary to understand social capital (Stone, 2001). An example of the contemporary use of social network analysis of the kind relevant to studies of social capital is Bowling's (1997) study of networks and social support, which includes the following network characteristics:

- Social participation: involvement in social, political, educational and other activities.
- Size: number of people maintaining social contact.
- Strength of ties: degree of emotional intensity.
- Geographic dispersion: from local networks to those more widely dispersed.
- Social anchorage: years of residence, familiarity with, and involvement in community.

Each of these elements has been explored in the current study. Social participation is investigated through questions about civic involvement (mostly weak ties) and participation in more informal networks (mostly strong ties). In accordance with the approach used by Putnam (1993; 2000), formal involvement is measured through questions about membership in organisations, voting and newspaper readership.

Community involvement and contact with local politicians are other indicators of participation in formal networks. In addition, local information (formal support) and communication is examined including questions about community information and public meeting places for the residents in the area, e.g. *Are you satisfied with information about Skarpnäck?"* and *"Do you think there are enough meeting-places in the area?"* In addition to Putnam's (1993) general operationalisation, spare-time occupations, such as watching or participating in sports and bingo, going to the library and attending meetings

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are also measured. I think it is important to include this aspect, as it could be a common way of being civically involved by a wider group of people, including for example young people and people from a working class background.

In this research, as suggested by Wellman et al (1988), informal social participation is also regarded as an essential component of social capital. People's social connections with family, friends and neighbours are therefore examined. Quantitative measurements of the social network are conducted in terms of the size and frequency of contacts. Additionally, the way people keep in touch, for example face-to-face, or through the use of the telephone or e-mail, is another dimension that is investigated in the research. More qualitative factors, such as satisfaction with the informal contacts, are also measured in the survey. There is also a question about the feeling of loneliness, which is not common within social capital research. Following Wacquant and Wilson (1989), I argue that this is a simple and straightforward indication of low social capital.

Size and strength of ties, as suggested by Bowling (1997), are also measured. Strong ties are measured through questions regarding close friends, such as *"How many really close friends do you have?"* and five dimensions of informal social support, such as borrowing money, baby-sitting, talking about personal problems or need of companionship. Weaker ties are studied in terms of contacts with politicians, spare-time occupation and membership in organisations and associations.

Geographic dispersion is another important network characteristic measured through the survey. As Stone (2001) argues, the ability to discriminate between social relations at local level and other geographic scales forms an important part of the study of social capital. Bridging and bonding social capital are therefore measured in geographical terms as well as in more traditional social terms (e.g. Putnam, 2000). In terms of geographical location the distinction is between local and non-local activities: networks and support

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within the area (bonding social capital) are compared with those outside the local area (bridging social capital). As suggested by Bowling (1997), the investigation concerns the range form local networks to more widely dispersed ones.

Within the local area, the dimensions of bridging and bonding are also investigated in relation to solidarity between groups and questions are asked about the existence of tension between groups in the area. Linking social capital (vertically cross-cutting ties) is investigated though questions about contacts with local politicians and civil servants, e.g. *"Do you think you have good contact with local politicians and civil servants?"*

The 'content' of these structural aspects of social capital refers to trust and sense of local community, which are the cognitive aspects embedded within the social networks. Means of measuring trust and community are less well developed than are measures of the structural characteristics of networks. Trust is measured using the Srole anomia-scale (Srole, 1956), which aims to measure people's sense of powerlessness and general mistrust. The scale was developed to test Durkheim's (1897) concept of anomie on an individual level. Srole (1956) distinguished five dimensions of anomia, operationalised into five opinion statements, including questions on social and institutional distrust, such as "*These days you do not really know whom to trust"* and *"There is no point in writing to officials since they are rarely interested in the problems of the average man".*

Sense of local community is operationalised by questions about social cohesion, sense of commonality, tension between groups, satisfaction about living in the area and local identity, for example, *"Do you think there is a strong cohesion between residents in the area?", "Do you believe there is tension between different groups in the community?"* and *"If you think there is tension, which groups are you thinking about?".* Many of these questions are also good examples of Bowling's (1997) network characteristic of social

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anchorage, especially the one about local identity that has been used in earlier studies in the area carried out by USK (Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000). According to Ivarsson (1993) the scale measures 'rootedness' and community attachment. The question is: "*To what extent do you feel 'locally anchored' and rooted in the community where you live? (Give rootedness on a scale from 0, no roots, to 10, very strong roots)*".

5.5.5 Focus Groups

Focus group discussions were the final method used in the study. The aim with the groups was to investigate online behaviour as well as offline behaviour in terms of social capital and a sense of local community. Whereas the questionnaire mainly focused on the effects of the computer projects on social capital and community in Skarpnäck, the focus groups also explored the creation and maintenance of social capital online. The extent of social capital and community in Skarpnäck in 2001 as well as in 1999 – before the opening of the Internet Café – was also discussed. In addition, the group discussions were intended to clarify points raised in the surveys and the interviews with the Café-manager. As such, issues and matters that had surfaced during the course of the initial studies were further explored in the focus groups.

Prior to the discussions, the participants filled in a pre-questionnaire about demographic factors, housing and computer experience. I then used an interview guide including the following topics: digital and social inclusion, social networks, social support, trust and community identity in relation to the IT-Café and ICT in general. Complex and sensitive issues, such as trust online, negative uses of the Internet, stigma and community identity, were also discussed. I constantly attempted to focus the discussion on the most convenient direction, maintaining a cordial and amicable atmosphere whist still attempting to induce contradiction around the most relevant issues.

The focus group sample consists of four groups, each group containing two to five participants, with a total of 12 participants. The age in the focus groups varies from 21 to 81 years. There is also variety in occupation. Of the 12 four are unemployed; two are pensioners; two are students and four are working (including two self-employed). As in the questionnaire, there are more females in the groups: eight women and four men. About half of the group participants have no university degree (three have elementary school as their highest educational level and four secondary school). The focus groups contain many single parents (four out of 12), participants with foreign background (eight out of 12) and physical handicap (three out of 12). The majority (eight out of 12) live in rented flats; four participants own their flats.

The sample frame used was a list of visitors who at some had bought membership cards at the Café. I phoned these people. As with many of the in-depth interviews, the rest of the sample was selected by snowball sampling. To make sure as many as possible that had been invited would attend the participants were paid 150 SEK (£ 7.50) for participation in the focus groups. I also phoned the participants the day before the group to remind them about it. There were, however, some difficulties, as some participants did not turn up to the groups as promised, which sometimes made the groups rather small.

5.6 LANGUAGE ISSUES

Most data was collected in Swedish and then translated into English. The exception was the informal interview with the Spanish-speaking group, which was conducted in Spanish. Also, part of one of the focus group discussion was conducted in English and Spanish as some of the participants did not speak Swedish that well. It was directly translated to the rest of the group by myself.

According to Birbili (1999), collecting data in one language and presenting the findings in another is now increasingly common among social researchers. She suggests that in those cases where the researcher and the translator are the same person the quality of translation is influenced by factors such as the researcher's knowledge of the language and the culture of the people under study. By conducting the study in the researcher's native language, she is, hopefully, able to perceive the meaningful feelings, and values implicated within the participant's explanation of the experience, which otherwise would not be possible (Birbili, 1999).

Much effort was put into the translations of the questions in the questionnaires between Swedish and English, as the initial aim was to do a similar study in Scotland. There were some difficulties in getting equivalence between questions in the different languages, especially concerning some of the main concepts in the research, such as social cohesion, social inclusion and community. Social cohesion in English is a rather complex concept, but the direct translation into Swedish is less complex and more understandable. In Britain social inclusion and community are current issues and well-known concepts, especially in the media and in politics. As discussed in chapter two, in Sweden, on the contrary, there are no equivalent concepts. For example, there is no distinction made between community and society, which made the operationalisation of these concepts rather difficult.

5.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Having conducted the quantitative research, the questionnaires were analysed in PinPoint. First, frequencies and percentages were calculated to give an overview of the results (see appendix II and II). Some of the questions have been recoded to include fewer alternatives in the tables shown in the result chapters. Numbers (n's) can slightly vary in the different questions as different numbers of people have answered different

questions. Because of these slight differences, each n is not always presented in the chapter, but an average of it. The exact n is, however, presented in the appendices.

Secondly, cross tabulations were conducted in order to investigate associations between different variables. Significance was tested using t-tests and chi-square, as appropriate[15]. Although, in some cases there is just one sample, for instance in analyses of local versus non-local contacts, chi-square tests were conducted as the sample is regarded as independent: the answer in one group does not effect the answer in the other. Most chi-squares are based on 2*2 contingency tables, but attitudes scales are conducted in 3*2 scales, including for example *positive, neutral and negative* categories. For presentational purposes, in most cases only one category or attitude presented in tables. The t-tests are mainly two-sampled, but sometimes one-sampled tests are used.

The interviews and focus groups were tape recorded and then transformed into transcripts. These transcriptions paraphrase what participants said within the maximum detail possible. This includes the "ums", "em's", "oh's", mispronunciations, pauses, word emphases and involves interpretative translation, with the aim of enabling the researcher to transfer the meaning from the tape to paper without missing any significant point made by the participants (Kent, 1999).

Responses have been classified into categories bringing together the different themes of study within each. Relevant comments and opinions have been extracted from each transcription and reorganised within the different categories by interpretation. As Gilbert (1993) suggests, an interpretation is required as the participants are expressing in a natural way for them, embedded in a symbolic fashion. Without such symbolic interpretations, descriptions would be no more than meaningless narratives of actions and

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[15] Only those categories were there were significant differences are presented.

events. Throughout the analysis, the findings are illustrated with quotes from the

interviews and focus groups, including name and age of each participant. The

participant's names have been changed, since their anonymity was ensured. Similarly,

when presenting quotes from open questions in the surveys I call them R for respondents.

5.8 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The special nature of doing research in the midst of projects which are at the forefront of technology has presented a number of problems. As the Scottish computer project did not work out as anticipated, a cross-cultural comparison between the Scottish and Swedish Local Nets (which were originally designed to be very similar) was not possible. Although the Local Net project went further in Sweden, it was hardly used, and comparisons between users and non-users proved to be of little relevance. The set top boxes were abandoned and the Local Net eventually became no more than a portal to the Internet. Moreover, neither usage of the Local Net nor social capital online could be investigated in the Local Net study. Instead the evaluation came to focus on attitudes, expectations and preferences.

The replacement of the Local Net, the Internet Café, that was opened in the area two years after the inauguration of Skarpnet, has been more successful. The focus of the research therefore had to change from the original comparison of two Local Nets, one in Scotland and one in Sweden, to a comparison between the two Swedish projects and an analysis of social capital and local community before and after the introduction of the Internet Café.

PART III: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Chapter 6: The Local Net and Digital Inclusion

Chapter 7: Social Capital and Community,

Skarpnäck 1998-1999

Chapter 8: The Internet Café and Digital Inclusion

Chapter 9: The Internet Café, Social Capital and

Community, Skarpnäck 2000-2002

CHAPTER 6:

The Local Net and Digital Inclusion

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Residents Connected to the Local Net

6.3 Computer and Local Net Usage

6.4 Perceptions of the Local Net

6.5 Summary and Conclusion

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to evaluate *Skarpnet*, the Local Net project in Skarpnäck that started in 1998. The overt aims of Skarpnet were to increase digital inclusion and social participation in the area. The Local Net aimed to include the whole community, with special reference to disadvantaged groups at risk of both digital and social exclusion. The extent to which this goal was fulfilled has been investigated through analysing a sample of connected residents, of actual and potential usage of the Local Net and of residents' perceptions (attitudes and expectations) relating to Skarpnet:

- *Who was connected to Skarpnet?*
- *What was the Local Net used for?*
- *What were the perceptions of Skarpnet?*

Data was obtained from questionnaire surveys of 87 residents who were connected to the Local Net and 90 residents of Skarpnäck, randomly chosen, who were not connected to it. Additionally, ten residents who turned down the offer of being connected to the Skarpnet project were also analysed. The questionnaire included both fixed-choice and open questions.

The questionnaire data was enhanced by information obtained in 6 in-depth interviews: conducted with four residents who were connected to Skarpnet, including the two 'ambassadors'. The manager of Skarpnet was interviewed twice and I participated in several meetings and informal discussions in relation to the Local Net.

6.2 RESIDENTS CONNECTED TO THE LOCAL NET

One way of evaluating whether the Local Net had fulfilled its goal in terms of digital inclusion was to identify the respondents who were connected to it. Respondents connected to Skarpnet were asked a series of questions relating to their demographic characteristics and computer experience. Usage patterns of the Local Net and potential ways of including residents excluded from it were also investigated.

6.2.1 Demographic Factors

The survey included questions about the number of years the respondents had lived in Skarpnäck, age, employment status, gender, educational level, ethnicity and family constellation. The data was compared with that of the non-connected sample and of the population as a whole, as given in the statistical report of USK (2000). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of those connected to Skarpnäck, the non-connected and the population as a whole, indicating any significant differences between them.

Table 1) Sample Description by Demographic Factors (%)

Demographic Factors	Connection Status		Significance			USK[1]
	Connected	Non-Connected	χ^2	p	d.f	Population
No of Living Years			2.20	0.332	2	
Less than a year	7	13				8
1 – 5 years	28	33				28
More than 5 years	64	54				64
Age			10.18	0.006	2	
0 – 34	27	30				51
35 – 64	73	59				38
65	0	11				11
Employment Status			14.72	0.002	3	
Students	11	8				na[2]
Employed	85	66				72[3]

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[1] USK (2000) (www.usk.stockholm.se)
[2] Not Available in the USK data

Unemployed	1	8				2
Pensioners	3	17				na
Gender			0.44	0.508	1	
Female	49	56				52
Male	51	44				48
Educational Level[4]			4.11	0.128	2	
Elementary School	6	13				19
Secondary School	34	41				42
University	60	46				37
Ethnicity						
Foreign Born	25	35	1.60	0.308	1	28
Foreign Mother Tongue	25	34	1.04	0.308	1	na
Family Constellation			1.32	0.521	1	
Single Parents	31	21				28[5]
n	87	90				300

The demographic characteristics of the connected and non-connected samples, which are generally representative of the population as a whole, indicates that Skarpnäck is a relatively deprived area including many disadvantaged groups, such as single parents, residents with low educational level and foreign background. Mobility is also high. The sample results are in accordance with previous studies conducted by USK (Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000) and confirm general descriptions of Skarpnäck as a relatively deprived area.

There was a significant difference between the samples in terms of age. Whereas the sample of those connected to Skarpnet contained *no* residents over 65 years old, the non-connected sample contained 11% (the same percentage as the population as a whole, $\chi^2=8.3$, p=0.004, d.f=1). There was also a significant difference in terms of occupation. There were fewer pensioners (3%) in the connected sample than in the non-connected (17%). In addition, 85% of the Skarpnet sample was in employment compared to 66% among the non-connected (cf. 72% in the population, $\chi^2=5.23$, p=0.022, d.f=1). Although the difference is not statistically significant, the connected sample also contained more well educated people, more single parents and fewer people with foreign backgrounds than the non-connected sample.

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[3] Age 20 – 64 USK (1999)
[4] USK (1999)
[5] In 1998, 28 percent of all households with children were single parents (USK, 2000)

As the sample of residents who declined the offer of being connected to Skarpnet is rather small (n=10), the analysis of it is only brief and few generalisations can be made. However, prominent categories in this sample were women and the unemployed. There were significantly more women (90%, χ^2= 6.01, p=0.05, d.f=2) and unemployed (20%, χ^2= 6.02, p=0.049, d.f=2)[6] among the 'refusers' than in the other two groups.

6.2.2 Computer Experience

The questionnaires included various questions about previous computer experience. The first question concerned access to computers. There were significant differences between the connected and non-connected in terms of computer experience. Firstly, there was, not surprisingly, a significant difference between the groups in terms of computer access: 100% of the former had access at home compared to 74% of the latter (χ^2= 25.80, p<0.001, d.f=1).

Despite the apparently high percentage of the non-connected respondents who stated that they had a computer at home, in the interviews it was asserted that there were many households without computer access in Skarpnäck. The low level of home access was also mentioned by several respondents in the open questions. According to them, the Local Net project could not work unless everyone had access to computers and the Internet. As put by one of them, who also adds that there are more crucial and basic needs to be fulfilled in the area than access to computers:

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[6] At least one expected frequency is less than 1.

> **R:** Far from everyone has a computer or computer access. If a
> computer project is to work on equal conditions then everyone
> needs the possibility to have a computer, but many in Skarpnäck
> do not even have a telephone. All the talk about local computer
> projects becomes empty as long as we live in a society that is
> becoming more and more segregated. Computers do not solve
> any problems with, for example, cut downs in schools. The
> pupils need educated staff and not more computers since a
> computer cannot satisfy elementary needs.

In addition to questions about access, the questionnaire also included items about the number of years the respondent had been using computers and their confidence in computer usage.

Table 2) Computer Experience: Connected versus Non-Connected (%)

Computer Experience	Connection Status		Significance		
	Connected	Non-Connected	χ^2	p	d.f
Number of Usage Years			7.45	0.007	1
5 years or more	61	39			
Less than 5 years	39	61			
Computer Confidence					
Confident	71	53	5.22	0.022	1
Unconfident	29	47			
n	*87*	*90*			

The survey indicates that there were significant differences between the non-connected and connected respondents in terms of computer experience. Significantly more of those connected to Skarpnet (61%) had used a computer for more than five years compared with the non-connected (39%). Moreover, not surprisingly, more connected respondents (71%) than non-connected (53%) expressed confidence in using computers.

Respondents who did not want to be connected to the Local Net are significantly less experienced computer users than the other two groups (connected and non-connected), which may be a reason for them being 'excluded' from the computer project. Only about one fifth (22%) have used a computer for more than five years compared to three-fifths (61%) of the connected and two-fifths (39%) of the non-connected (χ^2 =10.95, p=0.004, d.f=2) [7]. Only, one third (33%) are confident computer users compared to almost three-quarters (71%) of the connected and more than half (53%) of the non-connected (χ^2 =8.77, p=0.012, d.f=2) [8].

6.2.3 Usage Patterns on the Local Net

In addition to questions about computer experience addressed to both connected and non-connected respondents, questions were addressed to Skarpnet members about the number of hours they used computers, the regularity of computer usage and the profile of the main users in the household.

Those connected to Skarpnet were regular users of computers. The average was to spend 19.5 hours in front of the computer per week and the majority (75%) answered that they used PCs on a daily basis. Very few respondents (3%) used them less than weekly. When the connected respondents were asked who mainly used the computer in the household, the replies indicated an over-representation of young men. About two-thirds (67%) of those who were said to be the main users were aged below 35 years, about one-third (31%) was between 35 and 52 years old. The average age among users in the connected households was 27 years. More than half of the connected respondents (55%) were men.

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[7] At least 20% of expected frequencies are less than 5.
[8] At least 20% of expected frequencies are less than 5.

The over-representation of males amongst users revealed in the questionnaire responses was supported by the interviews with connected residents. When asked whether they thought the Local Net was used by those connected to it, the 'ambassadors', both men, answered as follows:

Anders (48): Oh, God, yes. At least the sons and dads… This might sound like a prejudice, but in general I think men are more project-minded. If they decide to do something, they make damn sure they do it. Women might think like this: 'How does it *feel*?' They ask a lot of questions before they do anything… It is gender segregation: so far the IT-society mainly consists of men.

Magnus (54): I think mainly men use it (the Local Net). I believe there is a difference between men and women, at least when they get older. Computers to me, as a man, are interesting and I want to learn more about them; while my wife is scared and doesn't dare to do that. She is afraid of pressing the buttons in case she destroys anything.

6.2.4 Digital Inclusion of Excluded Residents

Overall, the previous section illustrates that those who were connected to Skarpnet were younger, more likely to be in employment and had more computer experience than those not connected to it. The findings also show that regardless of household composition, the most regular computer users in the household were young men. Hence, those who were excluded from the computer project were elderly people, the unemployed, women and residents with little computer experience.

Ways of including these disadvantaged groups in the Local Net were discussed in the interviews. When asked how to attract residents who were scared or skeptical about computers, there were divergent opinions among residents as well as among the ambassadors, whose jobs were to include 'everyone in the area':

> **Anders (48):** I don't think there is much one can do. If they don't want they don't. I'm not going to push anyone.
>
> **Gudrun (67):** But elderly people don't *want* to use computers and nobody can do anything about that.
>
> **Magnus (54):** You have to teach them *what* they can use it for and not just *how* to use it. For example, show those who are interested in food where they can find recipes on the Internet.

Like Magnus (54), Bengt (68), a physically disabled local pensioner, who works as a volunteer helping seniors with computers in the local library, stressed the importance of finding out what the potential users are interested in. For example, he said that as there are many elderly people interested in cooking, he shows his 'pupils' how to search for food recipes on the Internet. Moreover, since many of the elderly residents were born in different parts of the country, Bengt usually shows them the local newspaper online for the area:

> **Bengt (68):** I tend to ask them where they were born and if they would like to know what the weather is like there. Then we check that on the Internet. Also, if they, for instance, were born in Mora I show them how to find Mora's local newspaper. They become very fascinated by that…

However, Bengt also says that some people already know what they want to look for online. Some of his pupils have specific issues they are interested in:

> **Bengt (68):** They also come and want to look for specific information. And then, you know, they can get the latest from the Internet. Like one woman whose husband has the same illness as the boxer Mohammed Ali. She wanted to find out more about it and found a lot. For example, there was someone online who had a mother with same illness and another person who had written a doctoral thesis about it.

Bengt stresses the importance of demonstrating computers and the Internet in an informal way. He is a very friendly and easy-going person, which makes the seniors relaxed and at ease about asking questions. It is a very informal and friendly learning environment. The teaching sessions are for free, no certificates are provided and there are no formal prerequisites. Bengt stresses the importance of using informal language when teaching beginners about computers. According to him, many courses aimed at pensioners, such as those organised by SeniorNet, are far too complicated and advanced, which puts learners off. After attending a course run by SeniorNet himself, he decided to start teaching his neighbours about ICT and has continued doing so.

6.3 COMPUTER AND LOCAL NET USAGE

In addition to analysing the profile of connected residents, the potential and actual usage of computers in general, and the Local Net, in particular, were examined.

6.3.1 General Computer Activities

Both connected and non-connected respondents were asked about computer activities to determine to what extent the use of computers was directly relevant to social inclusion.

Table 3a) Computer Activities
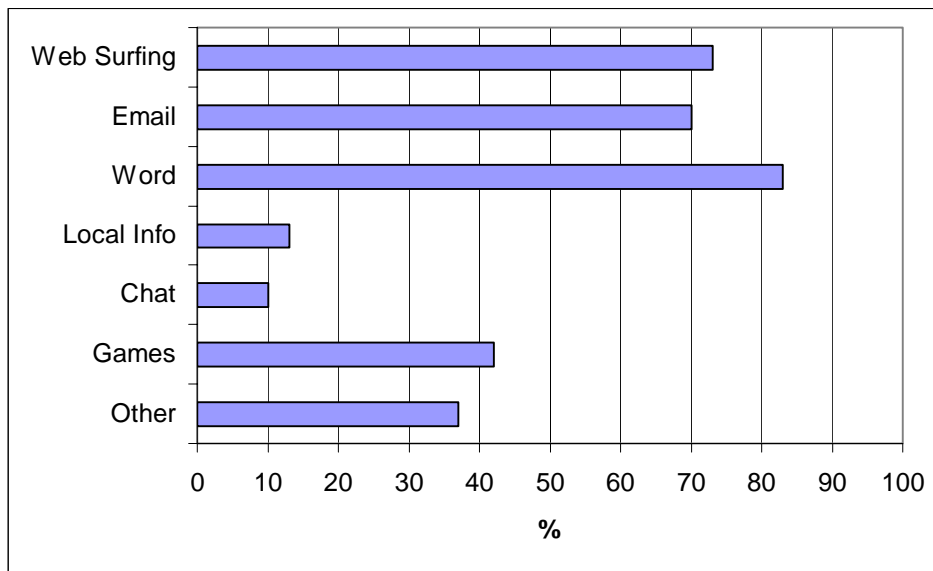
n = 154

The three most common activities among all respondents were word-processing (83%), Web surfing (73%) and email (70%). Playing games was also rather popular with about two fifths (42%) doing that. Searching for local information (13%) and chatting (10%) were less common activities. Other activities mentioned (38%) were calculating, programming, work (e.g. book-keeping), computer art, multi media, computer graphics, lay-out and downloading music.

Table 3b) Computer Activities: Connected versus Non-Connected (%)

	Connection Status		Significance		
Computer Usage	Connected	Non-Connected	χ^2	p	d.f
Web Surfing	82	63	6.74	0.009	1
Local Information	19	6	5.87	0.015	1
n	*83*	*71*			

There were significant differences between the connected and the non-connected in terms of certain computer activities. Not surprisingly, the connected used computers more than the non-connected. Of the connected 82% surfed on the Web compared to only 63% among the non-connected; a fifth (19%) of the former searched for local information versus 6% among the non-connected.

The picture given in the quantitative data was corroborated by the interviews. Most interviewees said that they used their computers mainly for Web surfing and hardly at all for accessing local information. The general reason for little local usage was stated to be a lack of interesting and relevant information on the Skarpnet site. This is demonstrated by the following extract from an interview with one of the ambassadors:

> **Sara:** Do you use the local net to search for local information?
>
> **Anders (48):** No, no!
>
> **Sara:** But that is one of the purposes with Skarpnet, isn't it?
>
> **Anders:** Yes, but that is probably Andersson's (the IT-manager) private mission. People, however, are rebellious and look for whatever they want… and not locally.
>
> **Sara:** On the Internet?

> **Anders:** Yes, this Intranet is so incredibly limited… there is not much information on it.

Similarly, the following interviewees, who also were connected to Skarpnet, complained about the lack of content on the local pages. However, they both pointed out that the project was rather new and that it would take time to develop content:

> **Magnus (54):** I don't visit Skarpnet very often. Sometimes I go in there, but they have not really started.
>
> **Gudrun (67):** There is not much there, but you cannot judge it as it is not completed yet.

Although it was argued that there was not much information on the Local Net, most interviewees were positive about the potential of the project. As will be demonstrated later, hopes and expectations were high.

Computer Activities and Demographic Factors

Differences in computer activities between different demographic groups were investigated.

Table 3c) Computer Activities and Demographic Factors (%)

	Demographic Factors		Significance		
Computer Activities	Gender		χ^2	p	d.f
	Female	Male			
Web Surfing	54	73	6.10	0.014	1
Email	52	70	5.01	0.025	1
Local Information	5	13	3.90	0.048	1
n	*92*	*83*			
	Age				
	- 50	50 +			

Web Surfing	75	19	35.93	0.000	1
Email	69	31	16.43	0.000	1
Word Processing	81	36	26.46	0.000	1
Games	45	8	14.63	0.000	1
n	*134*	*36*			
	Ethnicity				
	Swedish	Foreign			
Web Surfing	70	51	4.68	0.030	1
Word Processing	79	57	7.63	0.006	1
n	*117*	*49*			
	Education				
	School	University			
Web Surfing	56	72	3.90	0.048	1
Word Processing	37	83	35.53	0.000	1
n	*79*	*88*			

Overall, the data indicates that young Swedish men with a university degree used computers, especially Web surfing, word-processing and email, more than older people, women, residents with a foreign background and people with less education. Playing games was more common among young residents than among elderly people and men searched for local information more than women.

About three-quarters (73%) of men surveyed surfed on the Web compared with half (54%) of women. In addition, whereas three quarters (75%) of the respondents below fifty surfed on the Web; only about a fifth (19%) did among those over fifty. Another example of difference in usage was that word-processing was more common among respondents with a Swedish background (79%) than among those with a foreign background (57%), and among those with a university degree (83%) than among those without one (37%).

6.3.2 Services on the Local Net

Both those who were connected to Skarpnet and those who were not connected were asked about what services they thought *should* be on the Local Net. Those who were connected were also asked about what services they actually used.

Desired Local Net Services

First, the connected and non-connected samples were asked about which services they would like to have on the Local Net.

Table 4a) Desired Local Net Services (%)

Communication with other Residents	62
Communication (chat) with Local Politicians and Officials	56
Contact with different Local Service Agencies, e.g. schools and banks	76
Information from the Housing Company	78
Local Information	78
Ordering Food from the Food Store or Restaurant	43
Bookings, e.g. Cinema, Hairdresser or Travel Agent	54
Booking of the Laundry Room	62
Education / Courses	56
Helpdesk / Computer Support	63
Access to the Internet and the WWW	72
Games	34
Others	10

n=150

When asked what the residents would like to see on the Local Net, the three most popular choices concerned local issues, particularly local information: information from the housing

company (78%), local information (78%) and contacts with different local service agents (76%). However, in addition to local issues, access to the Internet was also seen as being desirable as almost three quarters (72%) stated that they would like that. *Communication* services were less frequently mentioned than *information* services, with the exception of contacts with different service agencies. About 60% of the respondents would have liked to be able to communicate with other residents or with local politicians and officials.

Booking services were seen as the least attractive services on Skarpnet. About half (54%) of the respondents mentioned shopping facilities and two-fifths (43%) said that they would have liked to be able to order food online. The ability to book the laundry room, however, was returned as desirable by 62% of the respondents. Education (56%) and IT-support (63%) were other activities mentioned by more than half the respondents. Playing games was the least required services on the Local Net, with about a third (34%) of the respondents choosing that. This may be influenced by the fact that all respondents were over 18 years old.

Table 4b) Desired Local Net Services: Connected versus Non-Connected (%)

	Connection Status		Significance		
Desired Services	Connected	Non-Connected	χ^2	p	d.f
Laundry Booking	71	51	5.41	0.020	1
IT-Support	74	50	8.01	0.005	1
n	*80*	*70*			

In general, there were few differences between the connected and the non-connected samples in terms of the services they would have liked to see on Skarpnet. However, about three quarters of the connected respondents expressed a wish to be able to book the laundry room (71%) and to have access to online computer support (74%) compared to about half among the non-connected (51% and 50% respectively).

The popularity of the laundry room bookings and IT-support was confirmed in the interviews. Two connected interviewees stressed the importance of the laundry booking in relation to a facilitation of everyday life:

> **Magnus (54):** I sometimes book the laundry room. If I can book the laundry room (online)… I have more time for other things.
>
> **Gudrun (67):** I use my computer every day and I book the laundry when it works. At first I thought, 'God, how silly! to book the laundry through the computer as one can easily walk down and book it.' However, as the service is there I do use it. It is easy to book at any time – two o'clock in the morning – and I wouldn't go down to the laundry at that time... (laugh).

The provision of IT-support online was also given higher priority among the connected respondents than the non-connected. This may reflect the considerable number of technological problems experienced with the Skarpnet project, which will be discussed later.

Local Net Services Actually Used

In addition to general queries about desired services on the Local Net, those who were connected to Skarpnet were also asked in an open survey question about what they actually did use it for. A wide variety of answers was given:

Table 5) Used Local Net Services (%)

Communication (with other residents, politicians, services), Email	16
Local Information, Information from Housing Company, Information	26
Bookings (e.g. Laundry Room, Shopping, Bank Services)	23
Education/Courses	5
Helpdesk/IT-support	6
The Internet	26
Games	6
Nothing	15

n=87

When asked what use they made of services on Skarpnet, respondents indicated a low pattern of usage. The most commonly used services included the Internet (26%), searching for local information (26%) including information from the housing company, and booking services (23%) including the laundry room. Hence, actual usage of the Local Net was somewhat different from the expressed desires. Booking services, especially booking of the laundry room, were relatively more used than described as wanted. The Local Net manager argued that booking of the laundry room was the most popular service among the users – it was also one of the services that actually worked[9]:

> **Skarpnet Manager:** Laundry booking via the Internet was very appreciated by the users. This service also gave the supervisory team a better opportunity for controlling their services. Sixteen tenants who made up to 340 bookings have used the laundry room booking regularly for two years.

---

[9] It is significant that this service is still available despite the general devise of Skarpnet.

In addition to laundry bookings, the survey also indicates that the Local Net was used for accessing local information, especially information from the housing company. The Skarpnet manager said that fault reporting via the Internet, introduced by the Local Net, was popular among the users. A version was still being used by the housing company in 2002.

As with the desired services, the actual usage indicates little interest in using the Local Net for two-way communication. The low interest in communication services may be due in part to the fact that some of the services either did not work or were never introduced as promised. The chat facility worked for a while, but was cancelled in March 1999 and never re-opened as a result of a change in Swedish law relating to the storage and communication of personal information on computer networks (Palme, 1999). Local interest groups were never established.

The ability to chat with local politicians, a service potentially provided on the Local Net, was a topic of discussion in the interviews. Both ambassadors were rather negative about the service. In general, they believed that the chat service would mainly be used by those residents who were already involved in the area. The fact that Swedish was the official language online was also critiqued. When asked what they thought about chatting with local politicians, one of the ambassadors said:

> **Anders (48):** I don't think it'll work.
>
> **Sara:** Why not?
>
> **Anders:** It may work for those who are already very involved. I guess they would bombard the politicians to death with their emails…
>
> **Sara:** What about those who are not involved?

> **Anders:** But how many has the language to meet bureaucrats? I almost think it is for the next generation who are more confident with the media and in general. Those who are not afraid of technical stuff. Also, you have to write in Swedish and that might not be so easy for a Turkish mother, for example.

Likewise, the second ambassador was skeptical about the value of being able to chat online with local politicians. The arguments he advanced appear to reflect a stereotyped view of class and ethnic differences:

> **Magnus (54):** I don't believe in it. Not in Skarpnäck. There are too many working class people and immigrants, and they don't care. However, those who are already interested in politics will probably use it. I'm sure many would be interested in it chatting with local politicians since they can get immediate replies.

A sixth of the survey respondents (15%) said that, despite being connected to the Local Net, they hardly used it. Some were simply not interested, others were dissatisfied with the services provided. Among the open-ended responses were:

> **R1:** I don't care. Live life natural!
>
> **R2:** I'm not that interested.
>
> **R3:** It is not very updated.
>
> **R4:** I don't use anything, as it doesn't seem to exist. If it does I would be grateful to be informed about it.

The two latter statements are in accord with those mentioned previously, which asserted there was little content on the Local Net. This can be further illustrated by the following quotes from the interviews:

> **Magnus (54):** There is nothing there (on Skarpnet)… You cannot even get into ICA (the food store) at all.
>
> **Anders (48):** It (Skarpnet) has to include more content. It cannot only include fault reports to housing company. It has to be something attractive so that people feel involved in it. For example, on the Internet you can go to AltaVista and search for a word and get 3000 or 30000 hits… and spend hours online, but not on Skarpnet. It is like buying a small flat – you walk around it pretty fast.

In addition to complaints about the lack of content on the local pages, many of the interviewees complained that there were too few residents connected to Skarpnet. Lack of users resulted in little communication or social participation online:

> **Thomas (31)**: I want to meet people (online), but there is nobody there. How many actually visit the local site? I think the most important thing to do is to advertise the page more: 'Everyone who has a computer in Skarpnäck visits the site where you can chat, exchange ideas and advertise!' Then, there would be some life, but a site without much content is totally worthless especially since not even half of the residents are connected. The risk is that is dies if it is not put up properly.

> **Gudrun (67):** Only a few blocks of flats are connected so far.
>
> We who got connected in August have lost interest…
>
> **Anders (48):** Residents have been offered a connection, but too
>
> few are connected.

6.4 PERCEPTIONS OF THE LOCAL NET

In addition to an investigation of potential users and usage of Skarpnet, perceptions (expectations, attitudes, problems) were examined in terms of digital and social inclusion.

6.4.1 Expectations of the Local Net

Although we have noted that that there was little actual usage of the Local Net, expectations of it were high both among connected and non-connected respondents.

Table 6a) Positive Expectations of the Local Net (%)

Skarpnet will lead to:	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
More IT-Interest and Knowledge	66	26	8
Better Contacts between Residents	34	45	21
Better Contacts with Local Politicians	50	34	16
Increased Support	26	58	22
Improved Local Information	70	25	5
Increased Trust	28	55	17
Stronger Cohesion	32	43	25
Decreased Group Tension	23	52	25
More attractive Housing-Area	56	36	8
Increased Local Identity	34	42	24

n = 160

Most residents thought the Local Net would increase digital inclusion. Two thirds (66%)

believed it would lead to an increase in interest in and knowledge of computers in the area.

Expectations about Skarpnet's effects upon social capital were also high. More respondents

thought the Local Net would improve contact between the residents (31%) than thought it

would not (21%) and half thought it would improve contact with local politicians. Almost

twice as many respondents agreed with the statement that use of the Local Net would

increase trust and informal support in the area (28%) than thought it would have a negative

effect. The vast majority (70%) believed that formal support, in terms of community

information, would be improved by Skarpnet.

It was generally believed that the development of Skarpnet would lead to a strengthening of

the sense of community in Skarpnäck. About a third believed that the use of a Local Net

could be a way of increasing cohesion (32%) and local identity (34%). More than half (56%)

thought that the project would make the housing area more attractive. However, opinions

about the relationship between the use of Skarpnet and tension between groups were

divergent. About a fourth of the residents (23%) thought that the Local Net would decrease

the gap between different groups; an equal number (25%) disagreed.

Table 6b) Negative Expectations of the Local Net (%)

Skarpnet will lead to:	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Less Participation in the Community	17	46	37
Increased Isolation of Residents	21	40	39
Less Face-to-Face Contact	32	30	38

n = 160

Few respondents had negative expectations of Skarpnet in terms of social capital and

community. Only about a fifth of the sample (17%) thought the Local Net would lessen

participation (17%) and increase social isolation (21%) in the area. However, there were divergent opinions about the effects of Skarpnet on face-to-face contact. About a third (32%) believed that the Local Net would lessen face-to-face contact; slightly more (38%) disagreed with the statement.

The relationship between the Local Net and face-to-face contacts was also brought up in the open survey-questions and in the interviews. One survey respondent argued that: 'computers are good for studying and searching information, but cannot substitute for human contact'. Similarly, two of the interviewees, both pensioners, one connected and one non-connected, expressed their concern at the effects of computers on face-to-face contact:

> **Bengt (68):** I don't have a computer at home because I'm afraid I would sit in front of it 24 hours a day. I don't dare to have it at home – I prefer to use the computers in the library, so I can meet people face-to-face too.
>
> **Gudrun (67):** I'm a bit scared of the Internet as it takes the human meeting away. Personally, I have a need to be out and about and to care about people. I need to hear people's voices.

However, Gudrun also pointed out that the she regards the Internet as a good complement to face-to-face interactions, especially for already civically involved people:

> **Gudrun (67):** The Internet is an advantage for civically engaged people as we can have online discussions. It is, for example, great to have pre-discussions online before face-to-face meetings.

In general, there were few significant differences between connected and non-connected respondents in terms of their expectations for Skarpnet. However, there were significant differences between the groups in terms of their expectations of the impact of the Local Net on IT-skills, local identity and contacts between residents.

Table 6c) Expected Outcomes of the Local Net: Connected versus Non-Connected (%)

	Connection Status		Significance		
Positive Expectations	Connected	Non-Connected	χ^2	p	d.f
More IT-Interest/Skills	80	52	11.98	0.001	1
Increased Local Identity	42	25	4.10	0.043	1
Better Resident Contacts	27	43	4.04	0.044	1
n	*83*	*77*			

The connected respondents were more positive about the impact of the Local Net on digital inclusion and community. Most residents connected to Skarpnet thought it would increase IT-interest and skills (80%) and local identity (42%) (cf. 52% and 25% respectively of the non-connected sample).

On the other hand, the non-connected had higher expectations about social contacts than the connected respondents. About two-fifths (43%) of those not connected to Skarpnet thought that it would increase social contacts in the area (cf. 27% of the connected sample). Some interviewees thought that this was because not everyone was interested in using the Local Net for the creation of social contacts:

> **Anders (48):** They (the residents) are only interested in the fast connection (to the Internet), so they can do whatever they want.

> **Magnus (54):** It depends on what you want. I mean Skarpnet
>
> won't make it become like in Italy here in Skarpnäck. Swedes are
>
> pretty difficult. You have to attract them somehow… However,
>
> Skarpnet could be good for increasing contact between different
>
> groups, as you don't know whom you are talking to.

However, the last interviewee suggested that the Local Net had the potential to increase social integration in Skarpnäck. Another connected respondent also thought that Skarpnet could build bridges between different groups in the area:

> **Thomas (31):** I think IT can do a lot with the right instruments.
>
> For example, I believe a Local Net could 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 a Local Net people might realise that
>
> they should meet face-to-face, and if they live in the same area
>
> that can create really 'cool' meetings, for example between an
>
> immigrant and a racist. When they eventually meet they cannot
>
> say: 'What – is it you? Get lost!'

In addition to the high expectations among the residents connected to the Local Net, the Skarpnet Manager had very high expectations of the project in terms of its potential for social integration and social capital building:

> **Skarpnet Manager:** You could use the network to look for
> someone who can play chess, fix your car, walk your dog or want
> to go mushroom picking. I believe in this – that one could look
> for contacts and get people collaborating. I have very big
> engagement in trying to bridge different ethnic groups through
> this project.

6.4.2 Attitudes towards the Local Net

In addition to expectations of the Local Net, general attitudes towards the project were also examined in the questionnaires.

Table 7) Attitudes towards the Local Net
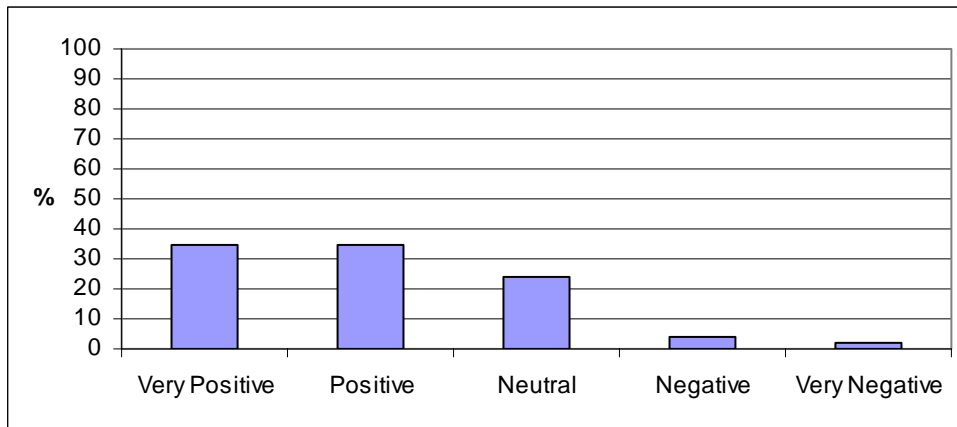
n = 162

As with the high expectations of the Local Net, most respondents had a positive or very positive attitude towards Skarpnet. More than two-thirds (70%) said they were positive towards the project and only 6% were negative. There were no significant differences between the connected and the non-connected in terms of attitudes. The vast majority in both

groups had positive attitudes towards the Local Net. Even among those who turned down the offer of being connected to Skarpnet, nobody was negative towards the project: 60 % were positive and 40% were neutral.

Reasons for the Positive Attitudes

In the open survey questions, most respondents connected to the Local Net stressed the importance of digital inclusion as a reason for their positive attitude towards Skarpnet. Many of them said that they felt more digitally included through the Skarpnet project and stressed the significance of being included in the Information Society:

> **R1**: IT and communication is the future and it is important to be part of it.
>
> **R2:** It will increase interest in computers and IT.
>
> **R3:** It is important to be part of the IT-development, especially for children who can find knowledge and information online.
>
> **R4:** It gives people the possibility to be part of the IT-world.
>
> **R5:** Computers is what it is all about now.
>
> **R6:** It gives more people access.

A particularly attractive feature of Skarpnet was the technology itself. The cheap and fast connection was seen to be an important aspect behind the respondents' positive attitudes towards the Local Net:

> **R1:** Cheaper phone bills since my son surfs on the Internet a lot.
>
> **R2**: Good with cheap Internet for children.

> **R3:** It goes via cable, which makes the Internet faster.

The Skarpnet Manager said that he received much appreciation from the connected residents in relation to the fast connection. According to him, this was one of the most valued aspects of Skarpnet. The interviewees themselves confirmed this by praising the technology, especially because of its speed:

> **Anders (48):** It is 20 times faster than an ordinary connection, so it is damn good. I am very happy with it. Since I use it (the computer) daily I save a lot of time.
>
> **Magnus (54):** It only takes a few seconds…

According to the open survey questions, most connected respondents believed that digital inclusion would also lead to social inclusion. The general view was that Skarpnet, with its provision of subsidised computer access, would facilitate social participation. Several respondents mentioned the global aspects and the facilitation of everyday life as something positive for their sense of social inclusion in the wider society.

> **R1**: Easier to do practical things, such as send a letter (email).
>
> **R2:** Can access information direct from home whenever it suits me.

Confirming the questionnaire responses, most interviewees thought the Local Net would facilitate everyday life, for example through such utilitarian tasks as booking the laundry room and encourage social participation free from the constraints of time, place or shyness:

> **Magnus (54):** I think Skarpnet can facilitate everyday life. If I
>
> can book the laundry room and order food, I have time for other
>
> things… Tonight I have to get in touch with my son's teacher,
>
> and it would have been good to do it through the Intranet.
>
> **Gudrun (67):** It would be good to start discussion groups
>
> through mail. The advantage is that you can contact anyone at
>
> anytime and write what you want, which saves time.
>
> **Thomas (31):** Many people who don't dare to go to meetings
>
> would probably prefer meetings on Skarpnet.

Some respondents also stressed the role of ICT in enabling the social inclusion of

disadvantaged groups, such as single parents and people with handicaps:

> **R1:** Can work from home at night. Can spend more time with my
>
> children. If you have the Internet you can be more involved as
>
> one can sit in pajamas and look at what is going on. You can also
>
> comment on stuff immediately. As a lone parent there is not
>
> much time otherwise. When the children are in bed, I can start
>
> caring about life outside home and work.
>
> **R2:** A good tool if you are heavily handicapped.

Another reason given for the positive attitudes towards the project was that some

respondents thought that Skarpnet was already having a positive influence on social capital

and community in the area. Participants believed that the Local Net project facilitated

informal and formal contacts and increased local identity in the area:

> **R1:** I think it leads to increased contact between residents.
>
> **R2:** Easier to communicate with both organisations and people.
>
> **R3:** The possibility to contact politicians from home. Local
> identity can increase.
>
> **R4:** Skarpnäck becomes a bit boosted by the project. It can lead
> to a positive strengthening.

Information, the most basic form of social support available online, was a common reason cited by respondents who were positive towards the Local Net:

> **R1:** A good effort to increase availability and information
> exchange in Skarpnäck.
>
> **R2:** Today there is lots of information online, for example
> different associations.
>
> **R3:** Computerisation has helped people a lot. It has made certain
> things easier, such as searching for information.
>
> **R4:** It is easier to obtain information.

Problems with the Local Net

Although respondents were positive towards the Local Net project, they also pointed out that they were experiencing problems with it, mainly relating to the technology used. Among the negative comments were the following:

R1: Fast and smooth - when it works.

R2: The initiative is good, but the technology bad. Broadband would have been better.

R3: Good that the Internet is available, but it is a shame that it works poorly with Telia. The Internet is often down and their support is very bad.

R4: It doesn't work so well at my home. Otherwise, most of it is super good.

R5: Problems all the time. It doesn't work, as it should.

R6: The net works slowly pretty often.

R7: You cannot get help.

R8: The modems are far too expensive. Single mothers, for example, will not be able to afford a connection.

R9: It could be very good, but the current Intranet does hardly work today.

R10: We would like to be able to shop from ICA (the local grocery store) online, due to lack of time, and get replies from local politicians, who we have emailed about important child issues. Except from that, we are very happy and satisfied with the project.

Additionally, as mentioned before and as demonstrated by the last quote above, interviewees complained about the lack of content and the layout of the pages. When asked what they thought about the Skarpnet project, some of the replies were:

> **Anders (48):** Damn boring! A good web site should be like a
>
> good Disney film!
>
> **Magnus (54):** The lay out of the site is not very good. It should
>
> be basic and simple, like a newspaper, so people would become
>
> interested.
>
> **Thomas (31):** So far I think it is pretty dead with this Skarpnäck
>
> project, except that the connection is very fast.

A final problem mentioned by some respondents in the survey was that few residents in Skarpnäck knew much about the computer project, even though they were said to be connected to it and the Skarpnet project had received considerable publicity in the media. The respondents claimed that the information about the project had been poor:

> **R1:** Have not received any information about the project.
>
> **R2:** Poor information.
>
> **R3**: What computer project?
>
> **R4:** Do not know anything about the local computer network –
>
> have never been connected to it.

Nevertheless, although admitting that there were some technological problems with the network and lack of information about it, a couple of respondents expressed their positive attitudes towards it:

> **R1:** Don't know much, but it sounds good!
>
> **R2:** I hope that this evaluation makes the Intranet work in a
>
> functional way.

Similarly, although pointing out that Skarpnet was not working as intended, the interviewees were mainly positive towards the idea of the Local Net. With Skarpnäck being pioneers with a Local Net, it was argued that 1998 might have been too early for a project, but it was believed that it would be standard in most areas in the near future:

> **Anders (48):** I think this (the Local Net) is going to be standard in five-ten years in each suburb in Sweden.
>
> **Skarpnet Manager:** There is a greater interest today. For example, everybody knows what www means. It is not so frightening as it may have been in 1998. We might have started too early, but someone must be first out… and I definitely think this is something for the near future.

6.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter deals with the Local Net project in Skarpnäck, which is a relatively deprived suburban area of Stockholm, containing many disadvantaged groups, including single parents, people with immigrant backgrounds and with low levels of educational attainment. The Local Net, Skarpnet, was introduced by the main Housing Association in the area as a means of tackling some of the problems of digital and social exclusion in Skarpnäck, through the provision of home access to everyone in the area. The evaluation of Skarpnet aims to investigate whether the Local Net reached its goal in terms of digital inclusion. Surveys and interviews carried out in 1999, when the project should have been in full operation, suggest that its success was very partial.

Sweden has the highest proportion of Internet users in the world (Townley, 2002), but far from everyone in Skarpnäck had access to computers in 1999 and even fewer were connected to the Local Net. Those who were connected to Skarpnet tended to be drawn from the ranks of those described in other studies (e.g. Dutton, 1999; Lin, 2000; Fong et al, 2001; Steyaert, 2002) as traditional computer users, already computer-experienced young residents in employment. Groups at risk of social and digital exclusion, the computer-illiterate, elderly people and the unemployed, were under-represented. In addition to inequality in connection, there was also inequality in usage within households, with a general over-representation of young males. There were divergent opinions about how to include the 'excluded'. Some residents argued that there one cannot force people to use computers. Other stressed the importance of learning people how computers can be beneficial to them.

Skarpnet embodied many of the tensions between the local and global uses of electronic networks. The most desired activity on the Local Net was the search for local information. Residents were interested in the potential of the Local Net for dealing with local issues, but a lack of local content and services lead to little local usage. For example, the lack of local interactive activity reflected the paucity of effective communications forums in Skarpnet. However, many residents were interested in and actually used Skarpnet as a gateway to the wider Internet, reflecting the concern expressed by Doheny-Farina (1996) that Local Nets might simply provide a means for local residents to 'get out of town'.

Despite the relative lack of use, residents of Skarpnäck were enthusiastic about the potential of the Local Net. It was seen as a vehicle for increasing general computer-skills in the area and encouraging digital inclusion, through providing subsidised access. It was also argued that Skarpnet had the potential to enhance social inclusion, providing access to excluded groups, such as single parents, and through its ability to provide links between different groups in the population. Residents were especially positive about the potential of the Local

Net to enhance civic involvement, providing local information and contact with local politicians and service providers. In general Skarpnet was seen as being a project which would not only improve digital and social inclusion within Skarpnäck, but would also serve to increase the standing of the area in the outside world, enhancing local pride and identity.

Skarpnet was launched with enthusiasm and publicity, but from the beginning it was clear that there were major problems with the project, mainly caused by technological and financial problems. It soon became clear that it was failing to achieve its goals of providing access to all and that the lack of local content meant that it was less attractive to new users than had been hoped. The description provided by one of its users that Skarpnet was like "a small flat you walk around pretty fast" echoes the concern expressed by Doheny-Farina (1996) that Local Nets might come to resemble a 'dying mid-town shopping centre'. Two years after its launch, Skarpnet ceased to exist.

CHAPTER 7:

Social Capital and Community
Skarpnäck 1998 - 1999

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Participation in Social Networks

7.3 Extent of Social Support

7.4 Level of Trust

7.5 Sense of Community

7.6 Summary and Conclusion

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to examine effects of Skarpnet, the Local Net project, on social capital and community in Skarpnäck in 1999. Comparisons were made between 87 respondents connected to Skarpnet and 90 respondents not connected to it. The survey data was balanced by material gathered in 9 interviews and four focus groups with a total of 17 participants.

Questions in the investigation were concerned with elements of social capital and community in the local area, including participation in social networks, aspects of social support and trust, and sense of local community:

- *What was the Extent of Participation in Social Networks?*
- *What was the Extent of Social Support?*
- *What was the Level of Trust?*
- *What was the Sense of Community?*

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Local Net was hardly used. It is, therefore, not surprising that few differences between connected and non-connected respondents were found in the responses to the questions above. When no difference was found the two samples were merged, in order to increase the sample size[10]. The chapter presents a picture of social capital and community in Skarpnäck in 1999 and sets the stage for a later comparison following the demise of the Skarpnet project and the opening of an Internet Café in the area.

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[10] When nothing is said, there is no difference between the connected and the non-connected samples.

7.2 PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Participation in social networks is an essential component of both social capital and community. Formal and informal participation, weak and strong ties were investigated. Many of the questions relating to social networks were also examined in terms of local and non-local aspects, taken to reference bonding and bridging ties.

7.2.1 Formal Participation

In accordance with the approach used by Putnam (1993), several questions were asked concerning formal community involvement, most of which constitute weak ties. Topics concerned community participation, voting, contact with local politicians, organisation membership, spare-time activities and satisfaction with the number of local meeting places.

Table 1) Difficulties in Participation in Skarpnäck
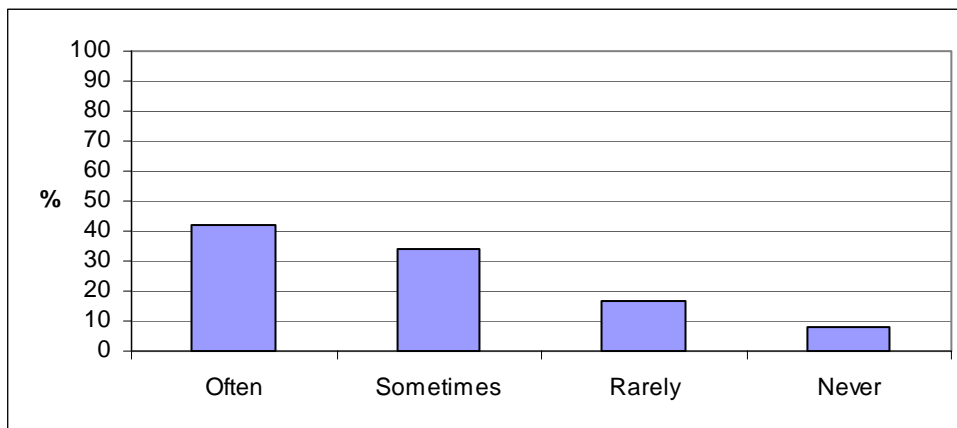
n = 170

To begin respondents were asked a general question about local participation. More than three-quarters (76%) stated that they experienced difficulties in participating in the area, primarily due to lack of time. Difficulties in local participation were confirmed in discussions within the focus groups and by interview responses. For example, single parents,

in particular, pointed out that they had difficulties in participating in events taking place in Skarpnäck due to lack of time.

Civic involvement was also measured through questions about voting and contact with local politicians. The level of voter turnout was relatively high, with 88% saying that they voted in the last local election. The overall figure for the Stockholm metropolitan area in 1998 was 78% (SCB, 1998).

Table 2) Contact with Local Politicians and Officials
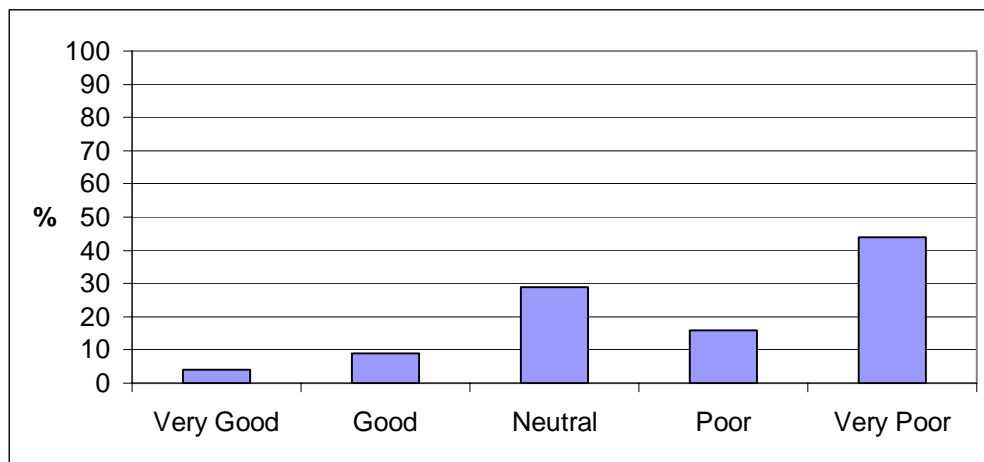
n = 174

In contrast to the active voting response, most respondents (60%) believed contact with local politicians and officials was poor. Only 13% thought they had good contact with local politicians.

Table 3a) Organisation Membership: Number of Organisations
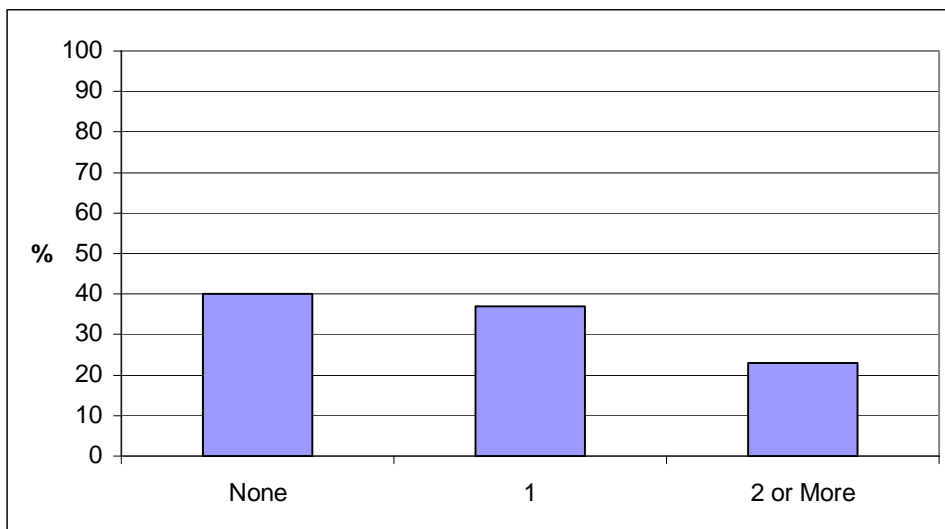
n =177

Civic involvement was also operationalised through a question about voluntary associations, local and non-local. Two fifths of the respondents (40%) belonged to no organisation at all. Less than a quarter (23%) belonged to two organisations or more.

Table 3b) Organisation Membership: Different Types of Organisations[11] (%)

Types of Organisation	Members	Non-Members
Political Party	7	93
Religious Organisation	7	93
Sports Association	20	80
Environment Association	5	95
Parental, Pensioner or Youth Group	14	86
Women's Organisation	5	95
Other Organisation	29	71
n	*177*	

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[11] As this is a multiple-choice question, the respondents could tick several organisations. As a result, the percentage does not add up to 100% in relation to n (177).

Among the types of organisations listed, membership in sports associations was the most popular, with a fifth (20%) of all respondents being members. In general, there was no difference between membership in local and non-local organisations. However, more respondents (14%) belonged to non-local sports associations than to local ones (7%).

In addition to Putnam's (1993) operationalisation of social capital in terms of organisational membership, a more informal version of involvement was examined through a question about spare-time activities. The respondents were asked what they normally did in their spare time, locally and non-locally.

Table 4a) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Number of Activities
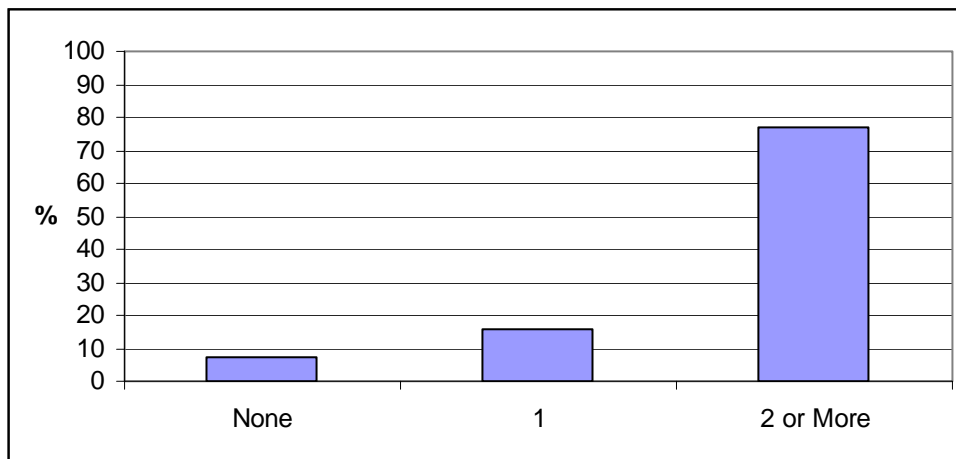
n = 177

Respondents were more involved in spare-time activities than they were in organisations. The vast majority (77%) participated regularly in at least two spare-time activities (cf. 23% in organisations); 7% were not involved in any spare-time activities (cf. 40% in organisations).

Table 4b) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Different Types of Spare-Time Activities[12] (%)

Spare-Time Activities	Participant	Non-Participant
Sports	48	52
Entertainment	62	38
Libraries	49	51
Education	21	79
Other	20	80
n	*177*	

Entertainment was the most popular activity mentioned with 62% of all respondents

mentioning that. Participation in sports (48%) and visiting libraries (49%) were also popular.

Table 4c) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Local versus Non-Local (%)

	Connection Status		Significance		
Spare-time Activities	Locally	Non-Locally	χ^2	p	d.f
Entertainment	33	51	7.52	0.001	1
Libraries	44	16	15.88	0.000	1
n	*109*				

There was little difference between local and non-local spare-time activities. However,

entertainment, not surprisingly, was more common non-locally (51% vs. 33%). In contrast to

this, library usage was mainly local (44% vs. 16%).

The respondents were also asked if they thought there were enough meeting-places for the

residents in Skarpnäck and how often they visited the local Culture House.

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[12] Again, as this is a multiple-choice question, the respondents could tick several spare-time activities. As a result, the percentage does not add up to 100% in relation to n (177).

Table 5) Satisfaction with Number of Local Meeting-Places
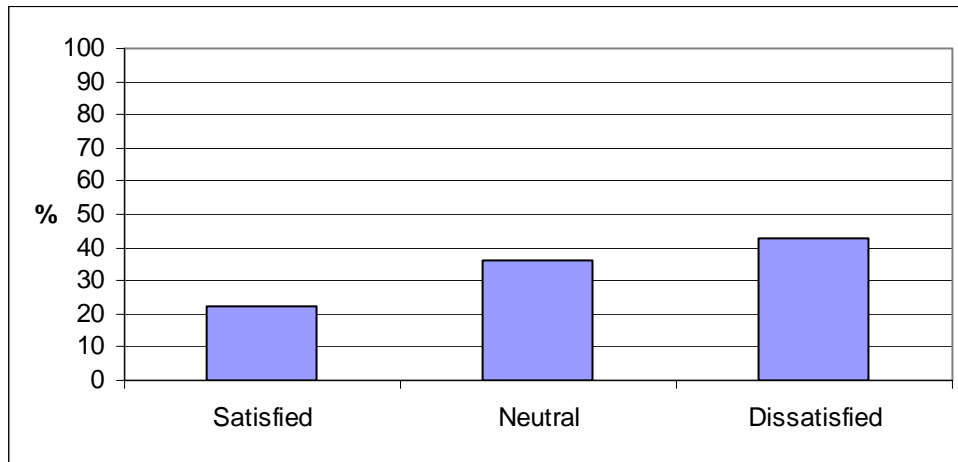
n=172

Few respondents (22%) were satisfied with the number of public meeting points in the area. More than two fifths (43%) did not think there were enough meeting-places for the residents. The lack of meeting-places was confirmed in the interviews and in the focus group discussions. Most participants said that they thought there was a great need for more public meeting-points in the area, especially as there is only an avenue in the middle of Skarpnäck but no square to provide a natural meeting-point.

However, although there was a general dissatisfaction with the number of local meeting-places, nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported that they had visited the Culture House on more than five occasions during the year. Almost a third (30%) had visited it more than ten times. In contrast, more than a quarter (27%) of the respondents had never visited the Culture House.

7.2.2 Informal Participation

Following Wellman et al (1988), who emphasise the importance of informal participation in the creation of social capital, the questions about formal participation (and weak ties) in the area were augmented by ones concerning participation in more informal networks (and strong ties): connections in Skarpnäck, number of close friends, satisfaction with the number, contact with people sharing similar interests, contacts with neighbours and feelings of loneliness. As in the questions concerned with formal participation a distinction was made between local and non-local contacts.

Few respondents (16%) had family or relatives in the local area, but most of them claimed to have friends or acquaintances in Skarpnäck (77%). However, the respondents had most of their *close* friends outside of Skarpnäck.

Table 6) Number of Close Friends: Local versus Non-Local

	Locality		Significance	
Number of Friends	Locally	Non-Locally	t	p
Mean	2.34	7.18	9.31	0.000
Std Dev	3.15	7.47		
n	*134*	*157*		
Valid n			*130*	

The next indicator of participation in informal networks, a question about the number of close friends, indicates that the respondents had significantly more close friends outside the local area (mean = 7.2) than within it (mean = 2.3). 134 respondents had close friends in the local area, 157 had friends non-locally. However, most respondents (130) stated that they had close friends both locally and non-locally.

The extra-local location of close friends was confirmed in both the interviews and the focus groups. The majority of the participants said that most of their friends were outside Skarpnäck, and that they knew very few residents in the area very well.

However, most respondents were satisfied with the size of their circle of friends. Two thirds of them (65%) stated that they were happy with the number of friends; one third (35%) would like a larger circle of friends. As with the number of close friends, the majority of respondents (60%) were also satisfied with their contacts with people sharing similar interests.

Participation in informal social networks was also investigated in the survey through various questions about frequency and means of contact with family, friends and neighbours.

Table 7) Face-to-Face Contact between Neighbours in Skarpnäck
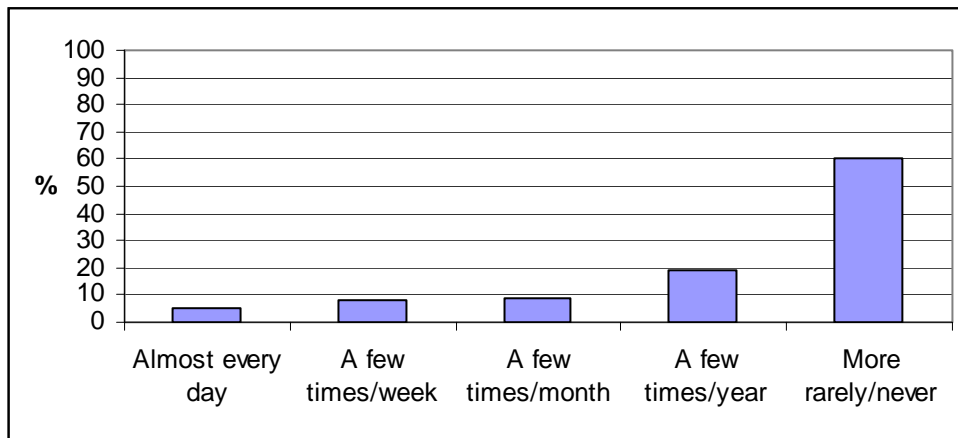
n=124

There seems to be little contact between neighbours in Skarpnäck, which further supports the general finding about residents having few friends locally. Only 13% of the respondents socialise face-to-face with their neighbours on a weekly or daily basis. The vast majority of the sample (60%) never spends face-to-face time with their neighbours. Overall, face-to-face

contact (35%) and telephone (58%) were the respondents' most common means of
maintaining regular contact (at least twice a week) with their informal networks. Email
(17%) and letter (2%) were less common.

Table 8) Feelings of Loneliness
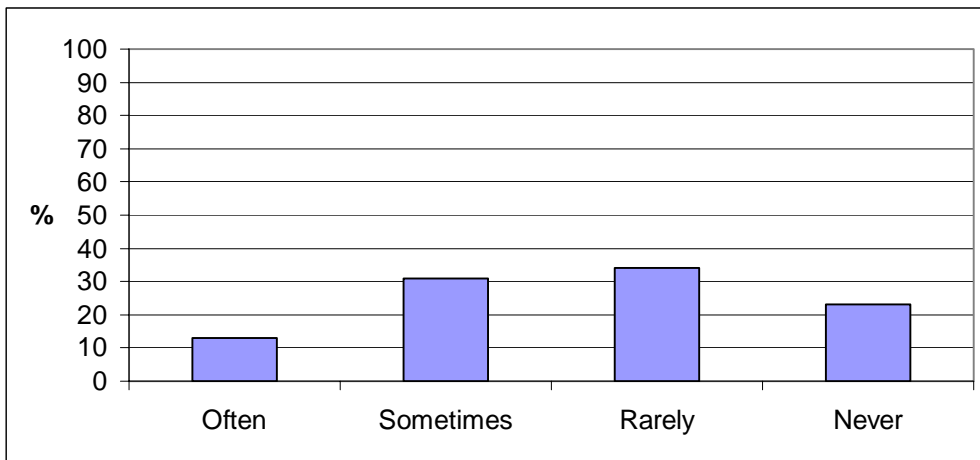
n = 175

In proportion to little contact between neighbours, feelings of loneliness were rather high in
the area. When asked how often the respondents felt lonely, many (44%) stated that they did
sometimes (31%) or often (13%). Less than a quarter (23%) stated that they never felt
lonely.

7.3 EXTENT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

The existence of social support, an important element of the concept of social capital, was
investigated through questions on the availability of financial, instrumental, emotional and
social support. The questionnaire also included questions about more formal support in
terms of local information.

7.3.1 Informal Support

As with the number of friends, most respondents (76%) were happy with the amount of support they received. The stated sources were equally divided among family and kin (82%) and friends, acquaintances and neighbours (78%). The importance of neighbours as a source of support was stressed by some interviewees. One of them, a single parent, said that:

> **Monika (46):** It is important with good neighbourhood contact, especially for me as a single parent. Neighbours can, for example, be a great source for baby-sitting. We used to have an 'extra granny' next door, who helped out a lot, but she moved and now I feel pretty lonely….

Table 9a) Social Support: Different Types of Received Social Support (%)

	Support / No Support	
Social Support	Yes	No
Borrow Money	88	12
When Sick	95	5
Help with Baby-Sitting	88	12
Talk about Problems	94	6
Want Company	94	6
n	*170*	

The survey indicated that the vast majority of respondents had access to support. Overall, about 90% (88-95%) knew someone who would provide them with support when wanting to borrow money, being sick, needing help with baby-sitting, needing to talk about personal problems or just wanting company. Few respondents (5-12%) indicated that they were isolated in the sense of knowing nobody who would provide them with social support.

Table 9b) Social Support: Local versus Non-Local (%)

Social Support	Connection Status		Significance		
	Locally	Non-Locally	χ^2	p	d.f
Borrow Money	46	87	54.87	0.000	1
When Sick	57	76	14.27	0.000	1
Help with Baby-Sitting	68	75	0.379	0.538	1
Talk about Problems	50	85	42.93	0.000	1
Want Company	74	95	25.37	0.000	1
n	*161*				

In common with the number of close friends, there was a large difference between support obtained locally and non-locally. The respondents tended to get most of their informal support from outside the local area (72-95% vs. 46-74% locally). The only exception was baby-sitting, where there were no significant differences between local and non-local sources of support.

7.3.2 Formal Support: Local Information

The survey also included questions about formal support in terms of local information. The respondents were asked whether they thought they were provided with enough information about Skarpnäck and what was going on there, including a question about information sources.

Table 10) Satisfaction with Local Information
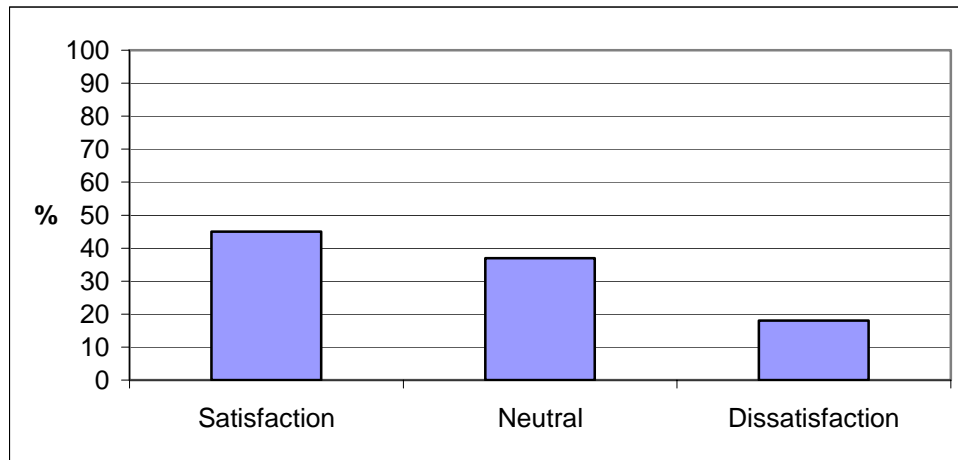
n = 174

More than two fifths of the respondents (45%) were satisfied with the local information.
About a fifth (18%) did not think they received enough information about Skarpnäck.
Despite the high profile given to the provision of local information in the prospectus for
Skarpnet, few (7%) of the connected respondents used the Local Net as an information
source. Newspaper reading, on the other hand, was a common source of local information.
The local paper, which ceased to exist just after the survey, was the most popular source of
local information; three quarters (75%) of the respondents used it as a source.

7.4 LEVEL OF TRUST

As mentioned earlier, trust is often argued to be the most significant individual measure of
the extent of social capital. In the present study, trust was measured by using the anomia
scale developed by Srole (1956). The scale includes five statements tapping different aspects
of trust (or rather, mistrust). The assertion by Srole almost half a century ago that the
questions in the scale tap a single underlying dimension was justified by the results of a
factor analysis of the responses of Skarpnäck in 1999.

Table 11a) Factor Analysis of Anomia Variables

Statements about Anomia	Component 1
1. Whatever people say most things are getting worse for the average person.	.582
2. It is hardly fair to bring children into the world in this day and age.	.714
3. Nowadays you must live pretty much for the day and take the future as it comes.	.635
4. These days you do not really know whom to trust	.735
5. There is no point in writing to officials since they are rarely interested in the problems of the average man.	.387

Each of the statements can be interpreted as referencing a single underlying dimension. Almost half (46%) of the total covariance is explained by this dimension. The loading of each statement illustrates the correlation between the individual variable and the underlying component. Two questions: *These days you do not really know whom to trust* and *It is hardly fair to bring children into the world in this day and age*, show especially strong correlations with the anomia scale, more than half of their variance being captured by the dimension.

Table 11b) Index of Anomia: General Mistrust
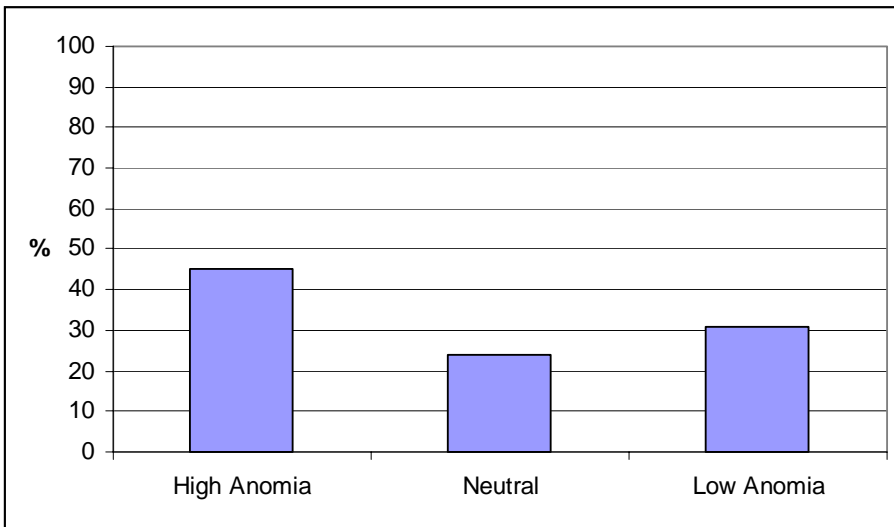
n = 172

There was a relatively high degree of anomia or general mistrust in the area. More respondents agreed (45%) than disagreed (31%) with the five anomia statements. Many respondents (49%) thought most things were getting worse for the average man; few disagreed (24%). Respondents, however, were more positive in their view on bringing children into the world. Less than a fifth (18%) believed that it was not fair to bring children into this world, more than half of the sample (52%) disagreed. Most respondents (40%) had little faith in the future, however, a third (32%) disagreed with the third statement that one must live pretty much for the day and take the future as it comes.

Table 12) Social and Institutional Distrust
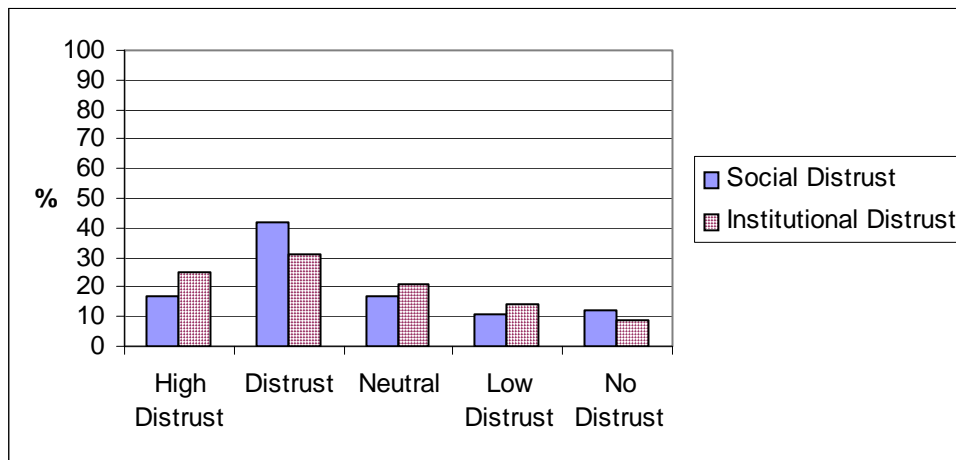
n1 (social distrust) =175, n2 (institutional distrust) =173

Trust (both social and institutional) was very low among the respondents. The majority thought other people in general could not be trusted; 59% agreed with the fourth statement: *These days you do not really know whom to trust,* less than a quarter (23%) disagreed with it. In addition, few respondents had faith in officials. More than half (56%) of the respondents agreed with the fifth statement that: *There is no point in writing to officials since they are rarely interested in the problems of the average man.* Less than a quarter (23%) disagreed. The low level of level of trust in the area was also stressed in the interviews. Many participants pointed out that other *people* could generally not be trusted. Moreover, the

participants did not think that the *politicians* cared about them or the housing area. The low

level of institutional trust is illustrated by the following quote from one of the interviews:

> **Bella (33):** The politicians don't care. They say that there is no
>
> money, but anyone understands that they just want to spend it on
>
> other places.

7.5 SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The sense of community in Skarpnäck was investigated through questions about sense of

solidarity and degree of community attachment.

7.5.1 Sense of Solidarity

Sense of solidarity was operationalised through questions about social cohesion, perception

of commonality and beliefs about the existence of tension between different groups in

Skarpnäck.

Table 13) Social Cohesion in the Area
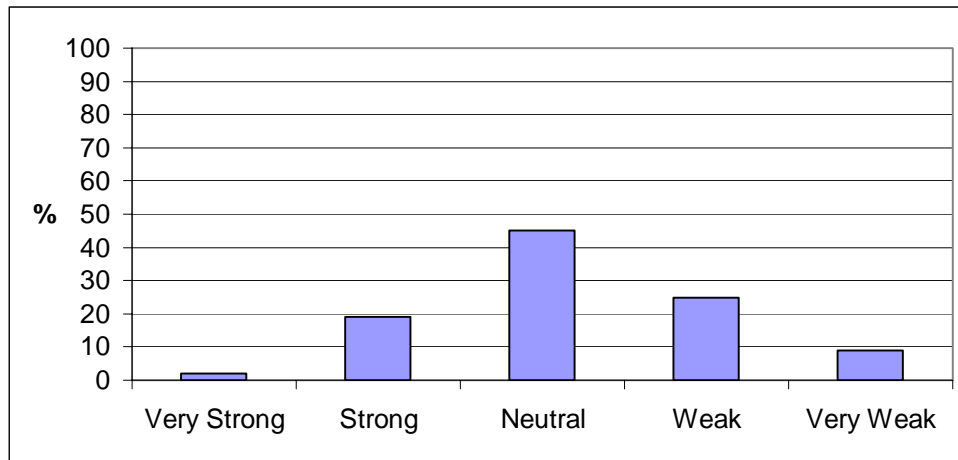
n = 173

When asked directly about the extent of social cohesion in Skarpnäck respondents generally

indicated that it was weak. More than a third of respondents (34%) stated that they thought

that cohesion was weak in the area, fewer than a quarter (21%) thought that it was strong.

The apparent lack of cohesion in Skarpnäck was confirmed by some interviewees who

argued that there were general problems with collaboration:

> **Monika (46):** Common responsibility for the area doesn't work
> with today's life style. Nobody wants to join in anymore. Many
> people have difficulties in respecting democratic rules.
> Everything is getting worse. For example, common cleaning days
> has ceased to exist since too few are joining in. It is a shame,
> because it is a great way of getting to know your neighbours.

However, not everyone agreed and some participants in the focus groups and the interviews

argued that there was strong social cohesion among residents. Although many residents

acknowledged the existence of social problems in the area, many also referred to Skarpnäck

as being a cohesive village, which almost could be related to bonding social capital or even localism. In this respect a clear distinction is sometimes made between Skarpnäck and surrounding areas. One of the residents succinctly describes it in the following terms:

> **Gudrun (67):** There have been some problems, but still Skarpnäck is like a small village. It is a bit like it used to be in the past. You keep united on your little back yard, but then you go to the next yard to fight.

Table14) Sense of Commonality among Residents
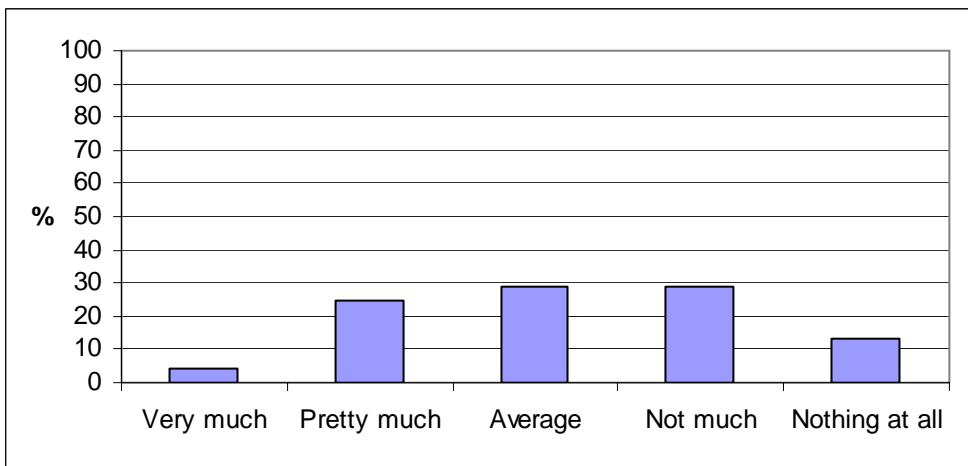
n = 174

Despite the assertions by some of the interviewees that Skarpnäck was like a small village, the questionnaire responses suggest that the sense of commonality among residents was low. Two fifths of respondents (42%) believed they had nothing or little in common with other residents of Skarpnäck, fewer than a third (29%) felt a sense of commonality with others.

The existence and strength of a sense of commonality was also discussed in the focus groups and interviews. Many participants said that they felt they had little in common with other residents in the area. As expressed by one of the interviewees:

> **Monika (46):** I don't think just because we live together it means that we have much in common. Sense of commonality has to be based upon something else.

The importance of shared values and shared interests was stressed as a basis for a sense of commonality and collaboration. As two residents said:

> **Gudrun (67):** There must always be a topic or a common interest for a sense of solidarity. I attend study circles and the aim with them is to meet other people, but for that there has to be a topic – a shared interest to gather around.
>
> **Karin (66):** It is easier to collaborate with people who are on the same level and share similar interests… You find each other on the common things, but then it is always also fun to see the differences – as long as you don't fall out…

Table 15) Tension between Local Groups
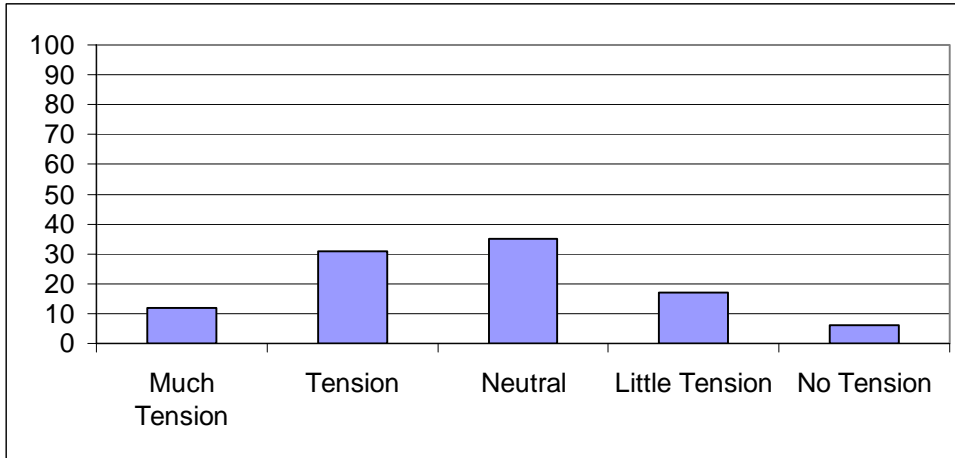
n = 174

As a further indication of community spirit in the area, respondents were also asked whether they thought there was tension between different local groups. More than two fifths of respondents (43%) thought that there was tension between groups in Skarpnäck; less than a quarter (23%) perceived little or no tension in the area. Many interviewees also pointed out that there was tension between neighbours:

> **Monika (46):** It is difficult to live together and be in agreement. There is more tension than collaboration… There are lots of problems between neighbours. For example, although everyone knows how to behave in the laundry room, nobody does it right…
>
> **Magnus (54):** You have to be a bit careful about what you do. You cannot talk politics or religion with everyone. That is a rule. You should not give a damn if your neighbor likes Saddam Hussein or not.

The main tensions mentioned in the survey were related to ethnicity. Almost every respondent (94%) who answered the question affirmatively mentioned tensions between Swedish-born and residents with immigrant background (54%), between different immigrant groups (18%) or mentioned Romanies as a cause of tension in the area. Other groups mentioned were different age groups (34%) and people living in rented flats versus people living in owned flats (7%).

The existence of tension between different ethnic groups was confirmed in the interviews. It was argued that there were problems with tension between different ethnic groups:

Bella (33): Sometimes there are different gangs fighting on the street. Black and gypsies. I have seen them fight in the middle of the street. Sometimes my sister's children are involved in fights and we have to go and pick them up because someone wants to hit them… It doesn't feel safe, as I'm a single young woman without any physical strength. I need a place to trust.

Monika (46): There are many people from different countries here, but it shouldn't make a difference since we all live here and should follow the rules and norms here. Otherwise it is impossible. I think many foreigners try to take advantage of this by pretending that they don't understand… It is a shame. Moreover, they may have another view on women and may not accept if a woman says something…

Bengt (68): I like it here, but there are many immigrants and a lot of fights, but if you don't get involved in it then you don't have any problems.

A particular set of prejudices appears to concern Romanies:

> **Evert (67):** I usually say that I only have one prejudice. It is a prejudice against Gypsies – a prejudice that I have seen both confirmed and refuted in Skarpnäck. It has been proofed the contrary through many Gypsies who try hard to be integrated in society, but there are others who… just look at the school where many of the Gypsy children are missing… and you see that some of them have ordinary jobs, but seem to have lots of money: driving big cars and behave in a very superior way.
>
> **Sara:** How can this prejudice be changed?
>
> **Evert:** It is a huge problem and very difficult to change. It goes back hundreds of years and in today's society there are great risks of strong tensions… The Gypsies become an isolated group.
>
> **Sara:** How can Gypsies become more integrated in society?
>
> **Evert:** I don't really know, because there has to be a desire to meet Swedes and the Gypsies are not interested in integration…

The existence of prejudices against Romanies was further supported in an interview with a young Romany woman (Bella, 33) who felt discriminated against by most residents in the area. She says that the Romanies, especially Finnish Romanies, have a bad reputation and have been stigmatised in the area. According to her, the stigma has spread, with local politicians referring to Skarpnäck as a 'Gypsy camp.'

The role of the media in presenting a stigmatised view of Skarpnäck and thus encouraging tensions between groups in the area was taken up by other interviewees and focus group

participants. It is argued that the negative picture of the area, presented by the media, influences many people's perceptions negatively, especially elderly residents. As a result, many pensioners became scared of young residents and the Swedish-born feared foreigners.

At the same time, informal discussions in the youth club, the in-depth interview and the discussions in the focus groups suggested that there was less tension between younger people in relation to ethnicity. According to one of the interviewees who worked with youngsters in the area: "There are no groups among youngsters. Everyone keeps together – from different nationalities" (Bella, 33). Moreover, discussions in the Skarpnäck youth club suggested that whatever the views of older residents, most youngsters felt a strong sense of attachment to the area.

7.5.2 Community Attachment

Community attachment is also part of the operationalisation of sense of community. In the survey, questions were asked about satisfaction with living in the area and local identity.

Table 16) Satisfaction with Living in the Area
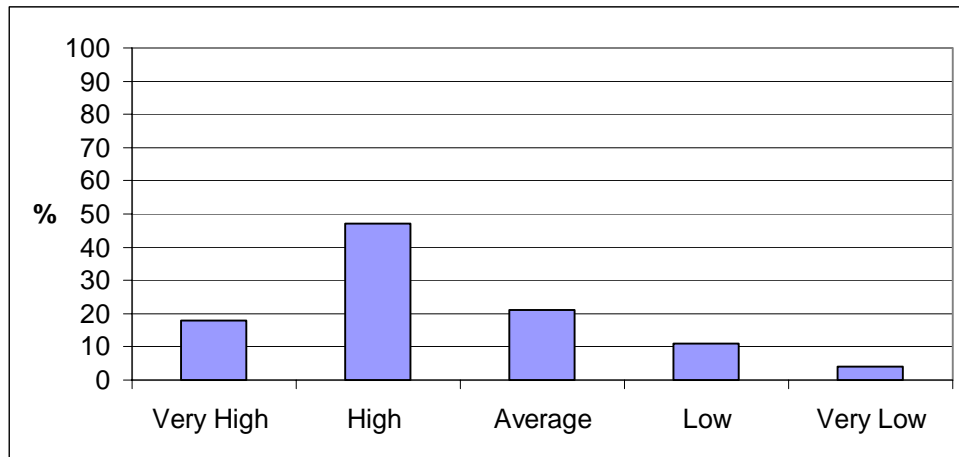
n= 172

Despite the evidence that solidarity was low, the majority of respondents (65%) stated that

they were happy living in Skarpnäck. Only 15% said that they were dissatisfied with living

there. This positive feeling was also supported in the discussions, which took place in the

interviews. Most of the participants stated that they were happy to be living in the area:

> **Thomas (31):** It is a very beautiful, quiet and pleasant place. You
> can walk home by night without any problems. It is the best area
> around this side of the city.
>
> **Anders (48):** I have lived here for 14 years and I'm not planning
> to move to Monaco.

Most residents said that they were very satisfied with the physical aspects of the area. For

example, they were happy about the modern housing and the green surroundings, such as the

forest and the lake nearby.

A scale, used by USK in earlier studies of Skarpnäck and other housing areas in Greater

Stockholm (Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000), was used in the questionnaire to measure

local identity as a global indicator of sense of community. The scale ranges between 0 and

10, where 0 indicates no sense of local identity and 10 a very strong sense of identity.

Table 17a) Sense of Local Identity 1989-1999

	Change in Local Identity			
Local Identity	S-näck 1989 (USK)	S-näck 1992 (USK)	S-näck 1996 (USK)	Skarpnäck 1999
Mean	5.1	5.3	5.4	5.5
std dev	na	na	na	3.1
n	*210*	*300*	*198*	*171*

Local identity among Skarpnäck respondents in 1999 was very low. The average was 5.5, among the lowest of any of the areas studied. Both the present research and studies carried out over more than a decade by USK (Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000) suggest that the general level of local identity in Skarpnäck has been relatively low for a long time. It has not changed much in ten years, with an average slightly above five between 1989 and 1999. In 1996, USK (Ivarsson, 1997) compared local identity among 24 different urban areas in Stockholm. The average mean on the identity scale for the city of Stockholm as a whole was 6.7. Skarpnäck, with a mean of 5.4 in the same year, had the third lowest score among the areas considered.

According to USK (Ivarsson, 1997), the districts with the highest scores (between 7.2 and 7.8) are inner city areas or high status outer city areas. Ivarsson (1997) describes the five areas with the lowest scores, Tensta-Rinkeby (6.2), Vantör (6.1), Skarpnäck (5.4), Kista (5.1) and Rinkeby (5.1), as being from the time of the 'million programme' housing scheme and having high proportions of immigrants. Skarpnäck does, of course, have a relatively high proportion of immigrants, but, in contradiction to Ivarsson's characterisation, the area was not part of the 'million programme', but, as noted earlier, had been developed as a counter to the million programme. Clearly the effort to change the sense of local identity through changing the physical form of the development has proved to be less effective than the planners had hoped.

Table 17b) Sense of Local Identity: Connected versus Non-Connected

	Connection Status		Significance	
Local Identity	Connected	Non-Connected	t	p
Mean	5.8	5.1	1.99	0.048
Standard Deviation	1.21	2.99		
n	*84*	*87*		

There was a significant difference in the reported sense of local identity between respondents connected to Skarpnet and respondents not connected to it in 1999. The connected sample had a significantly higher sense of local identity (5.8) than the non-connected (5.1). Unfortunately it is not possible to disentangle the causal priorities involved, but potential reasons for the low sense of local identity in Skarpnäck were discussed in the focus groups.

Reasons for the Weak Sense of Community

The main reasons for the low level of identity that were advanced in the focus groups were the lack of local services, including meeting-places, and the prevalence of social problems. Other factors mentioned were the fact that the housing area is fairly newly built, the architecture and the high mobility.

There is a consensus among the focus group participants that the lack of services, especially meeting-places, is the biggest problem in relation to low levels of local identity. It was argued that the presence of local services enables an area to flourish as people stay in the local area, encouraging feelings of satisfaction and 'rootedness'. Residents said that the lack of local services made it necessary to constantly travel out of Skarpnäck. This automatically decreases the chances of natural contacts occurring locally, which, in turn, decreases the sense of local identity. When asked about the reasons for the low level of local identity, several examples were provided:

Katitzi (26): Number one is the cutting down on local services. For example, if you compare with Skärholmen they have everything – swimming pool, pharmacy, sales of wine and spirits and H&M - everything that makes you feel at home and rooted where you live. You get so disappointed when those things are cut down. When what you need and live on is taken away. I think that is a very important reason - you have to be happy where you live, and outside the flat too since you don't just stay inside watching TV. You go out and want as much as possible around you where you live.

Birgitta (59): I also think it means a lot to have local services. If you have to go somewhere else to go to the pharmacy, to buy alcohol, clothes or to swim you have to get away from Skarpnäck all the time.

Shazia (38): It is about politics. They want to save money and don't want to have things here. There is hardly anything here. Therefore people are not very satisfied and happy here. They have taken too many services away. They almost took the library, but then so many people protested…

Lucia (22): If you compare with other areas, there is nothing here. No pharmacy, sales of wine and spirit or even a medical doctor. You have to go to Bagarmossen. The post office is sometimes closed and sometimes open. You never know when. The citizen office was closed down two years ago. You constantly have to go away from Skarpnäck. It is difficult to create contacts since there are no places to meet people.

Social problems as a potential cause for the low levels of local identity were also mentioned in the focus groups. As the area has been stigmatised in the media, it was a topic that seemed to concern all participants on an emotional level. Some respondents, as evidenced by the USK-reports, thought that there were problems with criminality in the area arguing that the media picture of the area was true. For example, Shazia (38) told her group that she thought there had been many burglaries in the area. Two other participants explained it like this:

> **Greta (81):** There has been an imbalance, which is common in new areas. There are social problems.
>
> **Lucia (22):** There is an increase in social problems and criminality. Before I had no problems to go home by night. It was peaceful here in Skarpnäck before. Now every night when I come home from the city I'm scared. Once I came home with the police who were looking for someone who was armed. There are also problems with the underground doors, which often are vandalised. I want to move! I'm glad that I got a student accommodation in Solna (another suburban area of Stockholm).

However, many focus group participants disagreed with the stigmatised picture of Skarpnäck presented in the Swedish media. They argued that it is either exaggerated or simply not true and that it leads to a low sense of local identity:

> **Henrik (54):** I have lived here since 1988 and nobody has ever threatened me or been bloody-minded towards me. But I think the picture presented in the media has a negative effect on many residents here.
>
> **Jurgita (47):** If you read the newspapers… Before I moved here I read about murders, robbery, car burglary and a dog being shot, but nothing like that has happened during the three years I have lived here. I think these years have been better than I had expected. I had heard so many bad things about Skarpnäck.
>
> **Ashmed (27):** In comparison with other areas, where I have lived, I don't think it is any different.

7.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter attempts to evaluate the impact of the Local Net on social capital and sense of community in Skarpnäck in 1999. Surveys of those connected and not connected to Skarpnet reveal few differences in terms of social participation, trust or feelings of community. Coupled with the fact that Skarpnet was hardly used and that the project failed to connect more than a fraction of the area's households, it has to be concluded that, whatever its promise, the actual impact of the Local Net was slight. Skarpnet did not reach its goal in terms of enhanced social contacts and social integration in the area.

The findings, however, show that Skarpnäck was characterised by relatively low social capital and little sense of community in 1999: high mobility, little participation in community networks, few local friends and little contact between neighbours, little local

support, a high degree of distrust, much tension between different groups and a low level of local identity. Some residents also suggested that the area had been unduly stigmatised in the media and there was evidence of bonding networks in the face of external enemies.

The low level of community involvement confirms Putnam's (2000) main argument that there has been a decline in social capital. Moreover, Sweden has been characterised as a nation of joiners, but organisation membership was low. There were few contacts with local politicians, indicating a lack of linking social connections in the area. The local newspaper was by far the most popular source of local information, so it is rather ironic that it ceased publication shortly after the survey was completed. Residents in Skarpnäck were disappointed with the availability of public meeting-places, Oldenburg's 'third places' (1989), and there was little interaction between neighbours and relatively high levels of loneliness. Most respondents were involved in informal networks and received social support, but this mainly involved people and resources outside the immediate vicinity.

In contrast to the general description of Sweden as a high-trust society (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995), application of the Srole anomia scale revealed low levels of trust amongst the residents of Skarpnäck. Institutional trust was especially low, in line with other research that this has declined considerably in Sweden during the last two decades of the twentieth century (e.g. Rothstein, 1998). There was little sense of local community in the area: little sense of cohesion and commonality among the residents of Skarpnäck, with much tension being perceived between different groups, especially in relation to ethnicity and age, and little sense of local identity.

This, however, was a topic in which a significant difference in views existed between those who were and were not connected to the Local Net. Residents connected to Skarpnet felt a stronger sense of local identity. The main reasons behind the low level of capital and local

community, according to discussions in the focus groups, were lack of local services and

meeting-places in the area. It can therefore be argued that the stronger sense of identity

among the connected residents may be related to the local services provided for them in the

otherwise rather deprived area. The Local Net was seen as a virtual meeting-place making up

for the lack of a physical one. Despite the lack of any overt impact of the Local Net, the

residents retained confidence in the potential of electronic networking to improve social

participation in Skarpnäck.

CHAPTER 8:

The Internet Café and Digital Inclusion

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted earlier, the demise of the Local Net was followed by the development of an Internet Café in Skarpnäck. The IT-Café opened its doors in April 2000 with the explicit aim 'to increase knowledge about the new media,' with special attention being paid to disadvantaged groups, such as elderly people, immigrants and people with handicaps. This chapter evaluates the extent to which the IT-Café has met its goals.

In a similar fashion to the approach used to study the Local Net, the extent to which the Internet Café has reached its stated goals is examined through the following research questions:

- *Who are the Visitors to the IT-Café?*
- *What is the IT-Café used for?*
- *What are the Perceptions of the IT-Café?*

Data has been obtained from both a questionnaire survey and interviews. The survey sample consists of 94 respondents who are or were visitors to the IT-Café. In order to further explore issues of digital inclusion, the Café sample is also compared with the sample of 87 respondents connected to the Local Net, as described in chapter six. The statistical data is enhanced by information obtained in five in-depth interviews and four focus groups conducted with 12 current or previous visitors to the Café.

The chapter also includes an evaluation of a small Internet study called Community Portraits, which was conducted in the Café. The Community Portrait project has been evaluated through online observations and in-depth interviews with the three participants from Skarpnäck and the project coordinator.

8.2 VISITORS TO THE INTERNET CAFÉ

Whether the Internet Café has reached its goals in terms of digital inclusion has been examined through a profile of the Café visitors. Demographic factors and computer experience among the respondents were therefore examined. Visitor patterns were also investigated, including questions about number and regularity of visits.

8.2.1 Demographic Factors

The survey contained questions about housing, age, employment status, gender, educational level, handicap and ethnicity. The data was compared with that for the Local Net gathered in 1999 and for the population of Skarpnäck as a whole as revealed in official statistics (USK, 2000). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the three groups and indicates the significance of any differences between them.

In contrast to respondents connected to Skarpnet, users of the Internet Café do not have to be resident in Skarpnäck and live in flats rented from the main housing company. Questions were therefore first asked about housing. Among the sample about three-quarters of the respondents (76%) lived in the local community of Skarpnäck. Most of the remaining respondents were from the nearby areas of Bagarmossen (13%) or Kärrtorp (4%). The majority of the sample (61%) lived in rented flats; about one third (29%) were owner-occupiers. Almost half of them (45%) lived in flats provided by Stockholmshem. Thus, like those who had been connected to Skarpnet, most Café visitors were resident in the area.

Table 1) Sample Description by Demographic Factors (%)

Demographic Factors	Connection Status		Significance			USK[13]
	IT-Café	Local Net	χ^2	p	d.f	Population
Age						
0 - 34	30	27	29.19	0.000	2	51
35 - 64	42	73				38
65	28	0				11
Employment Status						
Students	20	11	55.25	0.000	3	na
Employed	32	85				72
Unemployed	9	1				2
Pensioners	40	3				na
Gender						
Female	64	49	3.12	0.077	1	52
Male	36	51				48
Educational Level						
Elementary School	22	6	10.81	0.004	2	19
Secondary School	37	34				42
University	41	60				37
Ethnicity						
Foreign Mother Tongue	27	25	0.016	0.900	1	28
Handicap						
	5	na				7
n	*94*	*87*				

The Café sample contains significantly more elderly people than the Local Net sample or the population as a whole. More than a fourth (28%) of the Café respondents are over 65 years compared to nobody in the Local Net sample (cf. 11% in the population, χ^2=14.10, p<0.001, d.f=1). Not surprisingly, the Café sample also contains significantly more pensioners (40%) than the Skarpnet sample (3%). Another group that is more prominent in the Café sample (9%) than in the Local Net sample (1%) and the population (2%, χ^2=7.46, p=0.007, d.f. =1), is the unemployed.

The educational levels among the IT-Café respondents are representative of the area. However, in comparison with the Local Net sample, the Café visitors have significantly lower education. Two fifths (41%) of the Café respondents have a university degree compared to three fifths (60%) of those who were connected to Skarpnet. Gender, ethnicity

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[13] USK (2000) (www.usk.stockholm.se)

and handicap in the visitor sample are in accordance with the population and the Skarpnet figures. A wide variety of mother languages are represented among the Café visitors, including Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Indonesian, Italian, Norwegian, Persian, Polish, Romany, Russian, Serb-Croatian and Urdu.

In short, the Café sample consists of more groups at risk of digital exclusion than the Local Net sample. It has more people who are elderly, unemployed or with low education levels. The high levels of disadvantaged groups amongst the Café visitors were remarked on by the focus groups and the interviews. As indicated in the methodology chapter, the focus groups sample itself contains many users from disadvantaged groups, including the unemployed, elderly people, single parents, people with low educational levels and immigrants. In addition, participants in the focus groups and the interviews indicate that the visitors to the Café are representative of the area and include many disadvantaged groups:

> **Eva (48):** Every time I have been here it has been very mixed.
>
> **Margareta (68):** There are many young immigrants here.

The Café manager argues that the visitors represent the area well and states that many disadvantaged groups use the Café. For instance, he says that many pensioners use the Café, partly reflecting the popular senior courses provided there. The high proportion of elderly and unemployed visitors is also confirmed by the focus groups. As put by two of them:

> **Greta (81):** 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 of Skarpnäck and beyond. I took part in two courses and learnt a lot.

> **Katitzi (26):** 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.

8.2.2 Computer Experience

Computer experience was investigated in the surveys through questions about number of usage years, confidence in using computers and computer access. Perhaps surprisingly, more than half of the sample of Café visitors (59%) have a computer at home. They may not, however, have access to the Internet.

Table 2a) Computer Experience: Number of Usage Years
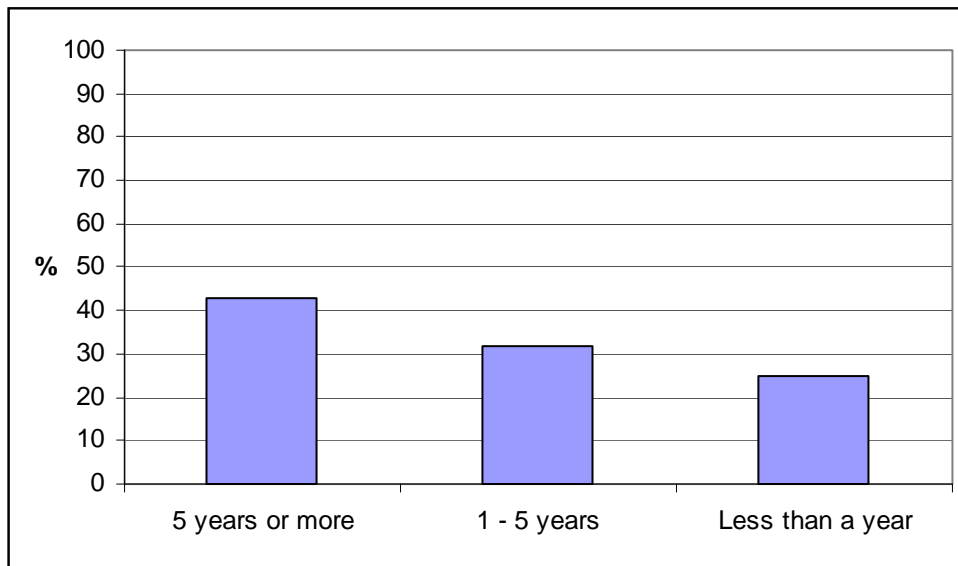
n = 90

More than two fifths (43%) of the questionnaire sample of Café visitors have used a computer for five years or longer. In contrast to this group, one quarter of the respondents (25%) have little or no previous experience of computers. The computer experience in the

focus groups varies too: five out of 12 have long experience (5 years or longer) and two have little experience (less than one year or has just started). Half of the participants in the focus groups have computer access at home.

Table 2b) Number of Usage Years: Café Users versus Local Net Connected (%)

	Computer Projects		Significance		
Number of Usage Years	IT-Café	Local Net	χ^2	p	d.f
5 years or more	43	61	5.58	0.018	1
Less than five years	57	39			
n	*90*	*85*			

In comparison with the Local Net sample, computer experience is rather low in the Café sample. Significantly fewer respondents in the Café sample have long computer experience than in the Skarpnet sample. About two fifths (43%) of the Café visitors have used a computer for 5 years or longer, compared with about three fifths of the respondents (61%) connected to Skarpnet. Thus, the Café sample consists of significantly more inexperienced computer users (57%) than the Local Net sample (39%).

8.2.3 Visitor Patterns at the IT-Café

The manager of the IT-Café produces monthly reports on the number of visits to the Internet Café. Visitor patterns have also been examined through questions in the survey instrument about regularity and total number of visits.

Table 3: Number of Monthly Visits to the IT-Café in 2001
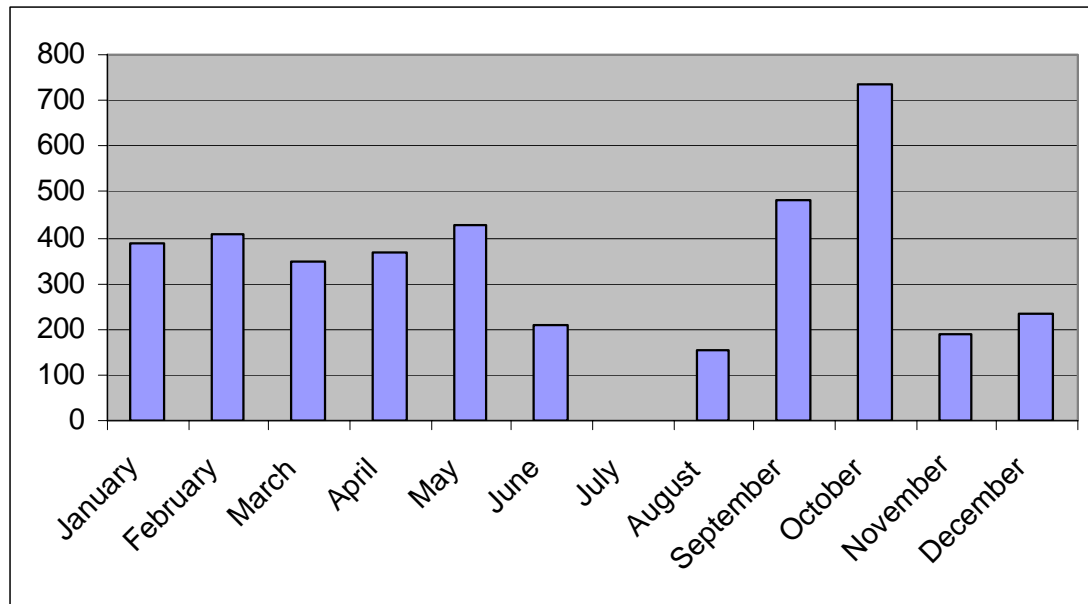
n = 3940   *Source: Cullgert (2002)*

In 2001, the IT-Café had an average of 379 visitors per month (excluding July and August when it was closed). October was the most popular month for visits with 736 visitors perhaps due to the weather. In total, the Café was open 190 days, which gives an average of 21 visitors a day. The target to have an average of daily 20 visits is thus being accomplished.

Although the quantitative data indicate that the Café has reached its original goal in terms of number of visits and variety of visitors, the manager would still like to see an increase. In common with a view expressed in the focus groups, the manager thinks that there is a need for more publicity for the Café. Several focus group participants said that they only found out about the Café through hearsay and that they thought that many residents in Skarpnäck did not know about it. This is also illustrated by the fact that in one of the focus groups, two Spanish-speaking participants were not aware that a Spanish-speaking group met in the Café.

Table 4a) Regularity of Visits to the IT-Café
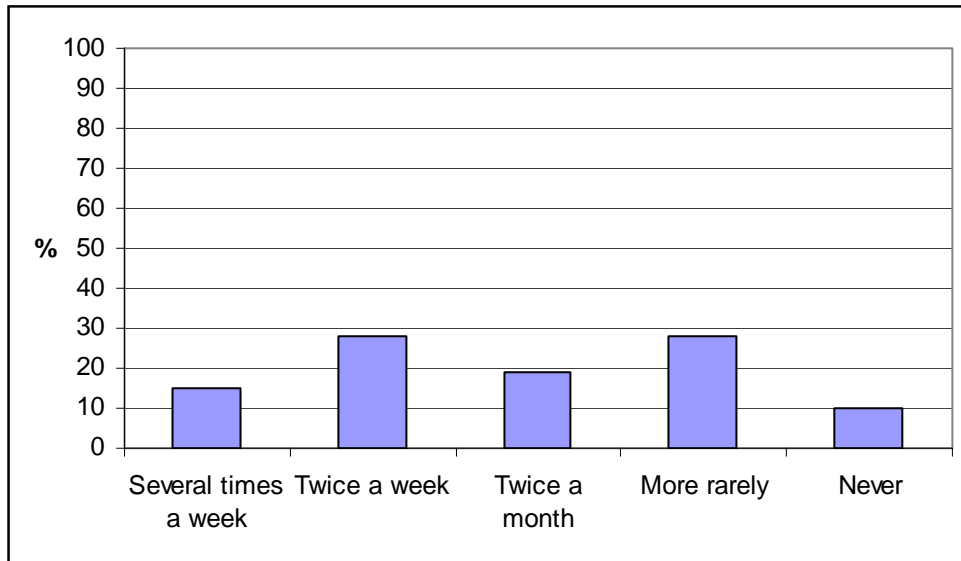
n = 81

Many respondents (43%) visit the IT-Café on a regular basis: twice a week or more

frequently. More than a quarter (28%), however, visits the Café less than a couple of times a

month. The latter is related to the fact that about the same number of respondents (20%) is

first time visitors. About a quarter of the respondents (26%) have been to the Café between

two and five times. More than half (54%) have visited the Café more than six times.

Although many respondents to the survey were people who had at some time purchased a

membership card, a tenth (10%) said they no longer visited the IT-Café. Two fifths of the

survey respondents who rarely or never visit the Café stated that they no longer have the

time. Other reasons mentioned are that the respondents have bought their own computers

(16%) or have access at other places (12%), for instance at work. This is succinctly

expressed by one survey respondent:

> **R:** I can now manage on my own since I have attended all
>
> Thomas's [the IT manager] courses in the Café.

Several participants in the focus groups also say that they have thought about buying, or have already bought, a computer since their interest has been stimulated by the Café visits:

> **Lucia (22):** I really needed a computer, so two months ago
>
> bought one. Saved money. That is the reason why I don't come
>
> here any more.

Visitor Patterns and Demographic Factors

Visitor patterns and demographic factors have been investigated to determine whether there are systematic differences in usage of the Café between different groups. Significant differences between regularity of visits and demographic factors such as ethnicity, age and occupation have been found.

Table 4b) Regularity in Visits and Demographic Factors (%)

Demographic Factors	Regularity of Visits		Significance		
Age	Twice a Week o More	n	χ^2	p	d.f
- 50	57	*49*	9.6	0.002	1
50 +	19	*31*			
Occupation					
Non-Pensioners	57	*49*	9.6	0.002	1
Pensioners	19	*31*			
Ethnicity					
Swedish	33	*54*	6.08	0.014	1
Foreign	65	*26*			

Younger respondents tend to visit the IT-Café more regularly than older ones. More than half of those aged under 50 years (55%) visit the Café twice a week or more (cf. 19% among those aged over 50 years). Likewise, in relation to occupation, pensioners visit the IT-Café less often than others (students, employed and unemployed workers). Less than a fifth of the pensioners (19%) visit the Café twice a week or more compared with more than half (57%) of the others. Finally, respondents with a foreign background visit the IT-Café more regularly than those with a Swedish background. About two thirds (65%) of the former visit the Café twice a week or more compared with one third (33%) of the latter.

The statistical data about visitor patterns and demographic factors were discussed in the focus groups. According to them, one reason for the frequent visits by young people may be that they have more experience and interest in computers, whereas many pensioners and the elderly tend to have little interest, be resistant or even feel fear towards computers. For example, one of the pensioners says that:

> **Greta (81):** My pensioner friends think that I am crazy. They would never go into the IT-Cafe. They are resistant.

Moreover, the older users in the Café seem to be more uncertain in their computer usage. The older participants say that they do not feel confident about using computers, especially for communication:

> **Göran (67):** I don't use it (the computer) for communication. I'm not confident enough. Another reason is that I don't have many friends who are connected.

The elderly users are not sure *how* to use the Internet, but are also uncertain about *what* it can be used for. For example, one of the elderly participants, Greta (81), feels that she has only a vague knowledge what to use computers for. She says that she has enjoyed using them very much, but has now stopped using computers because she does not have any official tasks, like writing for a pensioner association.

Focus group participants think that the reason for the frequent visits among young people is that they have greater ICT knowledge and interest than older people:

Ashmed (27): I can imagine that the younger people visit the Café more often since they have more computer experience. Their social life revolves round computers in a totally different way with email etc. They have a greater interest and it comes more natural. I myself have to check my email at least every second day.

Henrik (54): My daughter who is only seven is better with computers than I am.

Jurgita (47): My children are 10 and 12 years old. They are very good with computers. They play different games, download information about computer games using different codes.

Focus group members also discussed the reasons behind the high frequency of visits among people with foreign background. According to both the Café manager and the participants in the groups, many immigrants visit the Café regularly to keep in touch with their home countries. For example, one of the participants takes part in higher education in his home country:

> **Henrik (54):** I happen to live in Stockholm and the course I want to do is at Helsinki University. I just go there to give oral presentations and do exams.

The participants with an immigrant background praise the fact that they can speak their own languages online. For example, Julio (24) from Chile says that the Internet, accessed from the Café, enables him to speak in his mother tongue. Another participant, also with a foreign background, says that those who do not speak Swedish well find it easier to play with a computer: "…and especially with the Internet. It is so mixed - at any language. No wonder they (the immigrants) come here. They can write in their own languages." (Katitzi, 22)

However, language can also become a barrier in relation to computers. This is illustrated by some of the visitors, both with Swedish and foreign backgrounds:

> **Shazia (38):** I want to contact my home country (Pakistan) - my relatives. But it is a real shame - I don't know how to do it since I have not been to any computer courses. My Swedish is not very good… Sometimes it is difficult to understand the information on the computer, but changing it into English is expensive.
>
> **Göran (67):** On the Internet, it is the one who is most verbal who is dominant. It makes it even worse if you are not good at English.
>
> **Ylva (45):** Communication is very unequal (online). If you don't have the language, online as well as offline, you have worse opportunities

8.3 USAGE OF THE INTERNET CAFÉ

The questionnaire examines what the visitors use the Internet Café for, including questions about the reasons for visits and computer activities. The answers throw light on the extent to which the IT-Café is being used for the creation of digital as well as social inclusion.

8.3.1 Reasons for IT-Café Visits

Table 5a) Reasons for IT-Café Visits
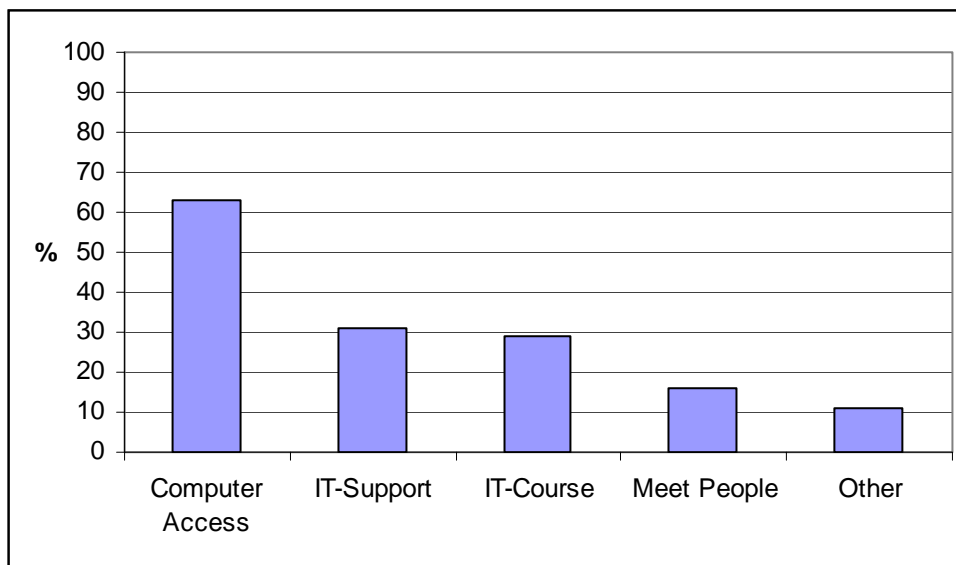
n = 87

According to the questionnaire responses, the most common reason for visiting the IT-Café is, unsurprisingly, getting access to a computer and/or the Internet (63%). Receiving IT-support (31%) and attending computer courses (29%) are other common reasons for visiting the Café; 16% go to the Café to meet people, including taking part in the Spanish association.

Discussion in the focus groups confirms the impression that most visitors go primarily to the Internet Café to get access to computers. As noted in the Skarpnet study, it was argued that there was a relatively low level of home access in the area:

> **Eva (48):** I think there are a lot of people, especially in Skarpnäck, with no access to a computer at home, or at least not a computer that is good enough.

Almost everyone in the focus groups states that they go to the Café because they cannot afford to buy a computer or get Internet access at home, which is shown by these examples:

> **Birgitta (59):** People with fewer recourses come here - people who cannot afford to buy a computer.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** We cannot afford a telephone at home or a mobile, so for me it is very good to come here. People can reach me through the computer. It is good to come here because it is cheap.
>
> **Lucia (22):** When I first came here I couldn't afford to buy a computer. At the psychology department [at Stockholm University] there are only a few computers and you had to pay monthly. Then I thought 'NO'! I heard that there was an IT-Café here. It was both cheaper and nearer.

Single parents in the focus groups, in particular, stress the importance of a public access point as many of them say they cannot afford home access or the latest equipment. One says that she "was just about to get Internet access at home, but then the cost increased" (Shazia, 38). As put by two single parents:

> **Eva (48):** I gave my children a computer game, which is not possible to use on my computer and it is only 5 years old. You cannot buy a new computer for 10-15000 SEK every fifth year. You don't do that.
>
> **Jurgita (47):** The computers are faster here. They have just been changed: new ones have been bought. At home one can buy cheaper computers and not change so often. Our computer is simple and not so fast. The children need fast computers. For example, if they want to play computer games they need the latest.

However, some Café visitors also point out that they visit the Internet Café because they do not want to have a computer at home, but value the face-to-face aspect with a public access point. Although only 16% of the survey respondents state that they visit the Café to meet people or take part in the Spanish association, many focus group participants argue that social aspects are important reasons for visiting the IT-Café. The Café manager also says that many users "think it is more fun to go to the Café where things happen and they can meet other people." He points out that some pensioners have returned after finishing a computer course in order to chat to the manager and make little or no use of the computers. As indicated in the Local Net study, there was a fear that computer access at home might decrease face-to-face contacts:

> **Margareta (68):** I don't want the Internet at home because then I would be stuck at home. And I don't want that. It is so easy to come here (to the Internet Café) and it is also so nice.

> **Lucia (22):** If you just sit in front of the computer at home, you may have difficulties in face-to-face contacts and therefore become isolated.

It was argued that computer usage at home could lead to a decrease in local participation and social isolation. As further said by Lucia:

> **Lucia (22):** When we bought a computer, my sister's children stopped going out. Before they were out the whole time. They had loads of friends. They were out in Skarpnäck, played football, had many different interests, worked at McDonalds and were involved in performances. Now it is unbelievable: they wake up in the morning, the first thing they do is to chat, then they go to school, after school they come straight home, they run home in order to get to the computer first: in order to sit in front of the computer and chat until 11 o clock.

The Café manager remarks that in addition to the rather obvious reason of getting access to computers, people also go there to receive technical help, for instance with printing, scanning and emailing. The focus group participants praise the IT-support provided by the Café and regard it as an important way of increasing their computer-skills. Most participants, especially the older ones, value the support and security provided in the Café:

> **Henrik (54):** I don't know anything about computers, so why should I buy one at home. I don't even know how to plug it in. It is fantastic for me to live opposite the Café and if I have problems with the computer I just ask the manager.

Two pensioners in the focus groups also discussed the support provided in the Café. One of them, Greta (81), tells the rest of the group about how worried she was when she received a suspicious email, but how relieved she was when the manager explained that it was a virus and helped her delete it. Another pensioner responds to the incident as follows:

> **Astrid (66):** This thing about viruses is scary. It would be awful if you would get it into your own computer. It could destroy everything and if you are home on your own, what do you do? It feels safe to be in the Café.

The appreciation of the support provided by the Café is not confined to elderly participants. Two of the younger ones point out the importance of IT support for their visits:

> **Lucia (22):** Thomas [the manager] gave me a lot of support, especially in the beginning. It was especially important when I started university. I didn't even know how to send my tutor a report. I asked Thomas who helped me to send and attach files. It is great for those without IT knowledge.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** If you are interested in computers it is good just to come here. Here there are both professionals and amateurs to help out.

In addition to the support provided in the Café, the subsidised IT-courses are also mentioned as a way of increasing computer skills in the area. For example, Greta (81), says proudly that her computer skills have increased considerably as a result of taking part in the courses:

> **Greta (81):** That is when I learnt everything I know. I was so interested and curious about computers. I knew nothing. It was mysterious… But Thomas (the manager) thinks that I have learnt a lot.

Although the participants mainly go to the Café to gain access to computers, get IT-support and attend computer courses, it is also valued as a gateway for social participation. It is argued that the increased digital inclusion also increases social inclusion. One elderly visitor describes how visiting the Internet Café has increased social inclusion for her

> **Astrid (66):** This is great for people, like myself, without computers at home. If this wouldn't exist I don't know where I would be able to write. Then I could not have been the secretary of the pensioner association, and through this association I have got in touch with many people in Skarpnäck, Kärrtorp and Bagarmossen.

Other groups at risk of digital exclusion, such as single parents and the unemployed, also say they feel that the use of ICT in the Café facilitates social inclusion for them, enabling them to participate despite barriers of time and place:

> **Shazia (38):** You can do almost everything through a computer.
> For example, instead of trying to phone people at awkward
> telephone times, which can be difficult for a single mum, you can
> easily use the computer to get information. The Internet is like a
> guide.
>
> **Ricardo (21):** I'm unemployed at the moment and I come here to
> check the work agency out, so I don't have to go there. This is
> much closer.

Reasons for Visits and Demographic Factors

On the whole, there are few systematic differences in the reasons stated by the various groups for visiting the Café. However, those aged over 50 without higher education are more likely to use the Café for attending an IT course than younger members of the population with university degrees.

Table 5b) Reasons for Visits and Age (%)

	Age		Significance		
Reasons for Visits	- 50	50 +	χ^2	p	d.f
Computer Access	74	25	31.10	0.000	1
IT-Course	6	29	13.84	0.000	1
n	*60*	*84*			

About three quarters of the respondents below 50 years (74%) state that they go to the IT-Café get access to a computer; only one quarter (25%) of the older respondents do that. The most common reason for visiting the Café among older respondents is to attend a computer course (35%); only 6% of the younger respondents state that they do that.

Table 5c) Reasons for Visits and Education (%)

	Education		Significance		
Reasons for Visits	School	University	χ^2	p	d.f
IT-Support	38	12	9.07	0.003	1
IT-Course	40	7	15.86	0.000	1
n	*50*	*60*			

More respondents without a university degree (38%) go to the IT-Café to get help and IT-support than respondents with a university degree (12%) do. The former group (40%) also attends significantly more courses than the latter (7%).

8.3.2 Computer Activities

The questionnaire also investigates computer activities among the Internet Café visitors. The respondents were asked what they mainly use the computers for in the IT-Cafe.

Table 6a) Computer Activities
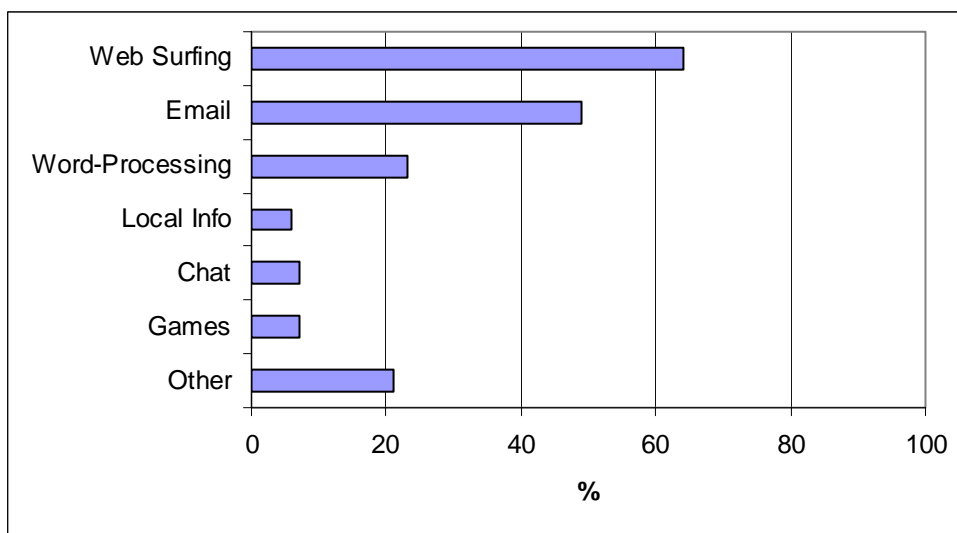
n = 80

As well as being the most common reason given for visiting the IT-Café, surfing the Web is the most common computer activity in the Café (64%). Sending emails (49%) and word-processing (23%) are other popular activities. Chat, games and searching for local information are less common activities in the Café (about 7% each). Other activities mentioned are printing, searching for information, looking for jobs, doing homework and paying bills.

Discussions in the focus groups revealed a similar range of computer activities among Café users as in the questionnaire. Participants confirmed that surfing on the Web is the most common activity in the Internet Café. The Web is used for activities, such as looking for jobs and education, reading newspapers, paying bills, taking part in higher education, looking for cheap flights, playing games and downloading music and films. The Internet is especially valued for its good provision of information, including very specific information:

> **Johan (35):** The Internet is invaluable for specific information. I'm very interested in music, and on the Internet you can find information about music and bands that cannot be found anywhere else.
>
> **Margareta (68):** When Princess Diana had died I thought her brother Earl Spencer gave a very beautiful speech. I thought that I would like to have it and read it, but where do you find it? I searched the Internet for 'Earl Spencer funeral speech' and found it immediately. I printed it and now I've got it at home.

However, some negative points were also raised in relation to the information provided on the Internet:

> **Ylva (45):** I think the Internet is overrated. I don't know how to
> search and find the right information on the Internet. I get lost and
> feel insecure. I prefer to use the phone instead to ask for
> information. It is much quicker.
>
> **Greta (81):** Recently, users have to log on, become members
> and/or paying for visiting many of the sites. It has become more
> difficult to use the Internet, so I use it less now. Information and
> resources were freer and more easily accessed before.
>
> **Johan (35):** It is difficult to search on the Internet. I'm not good
> enough at it. Is difficult to find good and deep information. A lot
> of it is in my opinion too broad and general, e.g. information
> about health issues.

In addition to information, more social activities, such as sending and receiving emails and chatting, are also very popular, especially among young visitors. As succinctly expressed by one of the young users:

> **Katitzi (26):** To me it was a fun thing to start with. Now I'm
> hooked to computers and chatting. I love it. I have to do it every
> day. It is a drug.

However, this kind of 'addiction' is criticised by Lucia (22) – another young participant. She argues that chat-rooms can easily be misused by young users, but supports other participants' positive views towards email as a way of facilitating contacts:

> **Lucia (22):** I use email, but I hate to chat. It is meaningless. It is a waste of time. One thing is to have faster communication in terms of email. Another thing is to sit in front of the computer alone and chat with someone you don't know.

In the focus groups, it is generally argued that computers can be used in both positive and negative ways. Some of the mothers stress that that it is important to give children a broad picture of the Internet: "It is important to educate children as independent individuals - then, they can use chat, the Internet and TV in a better way" (Jurgita, 47). It is argued that there are positive and educational TV-programmes, such as discovery, and web sites, such as discussions groups about politics. However, there are also negative TV channels and Internet sites, for example those relating to pornography.

Negative uses of the Internet among Café users were also brought up in the focus groups, such as pornography. Formally, visitors are not allowed to look at sex sites, but, according to some group participants, it still happens:

> **Katitzi (26):** When you are here you are not allowed to sex chat, but people do it anyway, because Thomas cannot check everything.
>
> **Greta (81):** I have seen boys…. but I was not sure what it was they looked at, but there were girls. I thought it was a bit frightening, but I didn't say anything. You see you are not allowed to do it, but how can you prevent it?

> **Margareta (68):** Many young boys look at pornography. You
>
> can see how the pages become more and more nude… Then
>
> suddenly you hear the manager saying: "Now you go home!"
>
> And they do. They listen to and respect the manager.

Table 6b) Computer Activities: IT-Café Users versus Local Net Connected (%)

	Computer Projects		Significance		
Computer Activities	IT-Café	Local Net	χ^2	p	d.f
Web Surfing	64	82	5.94	0.015	1
Email	49	76	11.69	0.001	1
Word-Processing	23	86	62.79	0.000	1
Local Information	6	19	5.05	0.025	1
Chat	7	19	3.88	0.048	1
Games	7	37	19.02	0.000	1
n	*80*	*83*			

There are significant differences between the Internet Café and the Local Net samples in terms of computer activities. The respondents connected to Skarpnet seem to have had a wider usage of computer activities, probably due to more time spent in front of the computer, compared to the Café respondents who are more specific in their activities. As indicated before, the Café users primarily visit the Café for Web surfing, whereas the Local Net respondents used the computers not only for web surfing, but also for email, word-processing and playing games. There is an exceptional difference in the use of word-processing with 86 % of Local Net respondents doing it compared to 23 % among the Café respondents.

Computer Activities and Demographic Factors

Table 6c) Computer Activities and Age (%)

	Age		Significance		
Computer Activities	- 50	50 +	χ^2	p	d.f
Local Information	0	11	6.97	0.009	1
Word-processing	8	21	3.80	0.051	1
n	*88*	*47*			

According to the questionnaire data there are few significant differences in computer use between different demographic groups. Nevertheless, there are some differences between different age groups. Respondents over 50 tend to search for local information (11%) and use word-processing more (21%) than those below 50 (0% and 8% respectively).

Both the manager and members of the focus groups remark on the difference in computer use revealed in the questionnaires. Their general opinion is that elderly people like to use word-processing, for example writing for associations they belong to, and that they are also more likely than younger users to search for information, rather than using the Internet for communication – partly due to insecurity. Two of the older users put it like this:

> **Henrik (54):** I am only on the level that I can search for information. I have not been able to communicate (online).
>
> **Astrid (66):** I have not come that far. I don't use the Internet or email, but I have seen the possibilities. They are amazing. If I used it more I think would mainly like to search for information.

As pointed out earlier, elderly users like to use the computer for activities with more specific aims, whereas younger users tend to play more games, chat and surf the Web for hours more for fun. They are more confident just to 'play around' online without any specific goals. The manager says that games are often played between young users who may be physically dispersed, which makes the otherwise rather unsociable activity more social.

8.4 PERCEPTIONS OF THE INTERNET CAFÉ

In addition to questions about users and usage of the Internet Café, expectations, experiences and attitudes towards it in relation to digital inclusion, social capital and community were also examined in the surveys. The data from the IT-Café has been compared with the Skarpnet respondents' perceptions of the Local Net project.

8.4.1 Expectations of the IT-Café

Table 7a) Positive Expectations: the IT-Café versus the Local Net (%)

	Computer Projects		Significance		
Positive Expectations	IT-Café	Local Net	χ^2	p	d.f
More IT-Interest and Knowledge	95	66	4.37	0.036	1
Better Contacts between Residents	70	27	22.10	0.000	1
More Participation	69	43	7.97	0.005	1
Decreased Isolation	67	41	7.30	0.007	1
Increased Support	42	26	1.34	0.248	1
Increased Trust	53	28	6.06	0.014	1
Increased Local Identity	66	42	6.95	0.009	1
More Attractive Housing Area	80	58	6.35	0.012	1
Stronger Cohesion	48	33	2.56	0.109	1
Decreased Group Tension	40	22	4.39	0.036	1
n	*59*	*83*			

The questionnaire results illustrate that the expectations of the IT-Café were very high in terms of digital inclusion, social capital and community. For example, almost every respondent (95%) expected the IT-Café to increase computer skills in the area. More than two thirds (67-70%) thought the Café would lead to an increase in social networks. Many respondents also thought the IT-Café would increase sense of community in the area by making it more attractive (80%) and increase local identity (66%).

There is a significant difference between expectations of the Local Net and the Internet Café. In general, the expectations of the IT-Café are significantly higher than those of the Local Net. The only exceptions where no significant difference can be found are in terms of social support and social cohesion.

8.4.2 Experiences of the IT-Café

The second Café survey included the same questions as those used in the first round in order to investigate the extent to which the expectations of the Café had been fulfilled. As previously mentioned, this sample consists of respondents who, at some point, have bought a membership card at the Café. Hence, this group has visited the Café longer than the first Café sample.

Table 8) Expected and Experienced Outcomes of the IT-Café (%)

	IT-Café		Significance		
Positive Perceptions	Expectations	Experience	χ^2	p	d.f.
More IT-Interest and Knowledge	95	84	2.00	0.157	1
Better Contacts between Residents	69	48	2.52	0.012	1
More Participation	69	52	1.62	0.203	1
Decreased Isolation	67	69	0.00	1.000	1
Increased Support	42	43	0.00	1.000	1

Increased Trust	53	37	1.21	0.271	1
Increased Local Identity	66	74	0.18	0.670	1
More Attractive Housing Area	80	85	0.11	0.735	1
Stronger Social Cohesion	48	37	0.51	0.477	1
Decreased Group Tensions	40	39	0.00	1.000	1
n	*59*	*30*			

There are no significant differences between expected and experienced outcomes. Most respondents in the second sample think that the IT-Café has actually resulted in an increase in social capital and community in the area. However, experiences of the Café have led to a general slight tempering of the expectations. Contrariwise, there are some exceptions where the actual experiences of the Café are held to have been more positive than the expectations. More respondents think that the IT-Café has actually led to an increased local identity (74%) and has made Skarpnäck a more attractive housing area (85%) than were the expectations of it (66% and 80% respectively).

8.4.3 Attitudes towards the IT-Café

As part of the evaluation, the survey finally examined attitudes towards the Internet Café and the reasons behind them. As with the high expectations and experiences of the Café, the attitudes are very positive.

Table 9a) Attitudes towards the IT-Café
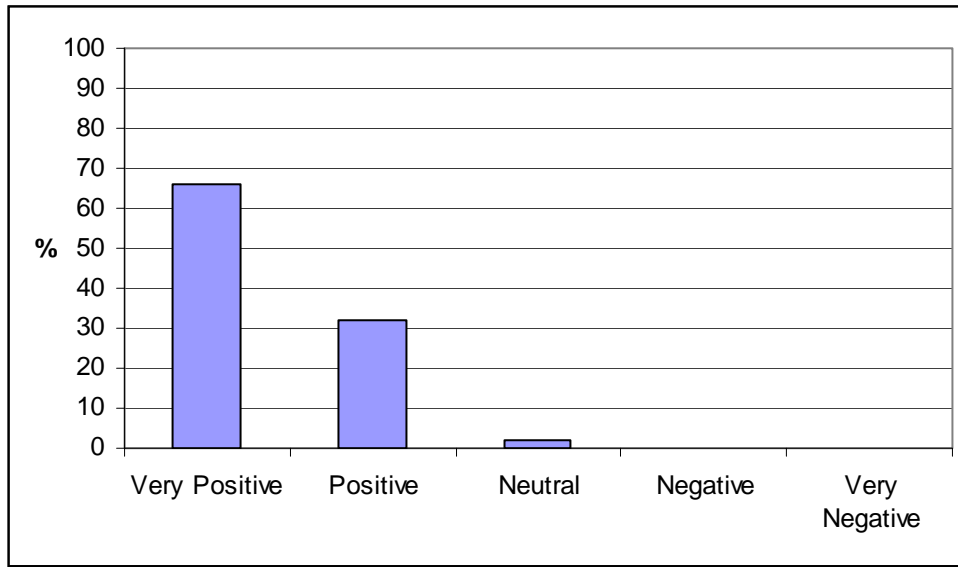
n = 94

Almost every respondent in the survey sample (98%) is positive towards the IT-Café. Two thirds (66%) in the questionnaire are *very* positive, nobody is negative. The results indicate that there are no differences between different demographic groups in their attitudes towards the Café. The vast majority of visitors in both groups have positive attitudes towards the Internet Café.

Table 9b) Comparison of Attitudes towards the Café and the Local Net (%)

	Computer Projects		Significance		
Attitudes	IT-Café	Local Net	χ^2	p	d.f
Positive	98	73	23.1	0.000	2
Neutral	2	23			
Negative	0	4			
n	*94*	*81*			

As with the expectations, there is a significant difference in attitudes towards the Internet Café and the Local Net project. The attitudes are significantly more positive about the IT-

Café: 98% of the Café respondents are positive about the Café compared with the 73% of the Skarpnet respondents who were positive about the Local Net. Whereas nobody was negative about the Café; 4% were negative about the Local Net.

The manager of the IT-Café, who had himself been connected to the Local Net, assumes that both a Local Net and an IT-Café 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 claims that home access, which is often offered within a Local Net project, is very comfortable, private and flexible. He says that: "One can do whatever one wants at any time."

The first view is supported by the survey respondents and focus groups participants. As previously mentioned, the face-to-face aspect is valued by many Café visitors for the creation and maintenance of social contacts. For instance, many survey respondents wrote that they regard the Internet Café as a social meeting-point for different groups (e.g. age groups) as well as for people with similar interests (e.g. Spanish-speaking visitors).

Reasons for Positive Attitudes

In the open survey questions the reasons for the attitudes towards the Internet Café were examined. Most IT-Café respondents cite the staff (i.e. the IT manager) as a reason for their positive attitudes. They feel very welcomed in the Cafe and comment on the support and help provided by the IT manager, who is regarded as competent, calm, friendly and helpful. The IT-courses are also mentioned in a very positive light by several respondents and there is a demand for more courses.

Several survey respondents mentioned the public access to computers: the availability of computers, the fast connection, the low prices and the easy accessibility both to ICT and to the Café itself (being locally based) as positive aspects. Members of the focus groups noted that the Café is appreciated for its central location and provision of easy access to computers. Participants feel that they can visit the Café at any time to get subsidised access to computers:

> **Eva (48):** Accessibility is important - I can go there whenever I want.
>
> **Lucia (22):** It is cheap, you can stay as long as you like and you don't have to book in advance.

The importance of the Internet Café in terms of digital and social inclusion is often stressed in the responses to the open questions in the questionnaire. It is believed that the Café plays an important role in providing access to everybody, which is especially important for disadvantaged groups:

> **R1:** Important initiative!
>
> **R2:** It is crucial since everyone cannot afford to have a computer at home.
>
> **R3:** It is absolutely necessary!
>
> **R4:** It gives everyone the possibility to deal with and use computers.

In accordance with the questionnaire data, the relationship between the use of ICT and inclusion in contemporary society is stressed throughout the discussions in the focus groups.

According to the groups, society has become more dependent on computers and it is crucial to be computer-literate in order to be included in the Information Society:

> **Katitzi (26):** Computers are today's 'thing'. In the 70s high platform shoes was 'it'. Now it is computers that count. That's just how it is. Everyone needs computers now.
>
> **Lucia (22):** We live in an IT-society and have to accept it. The whole society is built upon computers.
>
> **Greta (81):** All jobs are based upon computers nowadays… Everything is computerised. I think it is very nice.
>
> **Göran (67):** I think it is a requirement for pupils in school to use computers nowadays. It is necessary to manage the homework. I see it as those without computer at home become handicapped.

It is argued that those without access may become socially excluded, as it almost has become essential to have a computer to be socially included in society. One of the participants points out, through personal experience, the great risk of digital exclusion:

> **Lucia (22):** You need a computer for almost everything. I don't think that is very good since it isn't that easy just to buy one. It costs money and there are other priorities first, like clothes, food, and furniture and *then* comes the computer. In society is seems to have a huge importance - that every family must have at least one computer. I don't think it is fair. Those with money can buy a computer immediately. I remember when I started studying. I was in a great need of a computer, but I had no money to buy one and

> therefore I had problems at university. I missed a few lectures due to the fact that I don't have access to the Internet and email. The department sent out emails to everyone about changes in the schedule. If they change the original time I think they should inform the students in another way too and not take for granted that everyone has a computer or access to a computer. I felt a bit discriminated against in that way. That's why the Café with its provision of cheap access and support is excellent.

It is generally believed in the focus groups that the Internet Café, with its provision of subsidised public access, IT support and computer courses, has the potential to increase both digital and social inclusion. It is argued that the use of the Café enhances computer skills in the area and enables social participation. When asking about the Café's impacts on interest in and knowledge about ICT in the area, some of the participants answer as follows:

> **Sara:** How has the Internet affected IT skills in the area?
>
> **Margareta (68):** I search for information about everything. I'm learning. Just coming here is like a computer course… I have learnt a lot. I understood zero before. Now I know a bit. If you like computers your interests expand by coming here.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** 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):** It is good for young people and children. They learn a lot.
>
> **Lucia (22):** … but also for adults who want new knowledge about computers.

In sum, the Internet Café in Skarpnäck appears to have at least partly reached two of its goals: enhancing the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and encouraging a general increase in IT skills in the area. The Café, with its provision of computer access and IT support, seems to have made its visitors, and especially disadvantaged groups, feel more included in the Information Society. The question whether the Café has reached its goals in terms of social contacts will be investigated in the following chapter. First, the evaluation of Internet-based project Community Portrait, conducted in the IT-Café, is to be presented.

8.5 COMMUNITY PORTRAITS

The Skarpnäck participants in Community Portraits were online during January – June 2001. The results of their work were posted on the web site maintained by the Internet Café and can still be seen at http://www.itcafeet.com/skottland/skottland.htm.

8.5.1 Online Collaboration

Although the group managed to produce material the process was by no means as collaborative as had been hoped. Both the participants and the course coordinator agreed that the group was too small. It was also acknowledged that the lack of collaboration was caused by group dynamics related to the personalities involved. One of the participants had a rather dominant style, which the others found difficult. When asked about how the online collaboration worked, the participants answered as follows:

> **Göran (67):** It was bloody bad, but it is not easy to collaborate. The reasons for no collaboration were problems within the group itself, rather than being caused by the Internet. I think it could work via the Internet as one can easily communicate via email and send each other attached files.
>
> **Margareta (68):** There was no collaboration at all - the group was far too small. The problems were not related to the Internet, but to group dynamics in this specific group. In general, I think the Internet could be good for collaboration. But at the same time, it is easier not to be reachable and not getting back to people, which is something I experienced with the other participants. I kept on writing to them and they hardly ever replied to my emails.

The fact that the group occasionally met face-to-face did not help, if anything the reverse. In addition to agreeing that the group was too small participants also pointed to their lack of commonality, suggesting that this is needed for a successful online collaboration:

> **Ylva (45):** I think you need to have something in common for it to work, which we didn't have.
>
> **Margareta (68):** There was no common ground between the participants in the Community Portrait group. Our lifestyles were too different.

The problematic nature of the group dynamics was also noted by the coordinator, who argued that it was more difficult to deal with it online than offline:

Coordinator: The participants in the Skarpnäck group were very nice to each other, which posed its own problems. I don't think we yet have the skills to deal with group dynamics on the Internet. For me as a tutor it was a challenge. In a face-to-face group you can be more direct and ask more directly: 'What are you doing?' You can judge their bodily responses and emotions, which you cannot online. Also, in a face-to-face encounter you cannot walk out in the same way as you can online.

The course coordinator pointed out three main lessons, which she had gained from the experience of online collaboration in the two trials of Community Portraits:

1. Collaboration is slower online than offline.
2. Trivial exchanges take on added significance in online collaboration.
3. At least in online learning situations, people tend to seek similarities rather than differences in the search for smooth collaboration.

First, the coordinator argues that collaboration is slower online than offline. This was especially evident in one of the groups, which otherwise worked well, in the previous pilot of Community Portraits. Exchanges are slower online, because the online users do not see each other, correspond through typing and may not be online at the same time. The co-ordinator notes that the lack of bodily cues in online communication increases the time taken for trust and collaboration to emerge.

At the same time, the course coordinator pointed out that under certain circumstances the lack of physical cues could facilitate collaboration online:

> **Coordinator:** However, it (the lack of bodily cues) sometimes makes it easier, since body language can mislead people. In that sense, it is much more straightforward online, but it's still slower. It is communication in slow motion.

The lack of body language online makes informal communication or trivial exchanges very important for the creation of solidarity and affinity on the Internet. The importance of trivial exchange in online collaboration emerged in the earlier pilots of Community Portraits. According to the coordinator, the lack of trivial exchanges at the beginning of the online project made people less involved in it, which in turn had negative impacts on the collaboration. The importance of informal communication is stressed, as a second feature, for a successful online collaboration:

> **Coordinator:** One thing that became apparent, which we may overlook in face-to-face communication, was the importance of little reassuring words. Trivial exchanges are crucial.

The third feature is the tendency of the participants in the online discussions, which formed the kernel of Community Portraits, to focus on similarities rather than differences. Instead of seeking differences between people and communities, which was the aim, participants sought similarities. Thus, in the exchanges that took place between participants in Sweden and Scotland, much time was spent on trying to identify similarities between their experiences. Participants explained that this happened in order to get to get along better with each other and to facilitate smooth collaboration. The coordinator argues that online collaboration can be rather bland due to people being too nice to each other, stressing norms of politeness:

> **Coordinator:** It becomes a very bland way of communicating if people always agree and never argue, which can be the case online. Agreement reduces the possibility of different views. Being 'nice' doesn't take you very far, but most people want to be nice and want other people to be nice to them. I think that is common on the Internet: you have more time to be polite online.

The coordinator stresses the importance of bridging relationships if collaboration is to be effective and warns about too much bonding, as this reduces the exchange of new information, ideas and skills. The development of close bonding relationships, online or offline, may lead to the social exclusion of 'outsiders', those not in the circle:

> **Coordinator:** In terms of collaboration it is important to emphasise the role of differences. When differences are acknowledged and worked on participants can gain different information and knowledge: new skills. They can learn from each other and benefit more. If they all try to find similarities they miss out on opportunities. I can see that this has wider implications. In terms of community, it may have implications for social exclusion because if people always try to find how similar they are, they do not face up to the variations within communities.

8.5.2 The Learning Environment

Although there were occasional technical problems in accessing the learning environment in which Community Portraits was embedded and the participants said that they would have liked more assistance, on the whole the experience seems to have been enjoyed. As put by one of the participants:

> **Margareta (68):** It was a lot of fun. The technique was great and worked most of the time. It was easy to use, although it was totally new to me. First I thought I wouldn't be able handle the technology, but there were no problems at all…

A desire to extend technical expertise was, in fact, one of the main reasons, the participants said they had had for taking part in Community Portraits in the first place:

> **Göran (67):** I thought this seemed like a lot of fun. I have done almost everything to learn more about computers and this seemed like another way of doing that.
>
> **Ylva (45):** I thought this would be a good way of learning more about computers, which I'm not very good at. I thought this would be a spur for using and practising computers.
>
> **Margareta (68):** Through Community Portraits I wanted to get some new contacts - to have someone to send a short email to now and then.

As indicated by Bengt (68) in chapter six, the participants pointed out the importance of an informal learning environment in relation to technology. It was argued that Community Portrait provided computer training in an informal and fun way. In addition to learning new computer skills, there was a social aspect provided. The participants were interested using technology as well as in expanding their social networks and learning more about their communities.

Although the Skarpnäck edition of Community Portraits did not achieve all its goals in terms of online collaboration, the reasons given by the participants for taking part in an online programme provide further support to the assumed relationship between digital and social inclusion. Moreover, the project seems to have reached its goal in terms of assisting participants to learn about their community. All the participants said that they learnt a great deal about their own community through taking part in the project, even though the extent of comparison with what was meant to be the matching Scottish group was very limited. Some interesting cultural differences in the ways of perceiving community emerged. The coordinator points out that the Swedish participants tended to define community as facilities, politics and structures rather than as people, which was the more usual perception of community adopted by the Scottish group.

Although the Coatbridge group in Scotland evaporated about a month after the project was established, collaboration between the groups in Sweden and Scotland did work for a short while. The Skarpnäck participants had seen the possibility of cross-national collaboration as one of the major attractions of Community Portraits. The coordinator notes that there was genuine excitement among the Swedish participants when the Scottish community members communicated online with them. As put by one of the Skarpnäck group:

> **Göran (67):** It was so much fun when I communicated with a Scottish man. He told me when he had been out traveling from east to west in Scotland. Very interesting!

8.5.3 Community Portraits and Social Capital

All participants were positive towards the idea of online collaboration, noting, for instance, that one can write at any time one likes on the Internet. The use of ICT means, at least in theory, that learning and collaboration can be freed from the constraints of time and place. The coordinator, who has run Community Portraits for several years with face-to-face groups, also saw enormous potentials for using the Internet in collaborative exercises:

> **Coordinator:** I think the Internet can facilitate collaboration, as there is less pressure for immediate communication. There is time for reflection and how to phrase yourself. In face-to-face encounters you are hit with something that you need to deal with or respond to immediately.

The coordinator also thought that the Internet could have a significant impact on social capital and community in general, as it facilitates social participation for many people:

> **Coordinator:** The Internet has a huge potential to bring people in who may not otherwise be able to be included, due to all sorts of things like distance or shyness. Some people find it difficult to meet face-to-face. The Internet can be very inclusive as it can bring these people in. That is a tremendous opportunity.

> I don't think we should do everything on the Internet, but it does bring people in. It also allows people to communicate across distances that they would have had much more difficulty in overcoming face-to-face or on the phone. Phoning is so expensive, especially internationally. To email takes that barrier away. It's not a big deal to interact with someone thousands of miles away.

The power of the Internet to overcome distance does not, however, mean that the world immediately becomes a single village. A common observation about the Internet is the prominence it accords to proficiency in English and it was pointed out in the interviews with the participants in Community Portraits that language could become a barrier. More generally, it was argued that if some participants are more skilled in language than others, the online collaboration could become unequal.

At the same time, there was a lot of support between participants in both trials of Community Portraits. For example, one person who was not particularly confident about language received support from the others who were very clear that the involvement itself was more important than getting the language right. The coordinator noted that there was a considerable amount of online support exchanged between the participants:

> **Coordinator:** Social support is very often verbal, so it works well on the Internet. We saw support when some people 'disappeared' and others tried to bring them back.

In addition to online support, the coordinator also thinks the Internet in general, and programmes such as Community Portraits in particular, has great potential for bridging and integrating people and ideas.

> **Coordinator:** I definitely think the Internet can be a way of bridging different groups. The aim with Community Portraits was learning through difference, which is about bridging. We were encouraging bridging across national and community boundaries.

Finally, the coordinator also said that she thought that the use of technology could play a major role in changing the image of disadvantaged and stigmatised communities, such as Skarpnäck:

> **Coordinator:** I think that projects such as Community Portraits can increase the sense of local community. The participants look at Skarpnäck from a point of view that interests them. However, the expression of different points of views expands their sense of identity with the community. It reflects different views of the community that exist within it, presented by various members. It is important that their - all different groups - views are presented. It widens the sense of community and it also reflects on what people in the community think. It can help residents to take charge of themselves. The Internet is good for that. It is potentially very democratic. It is their voice. The media do not tend to get their view from the people of the community, but normally from outside.

The product of the Skarpnäck Community Portraits group, still available on the web, provides a set of personal, even idiosyncratic, perspectives on what the participants in the programme thought was important about their community. As the coordinator says it represents a view from the inside rather than from the outside. Although the participants in the programme spent a good deal of their time arguing, they managed to present a coherent view of 'their' Skarpnäck, adding a further example of the way in which the Internet Café is serving the community.

8.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter concerns an evaluation of the Internet Café in Skarpnäck. The findings indicate that the IT-Café has reached its goals in terms of digital inclusion. The fact that the IT-Café is frequently visited stresses its social significance in the area. It is also visited by many disadvantaged groups, such as elderly people, single parents, immigrants and the unemployed. In comparison with those who were connected to Skarpnet, the IT-Café has reached significantly more disadvantaged groups: more elderly people, the unemployed and computer-inexperienced people. As suggested by Aldridge (2000), it may be argued that the IT-Café is ideal for those who are still unsure about computers and want to try them out.

As pointed out in the Local Net study, there are many residents in Skarpnäck without access to the Internet at home. The prime reason for visiting the IT-Café seems to be that visitors cannot afford to buy a computer. However, some also point out that they visit the Café because they prefer public rather than private access points, being worried that Internet access at home would decrease face-to-face contacts. Many visitors also appreciate the support and training, which is provided in the Café. These services are especially popular among elderly people and people with low educational levels, further illustrating the extent to which the Café is reaching its goal in terms of the digital inclusion of disadvantaged

groups. Usage of the IT-Café also seems to have increased *social* inclusion, especially for disadvantaged groups. For example, many unemployed residents use the Café to look for jobs online, many single parents use the Café to facilitate everyday life and increase their social contacts, and immigrants use the Café as a gateway to keep in touch with their home countries.

Social activities, such as email and chat, are very popular among the Café users, especially among younger visitors, who are more confident than elderly ones. The elderly visitors use the Internet for information rather than communication, but the rather asocial activity of information search seems to be appreciated among all visitors. Despite the general approval of the role of the Internet in providing access to a vast range of information, Café visitors also mentioned some problems, which they faced. First, some Café visitors found searching for information online rather difficult. Second, it was noted that some young boys watched pornography in the Café. Against this it was also pointed out that negative usage might be better controlled by the Café manager than it was in many homes.

Attitudes towards the Internet Café were almost uniformly positive, reflecting a perception of a positive relationship between technology, digital and social inclusion. Supporting the argument advanced by Castells (2001), Skarpnäck residents stress the importance of being included in the new Information Society and the dangers of being excluded from it. The visitors point out the importance of the Internet Café as a gateway to digital and social inclusion, through its provision of public access, computer support and training. Skarpnäck, with its Internet Café, may in other words be an exception to the exclusion of many disadvantaged areas: the dual digital divide (Reddick, 2000; Fong et al, 2001).

Although the Community Portraits project, conducted in the Internet Café, did not achieve all its goals in terms of online collaboration, it appears to have assisted participants to learn

about their community. The reasons given by the participants for taking part in Community

Portraits also support the assumed relationship between digital and social inclusion. The

importance of informal and fun methods of learning new technologies was stressed. The

pilot also developed some interesting lessons. Echoing other studies of online interaction

(e.g. Walther, 1995; 1996), it was found that the lack of bodily cues slows down the creation

of relationships online. The importance of informal communication is stressed for successful

collaboration and community building online and offline. Finally, in contrast to theories

about flaming (e.g. Joinson, 2003), the online interaction was rather bland. The norms of

politeness may lead to down-playing on difference and a possibly over-zealuous attempt to

find harmony.

CHAPTER 9:

The Internet Café, Social Capital and Community

Skarpnäck 2000 - 2002

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Participation in Social Networks

9.3 Extent of Social Support

9.4 Level of Trust

9.5 Sense of Community

9.6 Summary and Conclusion

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the extent of social capital and community in Skarpnäck from 2000, after the opening of the Internet Café. In addition to its aims relating to the digital inclusion of disadvantaged groups, as presented in the previous chapter, the Café aims more generally to increase social contacts: 'to create a place where people, old and young and from different nationalities, can meet and in that way increase communication between people in the area'.

In order to examine whether the IT-Café reached its goal in terms of social contacts, questions are asked about social networks, social support, trust and sense of community. As in the Local Net study, a year earlier, the following research questions were examined in the Café-study:

- *What is the Extent of Participation in Social Networks?*
- *What is the Extent of Social Support?*
- *What is the Level of Trust?*
- *What is the Sense of Community?*

The survey sample consists of 94 respondents who are or were visitors of the IT-Café. This data is complemented by information obtained in five in-depth interviews and four focus groups conducted with 12 current or previous visitors to the Café. The extent of social capital and community from 2000 is compared with similar material from the Local Study in 1999. The 94 Café visitors are compared with the 90 respondents who were not, at the time, connected to the Local Net and here referred to as non-users (of the IT-Café).

9.2 PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Participation in social networks offline and online is used as one of the indicators of social capital and community. Participation in formal (and weak) networks is operationalised through questions about satisfaction with the number of local meeting-places and spare-time activities.

Table 1) Satisfaction with the Number of Local Meeting-Places
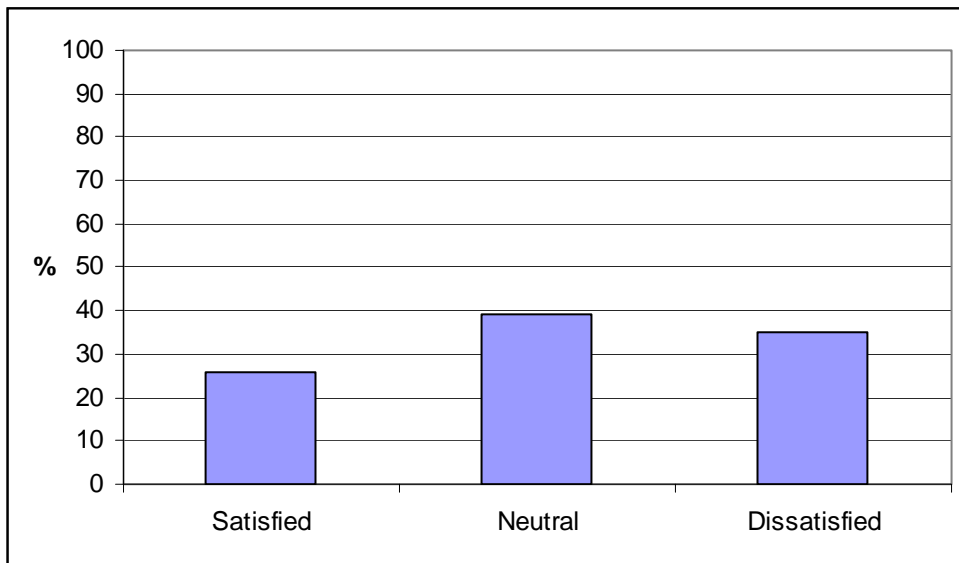
n = 46

When asked about satisfaction with the number of local meeting-places, few respondents (26%) state that they are satisfied. More than a third (35%) are dissatisfied with the number of meeting-places. There is no difference in satisfaction with local meeting places between users and non-users of the IT-Café. The question then is whether the Internet Café can act as a meeting-place in the area.

Table 2a) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Number of Activities (%)
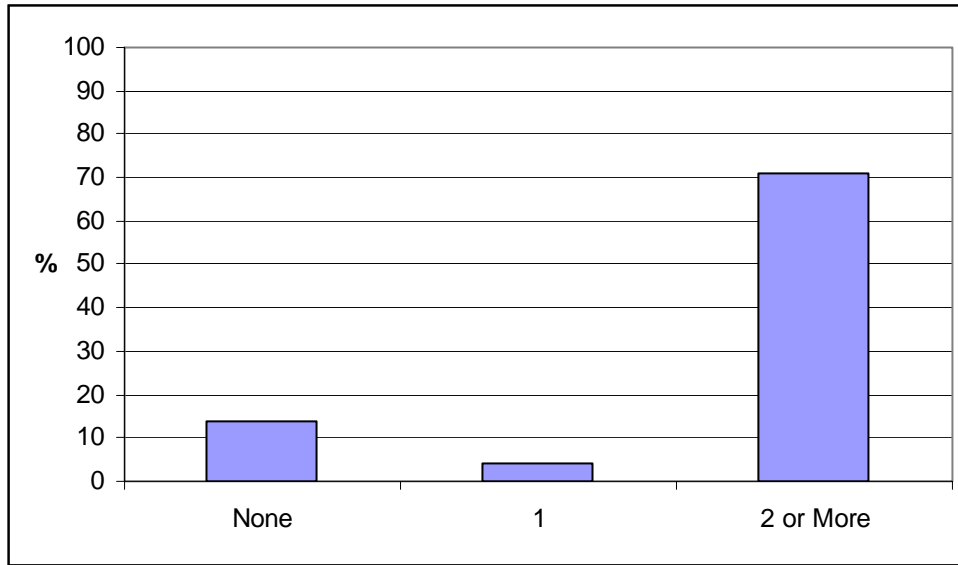
n=62

Participation in spare-time activities was also examined in the questionnaire. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (71%) were involved in at least two spare-time activities; 14 % were not involved in any spare-time activities. There is no significant difference in number of performed activities between users and non-users of the Café.

Table 2b) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Different Types of Spare-Time Activities (%)

Spare-Time Activities	Participants	Non-Participants
Sports	21	79
Entertainment	63	37
Libraries	42	58
Education	45	55
Other	13	87
n	62	

Among respondents claiming to participate in spare-time activities, the most commonly performed activity is entertainment, with almost two thirds of the sample (63%) doing that.

Table 2c) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Local versus Non-Local (%)

	Connection Status		Significance		
Spare-time Activities	Locally	Non-Locally	χ^2	p	d.f
Entertainment	44	92	19.07	0.000	1
Libraries	84	35	17.345	0.000	1
n	*39*				

The survey indicates that the activities are performed locally as well as non-locally. However, as demonstrated in the Local Net study in 1999, while entertainment was more common non-locally (92% vs. 44%), library usage was mainly local (81% vs. 35%).

Table 2d) Participation in Spare-Time Activities: Café-Users versus Non-Users (%)

	Users versus Non-Users		Significance		
Spare-Time Activities	Café-Users	Non-Users	χ^2	P	d.f
Sports	21	43	7.20	0.008	1
Education	45	26	5.48	0.019	1
n	*62*	*90*			

There are some differences in certain types of spare-time participation between the Café-users and the non-users. Café-users (21%) tend to take part in fewer sports than non-users of the Café (43%), but take part in more educational activities (study circles, courses, meetings, debates or seminars) (45%) than the non-users (26%).

According to some focus group participants, reasons for less participation in sports activities may be that Café visitors, such as pensioners, the unemployed and students, tend to have fewer resources than many other residents. Moreover, visiting the Café is in itself a way of using spare-time, leaving less time for sport activities. Some group participants think that the Café, with its location in the Culture House, encourages greater local participation, for

example in educational activities such as courses, study circles, debates and seminars. One participant, Jurgita (47), says that her children, who visit the Café regularly, tend to do it in conjunction with visiting the 'children's club' next door. She also says that, through contacts made in the Café, they play musical instruments and take dance classes in Skarpnäck.

In the questionnaires, participation in more informal (and strong) social networks has also been investigated.

Table 3a) Number of Close Friends: Locally versus Non-Locally

	Locality		Significance	
Number of Friends	Locally	Non-Locally	T	P
Mean	3.38	6.66	3.87	0.000
Std Dev	3.68	6.60		
n	*39*	*44*		
Valid n			*37*	

As reported by the respondents in the Local Net study in 1999, Café respondents have significantly more close friends outside Skarpnäck: an average of 2.4 locally versus 6.7 non-locally among the Café sample. Thirty-nine respondents have friends locally compared to 44 who have friends non-locally; 37 respondents have friends both locally and non-locally.

Table 3b) Number of Local Friends: Café-Users versus Non-Users

	Users versus Non-Users		Significance		
Number of Local Friends	Café-Users	Non-Users	t	p	d.f.
Mean	3.38	1.48	3.35	0.001	156
Std Dev	3.68	3.42			
n	*69*	*89*			

There is no difference between the Café-users and non-users in the number of friends outside Skarpnäck, but there is a significant difference in number of local friends. Respondents visiting the Internet Café have significantly more friends in Skarpnäck compared with respondents not visiting the Café (3.4 vs. 1.5). Many participants in the focus groups think this may be related to the meetings between residents in the IT-Café. It is argued that contacts are created and maintained in the Café online as well as offline.

9.2.1 The IT-Café as a Physical Meeting Place

The extent to which the Internet Café can act as a meeting-place, offline as well as online, was discussed in the focus groups. Divergent opinions were expressed about the Café as a physical meeting-place, although most participants agreed that the Cafe did function as a meeting place. Some participants regard the Café as a general meeting point where old contacts are renewed and new ones are made, but others say that they have made no new contacts in the Café, except with the Café manager. Regardless of their own experience respondents suggested that many visitors, especially younger ones, socialise in the Café:

> **Katitzi (26):** Only the name itself sounds like a lot of fun – an IT-Café. It is like a meeting-place and it is good that there is one here in Skarpnäck.
>
> **Jurgita (47):** People socialise in the Café. I have seen that. And my children have met other children here.
>
> **Birgitta (59):** Skarpnäck should brag about having an IT-Café – a meeting-point - in the area.

In response to an enquiry about the impact of the Café on Skarpnäck, most participants were clear that the Café has had a direct impact on social contacts in general, especially weak ties. The Café manager observes that the average of about 20 visitors a day creates meetings in themselves and that people who use the Cafe recognise each other outside it. As described by the manager and one of the group participants:

> **Café Manager:** I think the Café 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.
>
> **Birgitta (59):** If Thomas is busy you ask the person next to you for help, like: 'Do you know how to move the margins?' When you have spoken a few words to each other, next visit it is easier to say 'hi' and you may sit down next to that person. I have noticed that it is quite easy to meet people here. There is always someone you talk to, at least every second or third time.

The computer courses also seem to generate new contacts – weak as well as strong ties – within and beyond Skarpnäck (hence both bonding and bridging in terms of locality). In the courses, residents from Skarpnäck and other places gather around their common interest in learning more about computers. Here is an example of a positive voice from one of the more senior users:

> **Greta (81):** When I attended the courses there were participants from everywhere… It was very nice. As we were the same group every time, we got to know each other quite well.

However, not everyone agrees that the Café has succeeded in its aim of encouraging social contacts: about a third of the participants in the focus groups thought that it was not living up to its promise in this regard. Some participants argued that they were not aware that the Internet Café had specific social aims, suggesting that they have to be made more explicit and more effort put into them. As expressed by one of the doubters:

> **Birgitta (59):** I have not felt that it is a meeting-place where you are encouraged to make contacts, but rather that one should be quiet, calm and do your own thing. One cannot just leave people to get in touch with each other randomly. One could, for example, have a notice board where notices can be put up to each other, adverts about buying and selling stuff. One should simply encourage network contacts. There are so many good projects, like this one, where social contacts come naturally, but still people, and especially Swedes, have their shyness.

Other participants point out that some visitors may not be interested in the social and face-to-face aspect of the Café, for example due to lack of time. Some of them argue that while they do not visit the Café because of the social aspect, they think it is good if it occurs naturally:

> **Henrik (54):** I think many [visitors] sit by themselves. That is the experience I have. The only person I have got to know is Thomas or whatever his name is.
> **Lucia (22):** I didn't get to know anyone here, but I think it depended on my attitude. I came here and was super stressed only to look at the Internet.

> **Ashmed (27):** Personally I go there and sit my time. Then I leave. I think people who already know each other talk to each other. I don't think it generates new contacts. I go there and say 'hi' to Thomas and nothing else. I am here pretty often, almost every day. I cannot say that I notice other people. I come here and do my thing.
>
> **Eva (48):** It depends on your needs when visiting the Café. I meet a lot of people at work all day long and may not feel like it when I go here, but just to sit in front of my computer and then go home. You may not always look for contacts. Personally I do not go to the Café to meet other people. I go there because I have an errand, but then if it comes natural I may have a coffee and talk to some nice people.

Whereas the opinions are divergent about the Internet Café as a physical meeting-place in the area, the opinions about the Internet as an online meeting place are more positive. Most Café visitors see the Internet as a new form of meeting-place where social contacts are created and maintained.

9.2.2 The Internet as an Online Meeting Place

In the focus groups, it is generally believed that it is easy to meet people online, as the range for expansion of networks is greater. The participants stress the possibility of expanding their weak and bridging social networks through the use of ICT in the Café:

> **Eva (48):** You have a greater range for meeting people: the whole country and other countries. You can reach much further.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** Lots of people have made friends via the Internet…
> I have not made any friends, *friends*, but I have expanded my social network.

The Internet Café, with its provision of computer access, is seen as enabling the whole area to be included in the wider society, virtually if not necessarily physically. The Internet is, for instance, used as a way of bridging with different people outside Skarpnäck:

> **Greta (81):** It is not difficult to reach the outside world. We learnt that at the course.
>
> **Julio (24):** I chat with different girls from different places in Sweden, like Umeå or Gävle [north of Sweden].
>
> **Ricardo (21):** You can chat with people from all over the world.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** I love to chat with people that I don't know. Just because many of them are different to me. I enjoy that… I often chat in foreign chats. Sometimes they ask me what I'm doing in that room. I say that it is because I have a lot more fun there. It is also fun because you learn another language.

> **Shazia (38):** It is very easy to get contacts. The world becomes so
>
> small. You can go everywhere and find people with the same
>
> interests.

As suggested by the last quote, in addition to bridging (non-local) networks, the Internet
can also facilitate the creation of interest-specific or bonding networks (in terms of
interests). All participants in the focus groups think the Internet is excellent for finding
people with similar interests:

> **Jurgita (47):** It is a good way of finding people interested in the
>
> same things… I am interested in dogs and I was involved in a
>
> group about dogs. I read a bit what others wrote about races in
>
> Germany, England etc. I got in touch with one specific woman. It
>
> was a woman in America who I talked to about Pit bull terriers.
>
> Lots of discussion. We kept in touch for quite a while.
>
> **Ashmed (27):** I visit sites concerning music, football and general
>
> news. I think people who chat a lot tend to look for people with
>
> similar interests.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** I think the Internet leads to the creation of different
>
> interest groups, and if you join those kinds of groups, for example
>
> about music or other things, you can find people with similar
>
> interests. And perhaps meet them face-to-face.

Many participants think that computer-mediated communication can lead to the creation of
interest groups. Some of them provide examples of online interest groups, which have

moved on to face-to-face contacts. For instance, one participant talks about a group that gathers around a common interest - online as well as offline:

> **Eva (48):** A friend of mine plays games with other people on the Internet. It is a group of ten guys and girls who have met via the Internet and then they have created some kind of club. They play against each other and then they meet (face-to-face). They travel to different places to meet. It sounds positive and fun.

Participants in the focus groups also argue that online interest groups, in particular, and the Internet, in general, can create strong ties, for instance in terms of close friends and romance:

> **Katitzi (26):** I know so many people who have found love on the Net and really close friends. Guaranteed, within a year, I will have found a close friend through the Internet.
>
> **Shazia (38):** I think one can make friends online if you knew more about computers. Those who know a lot about computers don't need anything else. They get everything from the Internet and computers – friends, all your problems solved, and new contacts. They have the whole world at home. I have heard that many women have found someone they want to get married to. And friends. I mean everything.

Romance was a topic that emerged spontaneously in the focus groups and was one which all participants seemed interested in. It was argued that the Internet is a good place to find a partner, as each person has a chance to get to know the other before judging on looks.

Moreover, some participants say that if they join 'flirt groups' everyone is likely to share interest in the same things, which facilitates meeting someone. A couple of the participants provide good examples of love online:

> **Ashmed (27):** I have some friends who have starting dating on the Internet. You go in and chat a bit and there are different flirt sites. At first, I was skeptical, but they say it is fun and has led to positive results… Above all, if you are looking for someone you look among other people who you know are also looking for someone, so to speak. They have similar goals. It can be different if you are out one night or meet other people in general. Then you may not always know their intentions, but… here the rules are clear from the beginning. 'Now we intend to flirt with each other and we'll see what it leads to!'
>
> **Eva (48):** I have several friends who have met the men who they have got married to. The first time, several years ago, when one said that she was going in to the city centre [Stockholm] to meet a guy that she had been chatting with, I said "but God don't do that! Then I must go with you! It is scary. Anything could happen!" But today she is married to the guy and lives in Gothenburg. She moved out of Skarpnäck. She left.

Due to the anonymity and lack of social and physical cues, it is generally believed that people are less timid and more intimate online. For example, Katitzi (22) points out that: "You can talk about everything between heaven and earth with people on the Internet." It is argued that users get to know each other without being influenced by physical cues:

> **Eva (48):** When chatting, you get to know each other first. When you find someone who might seem interesting, then you talk a bit more and become friends. Then you start finding each other and move into talking in a private room.

Despite the fascination with the romantic possibilities of online interaction, the vast majority of participants in the focus groups use the Café, and email, to maintain already established social contacts, mainly informal strong ties with family, friends and partners. Email is argued to be an excellent complement to other forms of communication for maintaining strong ties at a distance:

> **Lucia (22):** Thanks to email I can keep in touch with my friends in Italy. It is also easier to get in touch with my tutors at the University.
>
> **Ashmed (27):** I use email to keep in touch with friends, partly from Skåne [south of Sweden] where I'm from and also with some who have moved abroad.
>
> **Ricardo (21):** I mainly email my friends and my girlfriend who lives in Umeå [north of Sweden].
>
> **Greta (81):** I receive photos and Christmas regards from my son in Denmark. I got a Christmas card with flashing Santa Clauses and music. I really liked that. My other son works in Norway decorating boats. He sometimes sends emails with photos of that.

However, it was generally argued that the use of email also facilitates the creation and maintenance of weak ties as it allows for an expansion of one's networks:

> **Johan (35):** I usually send jokes to my email list, which contains about 30 friends and friends of friends. It is an easy way of keeping in touch with lots of people, and every joke I send contributes to at least a few replies.

The participants explain that it is much easier to ask someone, such as a friend of a friend, an acquaintance or even a stranger, for his or her email address than asking for the phone number. It is also argued that it is less embarrassing to email someone you do not know well than it is to phone the person.

9.3 EXTENT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

In addition to participation in networks, the extent of received social support online and offline is investigated as part of the concept of social capital. As in the survey carried out in connection with the Local Net study, 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 money (500 SEK - £35) or to need help with baby-sitting.

9.3.1 Offline Support

Table 4a) Social Support: Different Types of Received Social Support

	Support / No Support	
Social Support	Yes	No
Borrow Money	88	12
When Sick	93	7
Help with Baby-Sitting	79	21
Talk about Problems	83	17
Want Company	88	12
n	*73*	

According to the questionnaires, most Café visitors claim to have access to informal social support. The vast majority (79-93%) know someone who would provide them with support when they needed to borrow money, were sick, needed help with baby-sitting, to talk about problems or wanted company. There is no significant difference between local and non-local support.

The survey indicates that few Café respondents (an average of around 12%) are isolated in the sense of knowing nobody who would provide them with social support. However, about a fifth (21%) would like more support in terms of baby-sitting.

Table 4b) Non-Local Social Support: Café-Users versus Non-Users (%)

	Users versus Non-Users		**Significance**		
Non-Local Support	Café-Users	Non-Users	χ^2	p	d.f
Talk about Problems	63	82	24.61	0.032	1
n	*46*	*78*			

In general, there is no difference in received support between users and non-users of the Internet Café. However, there is a significant difference between the two groups with those visiting the Café (63%) knowing significantly fewer people outside Skarpnäck whom they could talk to about personal problems than the non-users (82%).

The questionnaire results about social support were supported in the discussions, which took place in the focus groups. Some participants thought that the Café visitors might be a bit lonelier than average people. However, many of the focus group participants think that social support can be provided by the Café for lonely people, online as well as offline:

> **Birgitta (59):** It may well be so that people who come here are a
> bit lonelier than the average… I sometimes come here for that
> reason, since I work on my own I spend a lot of time at home on
> my own writing. Then I may as well go to the Café to print etc.
> and at the same time meeting some people. I think the Internet
> Café can replace something for lonely people who find it difficult
> to get in contact with other people. Here you can get out and get
> contacts on the Internet via the computer. When you come here
> you don't feel totally lonely. There are other people here in the
> Café as well as people to chat with on the Internet.
>
> **Katitzi (26):** If you are very lonely you may come here to meet
> people, not just on the Internet, but also to check things out - if
> there are any friends in a similar situation…

9.3.2 Online Support

The vast majority of respondents think that more formal social support can be provided
online, such as exchange of information and searches for specific information. It is argued
that information can be found about everything on the Internet:

> **Margareta (68):** The Internet is great for information exchange.
> Many people have made so much effort on putting things on the
> Internet. For example, I wanted to look for a poem by Allan Poe
> and found a guy who had gathered the most loved poems by him.
> The guy had put them in alphabetical order and there was also an
> 'own opinion' section. I think 16000 people had visited the page.

> **Ricardo (21):** When emailing, my friends and myself often advise each other about good web sites. We exchange information.
>
> **Johan (35):** When my mum got breast cancer, I searched for information about it on the Internet. I looked for facts about the illness and also about treatments.
>
> **Greta (81):** I think social support can be provided online. I am a member of the rheumatoid association. I can get any kind of information about my illness from their web site. Even my medical doctor was there on a photo… These things are very interesting. And you can find out about medicines and see exactly what they are. And also about health in general. But *talking* about it on the Internet, I'm not so sure…

As indicated by Greta, although support can be provided online in terms of information, most participants do not want to *talk* about personal problems on the Internet. When it becomes private most participants in the focus groups say that they prefer other means of communication, such as face-to-face interactions:

> **Ricardo (21):** I only email my friends about everyday stuff like football or what you have done during the day. No personal stuff.
>
> **Ashmed (27):** When it becomes very private I prefer to meet or talk on the phone. The Internet is more to keep in general touch, like 'I have seen that film' etc. When it gets more serious you want to talk or meet.

> **Eva (48):** If a catastrophe happens in life it may feel good that it
> gets a bit more abstract. If you meet someone you may break
> down and cry. If it is a machine there is more of a distance, but if
> I'm really sad I want my family or friends around me. Not to cry
> in front of a machine…

Thus, most participants stress the importance of face-to-face contact in relation to social support. The reason for most this may be a lack of trust online, which will be discussed in the next section. However, two young women, one current and one previous visitor of the Café, say that they have no problem *talking* about personal problems. According to one of them, the anonymity online makes it even easier:

> **Katitzi (26):** Once I talked to a guy about love. He was unhappily
> in love. I talked about my problems and we supported each other.
> He said things I hadn't thought about and reverse. You don't have
> to tell your name or where you live. It is entirely up to you. To
> talk about problems online is like talking about everyday
> problems that everyone around the world is dealing with. You
> may have lost a person or your job….

Similar to Eva's earlier statement about using the Internet during a catastrophe, in an interview Maria (31) explains the importance of online support when going through a personal crisis. When she lost her baby very late in the pregnancy, a midwife recommended her to join an online support group. At first she only observed the discussions concerning the matter:

> **Maria (31):** It felt good to see that I was not alone: others were going through the same thing as I did. I felt an urge to read about how others felt and experienced the situation. It confirmed that my feelings weren't strange. This was an enormous rescue for me. It felt almost necessary – and it wouldn't have been possible without the Internet.

However, Maria did not only use the support group for observing or lurking. After a while she wanted to get in contact with someone herself:

> **Maria (31):** Through reading all the emails, it was easy to find someone I felt a little bit extra for. I got in touch with a couple of mothers who had similar experiences as I had. They replied and I kept in regular contact with one of them. Being able to find someone like that is fantastic.

Maria regarded the online support as an important complement to other forms of support, which she received from professionals, family and friends - face-to-face as well as through the telephone:

> **Maria (31):** If was good to feel no obligations as you might with an old friend. I could just write emails during the crisis and then stop. No demands. I don't think I would have wanted to meet her face-to-face. She filled a crucial function solely in relation to this crisis and that's all I wanted. Also, we could write and read the emails whenever we wanted and felt a need for it. No pressures.

Maria goes on to describe the importance of the online support she exchanged with the other person as follows:

> **Maria (31):** I wrote to her almost like diary and got mirrored in her all the time, which felt great. It was good to avoid face-to-face contact. I dared to open up to her and write about 'strange' feelings, which others might have found weird. I found it easier to express my feelings in writing. I have never really been a writer, but I don't think I have ever written as expressive as then.

When Maria fell pregnant again, she joined another email list – for pregnant women who had previously lost a child. However, as she did not feel the same need to discuss these issues, she soon stopped participating in it. Now, being a mother of three, she is no longer involved in any email lists and is hardly using the Internet at all.

9.4 LEVEL OF TRUST

Trust has been measured in the questionnaire using items from Srole's anomia scale (1956). Questions were asked about social distrust (distrust in other people) and institutional distrust (distrust in the officials and politicians). As the factor analysis, presented in chapter seven, has already indicated that the questions belong to a single dimension, only two out of the five questions in the original scale were chosen. The extent of trust online was explored in the focus groups.

9.4.1 Offline Trust

Table 5a) Social and Institutional Distrust
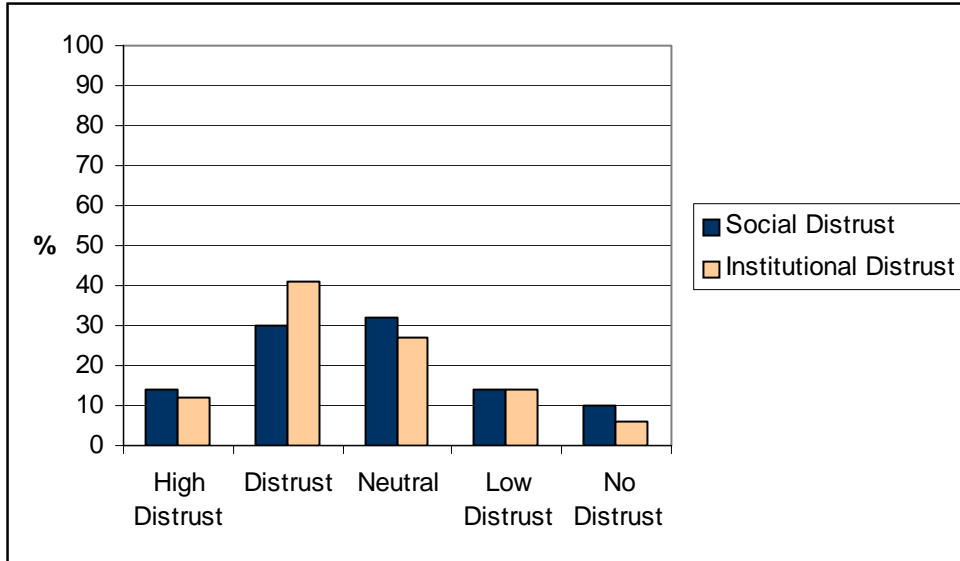
n1 (social distrust) = 47, n2 (institutional distrust) = 49

There seems to be a relatively high level of distrust among the respondents. Almost half of the sample (44%) agrees with the statement that *these days you do not know whom to trust.* Only a quarter (24%) disagrees. The results indicate that institutional distrust is even higher than social distrust. More than half (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 man*; only a fifth (20%) disagree.

Table 5b) Social Distrust: Café-Users versus Non-Users (%)

	Connection Status		Significance		
Attitudes	Café-Users	Non-Users	χ^2	p	d.f
High Distrust	44	66	16.1	0.000	2
Neutral	32	15			
Low Distrust	24	19			
n	*79*	*89*			

According to the statistical data, there is no difference between Café-users and non-users in terms of institutional trust, but there is a significant difference between groups in social trust. Significantly more of the non-users of the IT-Cafe (66%) than the users (44%) agree that *you do not really know whom to trust these days*. People who visit the Café tend to have a higher level of generalised social trust than those who do not visit.

Possible reasons for the higher levels of trust among the Café-visitors were explored in the interviews and focus groups. It was suggested that the meetings involving members from different groups in the Café have a positive influence on social trust. The Café manager and most focus group participants think that getting to know, or at least recognising neighbours, increases general trust in Skarpnäck. Within the IT-Café itself, they report that there seem to be high levels of trust, which they believe may lead to increased general trust in the area:

> **Birgitta (59):** You get a feeling that people who come here are pretty decent…. It is not the same feeling as when you go down in the underground in the city. Then another feeling appears. When you come in here, without thinking about it, you take it for granted that the people are pretty decent. This may increase general trust in the whole area.

Although there is no significant statistical difference in institutional trust between users and non-users, many users think that the Internet Café has positive influences on it. It is generally believed that the use of the Internet can facilitate contacts with local politicians and empower the residents in Skarpnäck:

> **Eva (48):** You can go to the Café to reach your politicians through the Internet and send them emails with questions. The local authority can be 'bombarded' from the Café. The contact with and faith in politicians would increase.

However, another Café-user is a bit skeptical towards the perceived importance of an email in comparison with a 'real' letter sent to a politician or the local authority:

> **Margareta (68):** An email doesn't feel as important as a written letter. If I write an email to the local authority it feels like they wouldn't consider it as very important. A letter in an envelope with a stamp, on the other hand, that is something of importance…

9.4.2 Online Trust

Even if trust is high in the Café, the general opinion in the focus groups is that trust is very low or even non-existent on the Internet. Most participants seem to be pretty certain that people in general cannot be trusted online (as well as offline):

> **Henrik (54):** How could you trust anyone on the Internet when you cannot trust anyone anywhere else? I think you must be paranoid both in reality and on the Internet.
>
> **Lucia (22):** Nobody is honest in the world. On the Internet you can say what you want. That is my opinion.

> **Katitzi (26):** I would not trust other people online. Not 100%
> anyway. I would be a bit careful and if I would meet someone it
> would be at a public place… Hopefully you are not unlucky to
> meet an axe murderer.

According to the focus groups, the low levels of trust are caused by the fact that users cannot see each other online. The general opinion is that Internet users can easily lie and make things up about themselves online. The lack of physical cues is believed to have a negative impact on social trust:

> **Eva (48):** On the chat not every one is honest. People make
> things up, for example that they are 24-years old…. Some say that
> they are girls when they are boys. It is a lot like that.
> **Henrik (54):** I could say on the chat that I'm tall and handsome
> and have lots of money…
> **Lucia (22):** If you want a tall, blond guy, super funny - that could
> be me! Even if I'm short, ugly and fat… This can happen due to
> the anonymity on the Internet, as you don't see the person. That is
> why it is difficult to trust people on the Internet.

However, some participants point out that the anonymity provided online can sometimes be positive, especially for groups who may have problems in face-to-face encounters. As mentioned earlier, it is believed that people are less timid on the Internet, which may facilitate social participation for many people:

> **Lucia (22):** If someone is really shy I think the Internet can help him or her somehow.
>
> **Göran (67):** If you manage the technology, then the Internet is good for those who are shy. I definitely think so since you don't see changes in people's faces…

According to the focus groups, people have fewer prejudices online as nobody is judged by physical traits, which increases feelings of security and trust. It is argued that physical appearance is less important on the Internet:

> **Katitzi (26):** The other day I chatted with a guy for three hours. If you have a conversation with someone, girl or guy, and you have a lot in common you don't care about what that person looks like. Then you don't think about it. I chatted with this guy for three hours without knowing anything about his looks. We had so much to talk about and so much fun. We talked about his job, what he likes, what you do, about dogs, animals and everything.

In the focus groups, it is argued that there is a different form of trust and honesty on the Internet, which users take into consideration when being online. Most participants say that people are not really lying online, but just 'having fun' experimenting with their identities. The general view is illustrated by the following extract:

> **Ashmed (27):** You are anonymous on the Internet in another way. You can live out a role when lying through the keyboard without having to take the consequences of it as when lying to someone straight in the face.
>
> **Eva (48):** … but I don't think you should really say that people lie, because it is for fun and you exaggerate a bit and clown about. I know some guys who went in and said they were girls and it was a lot of fun… I think it is mainly on a humorous level.
>
> **Jurgita (47):** I think as long as it is fun you can do it.

The atmosphere online is described as being humorous and laid-back. It is regarded as something positive: as a unique chance for role-playing and identity change. Nevertheless, it must be added that one participant, Lucia (22), thinks that these non-serious attitudes online constitute a major obstacle to building trust and social relations. It is argued this atmosphere creates a different trust online. In addition, some participants point out that there are different types of problems existing on the Internet and that building trust and relations online is a long process. As put by one Café visitor:

> **Shazia (38):** Nothing is perfect. There are bad things on the Internet, but there is nothing without its downsides. You are forced to trust others on the Internet even if something negative can occur.

Many participants say that one can easily choose to leave an online encounter at any time, which makes trusting on line easier. It is argued that people dare to take greater risks on the Internet, as it is easier to interrupt communication online than offline. However, this may have positive as well as negative influences on trust and social relations:

> **Shazia (38):** On the Internet you can choose. If there is something bad you don't have to open it or you can just leave.
>
> **Margareta (68):** On the Internet you can respond with silence and there is nothing you can do about it. It is like this expression: 'I'm on the receiving end of the silence.'
>
> **Johan (35):** One problem with email is that if you don't get a response you don't know if it is because the person doesn't want to reply or if it just because of lack of time. I have actually excluded some people from my email list as I never ever get a response from them and therefore don't know whether they appreciate my jokes etc. or not.

9.5 SENSE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY

The sense of community in Skarpnäck was investigated in the survey, focus groups and interviews. It is operationalised through questions about solidarity and community attachment: perceived level of social cohesion, tension between groups and local identity.

9.5.1 Sense of Solidarity

Table 6) Level of Social Cohesion in the Area
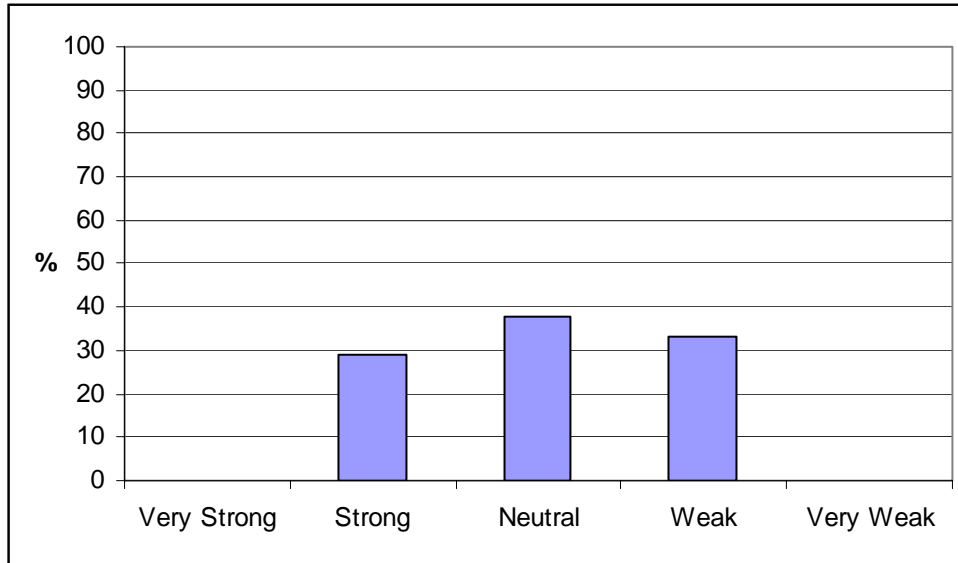
n=45

In the survey, when asked about social cohesion in the area, few respondents (29%) state that they are satisfied with the level of it. A third (33%) think that the cohesion is weak. There is no significant difference in perceived community cohesion between users and non-users of the Café.

Table 7a) Tension between Different Groups
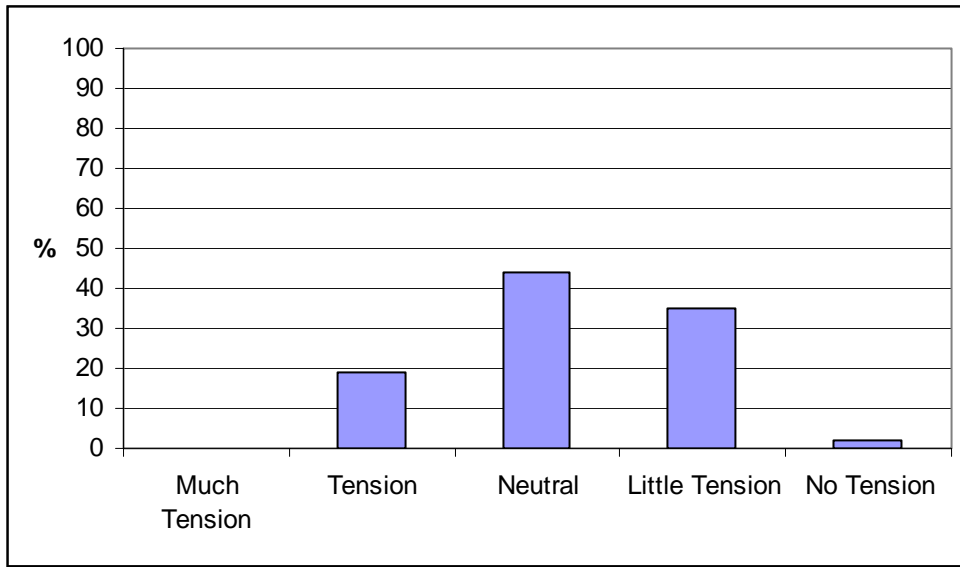
n=43

When asked about the extent of tension in the area, as another proxy of community, less than a fifth (19%) answered that there is tension between different groups. Almost two fifths (37%) think there is little or no tension in Skarpnäck. Almost half (48%) of those who think tension exist, cite Swedes and immigrants as the groups involved, about one third (31%) specify tension between old and young residents.

Table 7b) Tension between Different Groups: Café-Users versus Non-Users (%)

Attitudes	Visitor Status		Significance		
	Café-Users	Non-Users	χ^2	p	d.f
Much Tension	19	39	5.90	0.052	2
Neutral	44	36			
Little Distrust	37	25			
n	*43*	*89*			

There is a significant different between Café-users and non-users in terms of perceived tension. Non-users are much more likely to specify conflict than users of the Café. About

two fifths of the non-users (39%) think there is tension between different groups compared to only about one fifth in the Café sample (19%). Moreover, nobody in the Internet Café sample thinks there is very much tension in Skarpnäck (cf. 11% of the non-users).

The relatively low levels of perceived tension among Café users, revealed in the questionnaire, are confirmed by the focus groups. The vast majority of participants in the focus groups, most of whom were regular Café users, think there is little tension in the area. In their opinion, there is little snobbery or prejudice in Skarpnäck. Rather, it is argued that residents in Skarpnäck have high levels of tolerance and that residents are accepted the way they are despite differences in ethnic background, at least among young residents:

> **Eva (48):** I have lived in Skarpnäck for 18 years and something that Skarpnäck is very famous for is… It doesn't matter if you are white, yellow or whatever you are – all of us are 'Skarpnäck residents', you know. I think that is totally unique for Skarpnäck.
>
> **Julio (24):** In Bagarmossen, Kärrtorp and Hammarbyhöjden there is vandalism, problems and immigrants. There, Turks fight with people from Gambia. In Skarpnäck everyone is united. The Turks here may cause problems outside of Skarpnäck, for example at parties, but not here. Here there is no tension between groups. We only fight with youngsters from other suburbs. The fights are gang-fights between different suburbs.

Most focus group participants and interviewees think that the reason for there being less perceived tension in Skarpnäck among Café users may be the meetings between different groups which take place in the Internet Café. The Café manager believes the variety of

visitors to the Café reinforces social integration in the area, creating new face-to-face contacts and bridges between different groups:

> **Café Manager:** 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 here in the IT-Café, and I definitely think that the Café integrates people in Skarpnäck.

The interaction occurs between many different groups. An elderly Swedish participant provides an example of bridging between age as well as ethnicity groups by telling the focus group how a young immigrant visitor helped her with Swedish spelling:

> **Greta (81):** Today the girl next to me has helped me. We became friends. They are so sweet these young people.

These arguments in terms of the impact of the Internet Café on social integration are generally supported by the focus groups. According to the participants, Café visitors tend to chat and help each other, building bridges between different groups:

> **Katitizi (26):** I have got in touch with many people in the Café. If you sit here you naturally talk to other people - different people: immigrants, Swedes, youngsters... If you make a joke everyone laughs.

The extent of bridging connections made in the IT-Café was further investigated in the survey. The respondents were asked whether they had made any new contacts in the Café with people different from themselves.

Table 8) Bridging Social Capital in the Internet Café
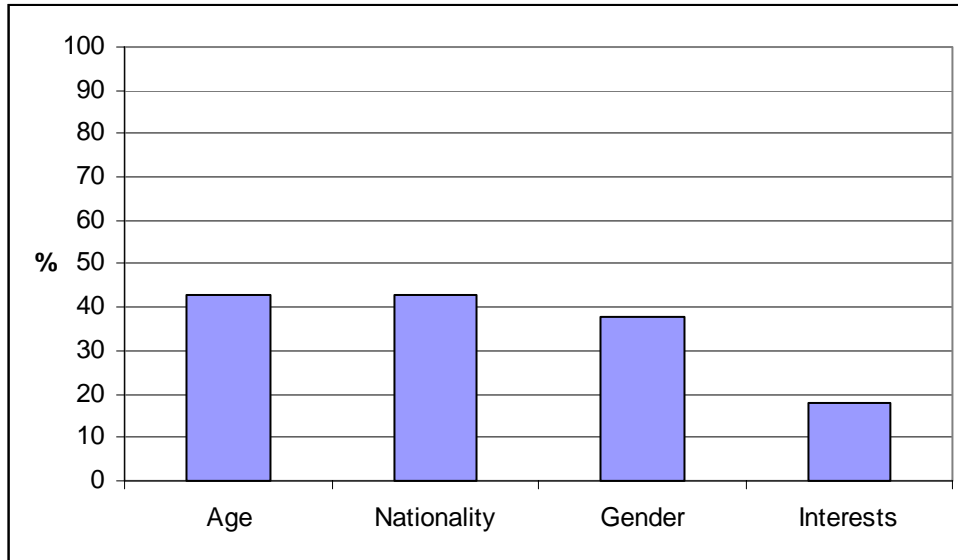
n= 41

The survey data indicates that the Café has both the potential to integrate and bridge groups locally, decreasing tension between them, and that it has had a considerable measure of success in achieving this goal. When asked whether the Café visits have led to any new contacts, about two fifths of the Café users state that they have made new contacts with people different from themselves in terms of age (43%), nationality (43%), gender (38%) and interests (18%). Some respondents also state that they have made new bonding contacts in the Café, contacts with people similar to themselves, in relation to age (47%), interests (35%), nationality (18%) and gender (18%).

9.5.2 Community Attachment

The final indicator of community is a question about sense of local identity ('rootedness')
using a scale from 0-10. This question has been used by USK in previous studies of the area
(Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000).

Table 9a) Local Identity: Café-users versus Non-users

Local Identity	Change in Local Identity		Significance	
	Non-Users (1999)	Café-Users (2001)	t	p
Mean	5.1	7.4	3.177	0.002
Std dev	2.99	5.95		
n	*87*	*76*		

In 1999, before the opening of the IT-Café, when asked in the survey about the sense of local
identity, the data demonstrates that the local identity was low (5.1). In addition, as illustrated
in chapter seven, USK (ibid) data demonstrate that the average score among residents in
Skarpnäck was low, slightly over five, for over ten years. The mean on the identity scale for
IT-Café-visitors in 2001 is 7.4, significantly higher than the figure recorded for non-users
two years previously.

Table 9b) Local Identity: Café-Users vs. Non-Users (%)

Attitudes	Visitor Status		Significance		
	Café-Visitors	Non-Visitors	χ^2	p	d.f
High Identity (7-10)	60	22	26.2	0.000	2
Medium Identity (4-6)	20	29			
Low Identity (0-3)	20	50			
n	*76*	*87*			

Far more Café respondents (60%) feel a strong sense of local identity (score 7+) than non-
users of the Café (22%). Only a fifth (20%) of the Café sample feel a low level of local

identity compared to half (50%) of the non-users. Café-visitors are clearly exceptional, expressing a much stronger sense of identity with Skarpnäck than those who do not visit the Café.

The high level of local identity among Café visitors is confirmed in the focus groups and the interviews. According to the interviews, especially the ones conducted in the youth clubs, the residents, and especially young ones, feel a strong sense of identity with the area. The Café manager himself also admits to feeling a strong sense of belonging to Skarpnäck. Despite the generally negative views of the area contained in the media, most focus group participants, who are also Café users, say that they feel a strong sense of local identity:

> **Eva (48):** I think there is a strong local identity in Skarpnäck. But they do write a lot of bad things about us in the media that I don't really think are true. I have a shop here, lived here for a long time and have youngsters, and I think it is great.

Reasons for Strong Sense of Community

The positive correlation between IT-Café visits and local identity, revealed in the survey, was thoroughly discussed in the focus groups. All participants think that the Café plays an important role in the creation of local identity in Skarpnäck. The vast majority stresses the importance of the Café as a local service in the otherwise rather deprived area:

> **Eva (48):** Even in our little Skarpnäck, who everyone else has abandoned, there is an *IT-Café!*

> **Katitzi (26):** I think it was a super idea. Skarpnäck needs an IT-Café instead of cutting down everything important here. A computer is something everyone needs just now… It just struck me: 'I hope they do not close this place down too!' Then it would really be so bloody dead here!

The general opinion in the groups is that those visiting the Café feel that there is something provided for them, which increases their sense of local identity and sense of belonging to Skarpnäck. When asking about the effect of the Café on local identity, the following explanation was provided by one of the visitors:

> **Birgitta (59):** Because the Café-visitors have something in the area, I think. For example, there is a day centre for handicapped people, which probably makes *them* feel 'rooted'. Those with small children probably think it is good with the playgrounds etc. It is always about service. Those who have something that interest them probably feel a high sense of local identity, but it is crucial that there are many different things so not only certain categories feel a local identity.

It is argued that the Café is important for a community identity since it is open for everyone and not solely for certain categories. The Internet Café's aim to include everyone in Skarpnäck creates a wide sense of local identity, as well as social integration, in the area:

> **Katitzi (26):** It is important that there is something – a kind of meeting-place for everyone. Not just a youth club or something only for mentally ill. This is something for everyone.

In addition to the provision of a physical service, it is also argued that there is a social aspect of the Café too. The Café manager argues that the Café creates a local identity as it serves as a meeting-point and a means of integrating residents. The importance of social contacts for the creation of local roots and a sense of community is also stressed by most focus group participants who maintain that the Café, as a meeting-place, gives the residents an opportunity to get to know each other. As put by one of the visitors:

> **Margareta (68):** I have lived here half my life, which has created natural roots to the place. Before, the roots were based upon external things, such as the place itself - the shops, the forest, and the lake – and that it was beautiful. These things still exist, but recently the roots have also become based upon *people*. Since I got retired I have increased my social network due to spending more time in the area, for example in the Internet Café. Now, when I go shopping I usually meet people that I know or at least recognise. You meet someone and you think: 'Aha, that's the women who works in Konsum (one of the food stores), that man spends a lot of time in the IT-Café and that's my son's school friend…' It becomes a bit of a small town feeling. And it suits me well because then I feel rooted here. All those people I know or recognise have some kind of connection to me and I to them. I think it feels very good.

It is also argued that the Café, as a local service and meeting-place, increases the attraction and status of the area. For example, the manager says that many visitors and other people are impressed by the existence of an IT-Café in an outer-city area, which may make the residents feel a local pride. All focus group participants think that the Café makes Skarpnäck more attractive, especially in comparison with other areas. Many examples are given by the Café-users:

Greta (81): I think the Café increases the standard in the whole of Skarpnäck. Absolutely.

Jurgita (47): If you compare with Bagarmossen, they don't have an Internet Café. You cannot surf on the Internet there.

Katitzi (26): I think Skarpnäck becomes more attractive. It is a cool thing! When I heard there was something new I thought 'WOW – they have come up with a great idea!' First, everyone likes computers in some way. If you haven't tried them you will do it anyway since it is there all the time. Second, it simply attracts people. It really does! It looks good for Skarpnäck's appearance. If you compare with Kärrtorp and Björkhagen, there is nothing. As such, people come from the whole of the Green Line [the underground line], so, of course, it looks good.

Lucia (22): It is good that the Café exists. There is nothing else in Skarpnäck. We must at least keep the IT-café. It is good. It is nice. It is also something extra that not everyone has, I mean, in other areas.

The participants in the focus group think that the Café is an important tool in changing the negative picture of Skarpnäck created by the media. The Café is believed to be crucial for the area as it makes it more attractive. It makes people proud of the area and, as such, feel a stronger sense of identity with it. The existence of the Café is seen as giving Skarpnäck a competitive edge in the struggle for recognition.

9.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the effects of the Internet Café on social capital and sense of local community in Skarpnäck. The study in 2000-1 suggests that the Café has increased social capital and community in the area from 1999. The Café visitors have significantly more local friends, are more trusting and socially integrated, and feel a much stronger sense of local identity.

In the absence of control groups, causal priorities are difficult to disentangle, but the discussions in the focus groups suggest that the IT-Café is a potent force for the creation and maintenance of social capital and community identity. The Café is seen as facilitating social connections, online and offline, and as making Skarpnäck a more attractive area in which to live. Many participants think that the Café acts as a local physical 'third place', as described by Oldenburg (1989), building bridges between different groups in the area. It is also argued that companionship, offline as well as online, is a common reason for visiting the IT-Café.

In addition to the general opinion about the Café as a physical meeting-place, the vast majority of the Café users view the Internet as a new form of online meeting-place. In accordance with arguments in the literature (e.g. Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Wellman & Gulia, 1999; Lin, 2001), the general opinion among the Café visitors is that the Internet is well designed for networking: in particular global, weak and interest-specific ties. It is,

however, not only weak ties which are seen as being supported by the Internet. Several participants argue that the creation of strong ties; romance and friendship, and the exchange of support exist online. In support of the position outlined by Reid (1995), many visitors argue that the lack of certain physical cues online enables people to be more open online.

At the same time, in common with critics in the literature (e.g. Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995), most participants in the focus groups were skeptical about the quality of support available online, arguing that they preferred face-to-face rather than online encounters when *talking* about personal problems. In accordance with arguments by Blanchard and Horan (1998) and Rheingold (2000), information, e.g. about medical issues, rather than communication, seems to be the most common form of support online.

However, this view was not universal and two young women made extensive use of the Internet for talking about personal problems, arguing that the provision of anonymity and abstraction makes it easier to open up and talk about sensitive issues. Like Barlow et al (1995) and Wellman et al (2002), they view the Internet as a good complement to other forms of support, face-to-face and over the phone. This view is supported by the other visitors in terms of email, as it enables participation at a low cost despite barriers of time and place. Email is viewed as an excellent complement to other forms of communication, maintaining 'non-local, personal network communities' (Wellman, 1996: 348).

It is generally argued that the meetings in the Café have a positive influence on trust in Skarpnäck in general. As suggested by Uslander (2001), the higher levels of trust may also be affected by a greater sense of equality in the area due to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the Café. Although no significant difference existed between Café visitors and non-visitors in terms of their expression of institutional trust, the Internet was valued as a

tool for contacting local politicians, and as suggested by Sproull & Kiesler (1991), promoting connections across hierarchical barriers.

Café visitors were in agreement that there is little trust online, or at least a different form of trust from that characteristic of face-to-face encounters. Resembling descriptions of thin or abstract trust (Miztal, 1996), it is argued that lack of physical cues makes it easier to lie, but, at the same time, creates fewer prejudices. Café visitors say that it is easier to trust and take risks online, but at the same time easier to mistrust.

According to the focus groups, the Internet Café fulfils an important role in community building. The significance of the Café as a new local service and a meeting-place in strengthening the sense of local community is stressed by all residents. For example, it is argued that the lower tension perceived by Café-visitors is a direct result of the meetings between different groups, which occur in the Internet Café. Supporting Ivarsson (2000), the visitors also say that Internet Café makes the area distinctive and more attractive, which in turn creates a strong sense of pride, local identity and community.

PART IV:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

> **Chapter 10: The Internet,**
>
> **Social Capital and Local Community**

CHAPTER 10: THE INTERNET, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

10.1 Summary of Results

10.2 Digital and Social Inclusion

10.3 Social Impacts of the Internet Café

10.4 The Internet and Social Capital

10.5 The Research Question Revisited

10.6 Future Directions for Research

10.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This dissertation has addressed the question: *To what extent can the use of information and communication technology (re-)create social capital and a sense of local community in the urban environment?* The question has been examined through an evaluation of two computer projects, a Local Net and an Internet Café, in Skarpnäck, a marginalised area of Stockholm.

10.1.1 Social Capital and Local Community in 1999

Skarpnäck is a relatively deprived area, with many 'socially excluded' groups (Starrin et al, 2001), such as single parents, residents with a foreign background and low educational level. A number of official reports (e.g. Ivarsson, 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000) confirm the status of the area as being rather deprived in comparison with other areas in Stockholm. Its physical location, on the edge of the metropolitan area, further contributes to its exclusion and Skarpnäck can be characterised as a 'spatially excluded' area (Kronear, 1998). Skarpnäck has also been stigmatised by the media, where it is described as being home to many social problems.

Writing about similar areas in Scotland, the Scottish Office (2001) states that the effects of exclusion on individual households are most evident when a whole area is excluded. Skarpnäck typifies the problem. The combination of poor reputation, physical isolation and relative deprivation leads both the area and its inhabitants at risk of being excluded from the wider society as well as from the Information Society. Skarpnäck, and its residents, is hence at risk of becoming prey to the 'dual digital divide' (Reddick, 2000).

The questionnaire surveys and interviews carried out in 1999 portray Skarpnäck as an area with low levels of social capital and little sense of community: little participation in

community networks, little local support, a high degree of distrust and a low level of local

identity. These findings are cast into relief by the general perception of Sweden as being a

high-trust society with high levels of social capital (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995), but confirm

general arguments that modern urban areas, especially disadvantaged ones, possess little

social capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1990; Woolcook, 1998). The results suggest

that Skarpnäck generally fits the description provided by Putnam (2000) of communities

with low social capital:

> Areas with local social capital are characterized by high mobility,
>
> neighbor anonymity, ethnic groups uneasily mixed, local
>
> organizations rare and disadvantaged youth caught in subcultures
>
> cut off from the adult world (p. 301).

The question posed in the present study is whether the general trends of a decline in social

capital (Putnam, 1993; 2000) and a loss of community (e.g. Wellman et al, 1988; Oldenburg,

1989) can be counteracted by the use of ICT. More specifically, can the use of Local Nets

and/or Internet Cafés increase digital and social inclusion in marginalised urban areas?

10.1.2 The Local Net and the Internet Café

The evaluation shows that Skarpnet, the Local Net project, with its provision of subsidised

home access and local pages, largely failed to meet its goals in terms of increased digital

inclusion and social inclusion. Those who were connected to the computer network were

predominantly young residents in employment – groups generally described as traditional

computer users (e.g. Dutton, 1999; Fong et al, 2001; Steyaert, 2002). The connected

respondents were also significantly more experienced in the use of computers than the non-

connected. The project failed to extend access to the excluded. As Skarpnet was hardly used,

due to a lack of effective online services and a lack of take up, the effects upon social capital and community were also small.

Despite its failure to deliver, the expectations of Skarpnet remained high. Both connected and non-connected respondents surveyed in 1999 believed that the Local Net had the potential to be a powerful weapon in attempts to enhance digital and social inclusion. Skarpnet was also believed to increase access to local (and global) information and communication, the basis for the development of social capital and community.

In contrast to the Local Net, the Internet Café, with its public access, appears to be being much more successful in attaining its goals in combating the digital divide. The Café has directly increased the digital and social inclusion of those residents who make use of it. This includes many who might be labelled as disadvantaged (e.g. Starrin et al, 2001), such as elderly people, single parents, the unemployed and people with a foreign background. The provision of subsidised public access, informal computer support and courses has increased general computer-skills in Skarpnäck and facilitated social participation for the residents.

In addition to increased digital inclusion, the evaluation also shows that the Internet Café is well on the way to reaching its goals in terms of social contacts and social integration in the area. Social capital and sense of community were significantly higher among Café users than it was among those residents of Skarpnäck surveyed two years earlier. The Café-visitors have more local friends, are more trusting and socially integrated and feel a much stronger sense of local identity than the non-visitors.

According to the focus groups, the increase in social capital and sense of community is directly attributable to the Internet Café. It is argued that the Café, as an informal physical third place (Oldenburg, 1989), increases contacts and social integration. In addition, it is

stressed that the Café provides a local attraction, which, as suggested by Ivarsson (2000; 2003), increases the sense of pride and local identity. The Internet also provides a base for the development of virtual third places online. It renders support to the argument advanced by a number of other writers (e.g. Wellman, 1997; Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Lin, 2001), that the Internet itself provides a mechanism for increasing and maintaining social capital, through online networking and the exchange of information.

Although Community Portraits only attracted a small number of participants, it provided further evidence of the way in which the Internet Café could act as a portal to a virtual community, which remained grounded in the local community. This supports the arguments of Wellman and his colleagues (2002) that the increased use of ICT has facilitated the emergence of personal communities, which may exist regardless of space and time and yet are still grounded in geography.

10.2 DIGITAL AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The significance of computers in contemporary society and the development of what has been variously described as an 'Information Society' (Bell, 1974) or a 'Network Society' (Castells, 2001) is stressed throughout the study. With the rapid growth of new technologies and the development of the Information Society, digital inclusion has almost become a prerequisite for social inclusion. Participation in the virtual world is often closely related to participation in the real world. It has almost become necessary to have access to computers and the skills to use them in order to be able to participate fully in contemporary society.

Most Skarpnäck residents who took part in either of the local projects stress the importance of computers in contemporary society. They are very positive about the potential of information and communication technologies, but, like Castells (2001), they are also aware

of the danger of being excluded from them. In broad agreement with the positive voices in the literature (e.g. Rheingold, 2000; Healy, 2001; Lin, 2001), I think the Internet has great potential to be inclusive, with special reference to disadvantaged groups, as it facilitates participation at a low cost across physical and temporal barriers. At the same time, I argue that it is crucial to acknowledge the great risks of digital and social inclusion, as many disadvantaged groups are being excluded from the Internet (e.g. Fong et al, 2001).

Although Sweden has the highest proportion of Internet users in the world (Townley, 2002), far from everyone in Skarpnäck has access to computers. The whole of Skarpnäck, being a deprived area, is at risk of both social and digital exclusion, leaving the residents facing the 'dual digital divide' (Reddick, 2000; Fong et al, 2001). This potential divide emphasises the importance of initiatives, which aim to include everyone in the area, especially disadvantaged groups. The question is to what extent community initiatives like Local Nets and Internet Cafés can include disadvantaged groups in the Information Society.

10.2.1 The Local Net and Digital Inclusion

Despite aiming to increase digital inclusion in the area, the Local Net failed to connect everyone and to increase general computer-skills in the area among all groups. Only a small fraction of residents were connected to the Local Net system and those who were connected were mainly traditional computer users: young residents in employment who were already experienced in the application of computers (e.g. Castells, 1996; Dutton, 1999; Steyaert, 2002).

Groups at risk of both social and digital exclusion, the elderly, the unemployed and the computer-illiterate (e.g. Fong et al, 2001; Starrin et al, 2001) were largely excluded from Skarpnet. In accordance with Aldridge (2000), writing about Britain, the surveys in

Skarpnäck show that income and age are also risk factors in Sweden for being on the wrong side of the digital divide. The Skarpnet project failed to span the digital divide, as those who took up the offer of subsidised access were much more likely to be among the more privileged members of the population than those who remained non-connected.

In addition to inequality in terms of connection, there was inequality in usage within the households, with a general over-representation of young male users. Elderly people, women, immigrants and residents with low educational levels made significantly less use of the more popular computer activities compared with younger Swedish males with higher education. The digital divide in usage replicates existing social stratification (Steyaert, 2002) leading to the further exclusion of already disadvantaged groups. Despite the inclusive intention of the founders of the Local Net, the exclusion of the elderly, the unemployed and the computer-inexperienced from Skarpnet could have led to a further marginalisation and isolation of these groups.

As the Local Net did not reach its goals in terms of inclusion, it was also not able to fulfil the aspiration about social capital. Only a small number of people actually enrolled in the service (less than 200 out of 3400 households) and not all of them turned out to be users. The general lack of up-take by residents meant that little online communication took place on Skarpnet. Even among those formally connected to Skarpnet, many said that they made little or no use of it. Lack of content and services that worked were highlighted as reasons for the low level of use. Cisler (1995) stresses the importance of interesting and updated services for an active use of a Local Net; Blanchard and Horan (1998) state there have to be forums for activity. Neither of these preconditions existed on Skarpnet and the lack of effective communication forums led to little online communication, which is the basis for the creation of both social capital and community.

Despite the relative lack of use, the overall perceptions of the potential of Skarpnet remained positive. In agreement with the view expressed by Morino (1994), the general belief was that Local Nets, like Skarpnet, are emerging phenomena with the potential to affect societal transformation. The expectations of its impacts of social contacts and community identity were high. Many residents thought that Local Nets were to be common place in most areas in the near future, and the expectations of its impacts on social contacts and community identity were high. In my opinion, Local Nets have the potential to provide a new kind of community and well as strengthening the existing community, but only if people use them for that end.

According to the general expectations held by residents and the manager, Skarpnet was also seen as having the potential to achieve the three general goals of a Local Net, outlined in this thesis. Although little use was actually made of the facility to search for local information, residents remained interested in using Skarpnet for dealing with local issues and especially for accessing local information. This suggests that Skarpnet had the potential to reach one of a Local Net's main goals: the focus on local issues (e.g. Morino, 1994; Beamish, 1995; Guy, 1996; Schuler, 1996).

At the same time, many residents were interested in Skarpnet as a means of getting access to the Internet, confirming Doheny-Farina's (1996) argument that residents may be interested in using a Local Net primarily as a means of 'getting out of town' to pursue global activities. As put by Wellman and his colleagues (2002), the Local Net was seen as having the potential for enabling communication with people both 'near and far'. Skarpnet embodied many of the tensions between the local and the global, which have generally accompanied the development of modern society (e.g. Morino, 1994).

Access to the Internet is very important for a deprived area like Skarpnäck, as it facilitates links to the wider society and inclusion in the Information Society. However, for the survival of a Local Net it is crucial to make local online services as attractive as those available elsewhere in cyberspace. A Local Net has to include content of interest to the residents, for example local discussion or interest groups, chat with politicians and updated news about the area and its services. These were all services to be included on Skarpnet.

Despite the fact that Skarpnet failed to 'include the excluded', reaching 'everyone' in the area, the residents thought that it had the potential to do so. In agreement with the views expressed by the positive voices in the literature (e.g. Beamish, 1995; Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Healy, 2001), Skarpnet was seen as a vehicle for increasing computer-skills through the provision of subsidised access. The importance of being included in the Information Society was stressed by most residents, who praised the modern technology brought to their area. In accordance with suggestions made in the literature (e.g. Rheingold, 2000; Lin, 2001), it was also argued that the Local Net had the potential to facilitate social inclusion, as participation can take place regardless of time and place constraints.

It can also be argued that Skarpnet had the potential to reach the third general aim of a Local Net: community building (e.g. Morino, 1994; Doheny-Farina, 1996; Guy, 1996), which also support the utopian views in the literature (e.g. Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Lin, 2001; Castells, 2001). The questionnaire data indicate a significant difference between the residents connected to the Local Net and the non-connected, with the former feeling a significantly stronger sense of local identity than the latter. This difference has not been further investigated, but it can be speculated that the connected residents felt a stronger sense of community due to the service provided for them in the otherwise rather deprived area and because of the high expectations they had of the Local Net.

The expectations were especially high in relation to the potential impact of Skarpnet on formal community involvement, such as access to local information and electronic links with local politicians and community services, but expectations were also high in relation to the enhancement of informal contacts between neighbours. However, some residents were worried that the use of computers at home might reduce face-to-face contacts. Some support was given to the views expressed by a number of dystopian writers (e.g. McClellan, 1994; Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995; Nie & Erbring, 2000) that the Internet may lead to the creation of 'mouse potatoes' who neglect participation in the local community. In general, however, the majority of respondents believed that Skarpnet would increase social contacts and the standing of Skarpnäck in the outside world, enhancing the sense of local community.

Despite the general enthusiasm with which Skarpnet was launched, it was clear that there were many problems with the project. In contrast to Netville, the thriving Local Net in Canada (Hampton, 2001), Skarpnet did not work out as anticipated, due to technological, managerial and financial problems and its failure to attract and involve the residents. For example, the set top boxes failed to live up to their specifications, there were problems with the Internet provider, few local services were available and the project failed to extend its membership. Skarpnet ceased to exist as a separate project in year 2000. It was not, however, entirely without lasting impact. Largely as a result of the experiences gained from the Local Net, an Internet Café providing public access, computer support and training opened in the same year.

10.2.2 The Internet Café and Digital Inclusion

In comparison with the Local Net, the Internet Café seems to be having considerably more success in reaching out to the residents in Skarpnäck, in particular the disadvantaged groups. Whereas the Local Net reached less than 200 out of 3400 households, the Internet Café is

visited by about 20 residents a day with a total of 4000 annual visitors. Although relatively small, the Café, with its central location in the community, appears to have had a considerable impact on the area.

Café visitors include significantly more elderly, unemployed and computer-illiterate residents than were users of the Local Net. The most common reason given for visiting the Café was that the residents could not afford to buy a computer or get Internet access at home. The visitors used the Internet Café to learn more about the new technology. As pointed out by Aldridge (2000), it may be argued that the Internet is ideal for those who are still unsure about computers and want to try them out.

Many visitors say that they feel safe about using technology in the environment provided by the Internet Café. They are very positive about the informal and friendly support they received from the Café manager. It increased their computer-skills considerably and gave them confidence. The Internet Café makes the Internet available and provides skills in how to use it at low cost and in a secure environment. Some respondents had acquired sufficient confidence and expertise as a result of their visits to the Café to buy their own machines. The Café is thus helping to bridge the digital divide, increasing computer interest and skills among residents in the area.

Participants in the Community Portraits project, who were all fairly inexperienced in the use of computers, exemplified some of the ways in which the Internet Café provides a base for residents to extend their skills. In order to collaborate online they had to develop confidence, a task that was facilitated by the combination of informal online and offline support they received. At the same time, focus on a task in which everyone could claim to be an expert, enabled them to tackle new forms of technology in what they described as a 'fun' way. Although the technology was not as transparent as had been intended, the focus on the task

of explaining the nature of community to other people online meant that the group had the potential to become a virtual community, almost without noticing it. In order for people to make good use of the Internet they have to have the motivation as well as the necessary technical knowledge. Tasks such as the preparation of a community portrait provide a suitable spur.

The results from both the quantitative and qualitative studies indicate that the increased digital inclusion facilitated by the Internet Café has led to increased social inclusion. Many unemployed people in Skarpnäck use the Internet, accessed through the Café, to look for jobs; single parents use it to facilitate everyday life through email; immigrants use it keep in touch with their home countries; pensioners use the facilities of the Café to produce reports for voluntary association and keep in touch with their children and some residents in the area use the Internet to take part in higher education. These findings support the positive relationship between digital and social inclusion in contemporary society.

10.2.3 The Local Net versus the Internet Café

There are five main reasons for the difference in success between the Local Net and the Internet Café: 1) timing, 2) management, 3) computer support, 4) the nature of the access, and 5) the combination of online and offline communication.

It can be argued that Skarpnet, which started in 1998, was simply too early to succeed. By no means all pioneers or pilots projects survive. People were less interested and used to computers in 1998-9 when Skarpnet was promoted and the technology was less robust than required today. This made it difficult to attract users as well as sponsors. The Skarpnet manager points out that it would probably have been easier to succeed with a Local Net in 2002 than it was in 1998. When opening the Internet Café, two years later, the interest and

knowledge about computers was much greater, which facilitated the inclusion of participants in the project.

Both computer projects were planned to be bottom-up approaches. The Local Net, however, failed in its goal of involving community members in the management structure. It was mainly the Skarpnet manager, an IT-manager in the housing company, who was in charge of the whole project and made all the decisions. The Internet Café, by contrast, is managed by a young previously unemployed local resident, well known in the area and with a range of local connections. The Café visitors felt comfortable with the manager and could identify with him. In conclusion, the Local Net seems to have been perceived as belonging to Stockholmhem; the Internet Café is perceived as belonging to the community. For the success of a local computer project, it is thus very important that the residents in the area feel a part of it.

The fact that Skarpnäck is a relatively deprived area is probably a further contributing factor to the relative lack of success of Skarpnet. Both projects provided subsidised access. The most obvious difference between Skarpnet and the Internet Café is in the location of the access: the former depended on access in residents' homes, while the latter provided public access in a space which enabled face-to-face interaction. By no means everyone in Skarpnäck can afford home access. For those unable to afford to purchase or rent the necessary equipment some form of public access is required, along with readily available support.

As there tends to be a general fear and scepticism among many digitally excluded groups, especially elderly people, it was not enough to rely on only two 'ambassadors' to support up to 200 users in the Local Net and attract the other residents. The digital inclusion of disadvantaged groups and those lacking confidence is a long and demanding process, which

requires a lot of encouragement. Considerable amounts of time and effort are needed with an emphasis on computer support and training in a safe environment; this is something the Café seems to have managed well.

The friendly and informal atmosphere in the Internet Café provides an excellent arena for learning more about ICT. It provides an example of introducing new technology to people with little or no experience of computers, and hence to combating the digital divide. Throughout the research - in the early interviews, the questionnaires, the focus groups and the discussions with the participants in Community Portraits - the importance of informality was stressed. In view of this, it may be doubted whether attempts to host Internet Cafés in more formal environments, such as public libraries will be as successful. The provision of informal learning seems to be important when introducing new technologies to disadvantaged areas.

The Local Net also suffered from the lack of social reinforcement available to users of the Internet Café. Many visitors to the IT-Café in Skarpnäck have computer access at home, but find the additional services provided in the Café sufficiently compelling to make use of access there as well. Some respondents who were familiar with both the Local Net and the Café volunteered that they preferred public access because they feared home access would lead to them losing face-to-face contact and community involvement. It can thus be argued that the combination of online and offline interactions plays an important role in the creation of digital inclusion and social capital in disadvantaged urban areas.

In conclusion, the success of the Internet Café lies in the provision of subsidised public access, the informal IT-support and training provided by a local resident working in the Café, and the ease with which the Café can support both virtual and physical meetings. The Café functions as an informal third place in both physical and virtual space. Hence, it is the

provision of support and the blending of online and offline activities which accounts for the fact that the Café has been much more successful in terms of reaching its goal in terms of digital and social inclusion than the Local Net.

10.3 SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE INTERNET CAFÉ

In addition to reaching its goal in terms of digital and social inclusion, the Café is also contributing in terms of increasing social capital and the sense of community. The survey shows that the Café visitors in 2001 have significantly higher levels of social capital and feel a significantly stronger sense of local community than the non-visitors felt in 1999. Residents visiting the Café have significantly more friends and are more socially integrated in Skarpnäck than non-visitors. Sense of local identity and social trust is also considerably higher among the Café-visitors than it is among non-visitors.

10.3.1 The Internet Café as a Physical Meeting Place

As stated in its initial prospectus, the Internet Café aims to function as a "place where people, old and young and from different nationalities, can meet and in that way increase communication between people in the area." It is largely successful in meeting this goal and serves as an important local facility and meeting-point for residents, fulfilling the 'third place' role, which has been claimed to be crucial for the development and maintenance of a sense of local community (e.g. Meyrowitz, 1985; Oldenburg, 1989). The success of the Café supports the assumption that physical third places play an important role in the creation and maintenance of a sense of community in urban areas. It acts as a place where the residents can get to know their neighbours and seek support in terms of companionship. Residents meet in the Café and later say 'hi' to each other out on the street.

The Internet Café is also proving successful in bridging groups who otherwise would have little excuse to meet. Supporting the conclusions reached in discussions in the focus groups, the questionnaire data indicate that bridging, as well as bonding, connections are made in the Café. The common interest in computers brings residents from different backgrounds together. For example, young people help the elderly with computer problems and Swedes help immigrants with spelling. Information and communication technology is something that attracts people across community divides. Unlike many other meeting places, such as a youth or a bingo club, which tend to lead to segmentation, the Internet Café attracts everyone. The Café provides a sense of place for all residents, based upon a common interest in computers and the Internet. According to most Café visitors, these meetings in the Internet Café have a positive influence on trust and community identity in the whole of Skarpnäck.

10.3.1 Trust and Sense of Local Community

Visitors to the Internet Café of 2001 are more trusting than the non-visitors of 1999. In addition to the positive impact of the meetings between different groups, the higher levels of trust may also be affected by the fact that the Internet Café enables residents in Skarpnäck to feel more included in community and society, both digitally and socially. Residents involved in the Café (and the Local Net) stress the importance of feeling equally included in the wider society. It is generally argued that the technology enables Skarpnäck residents, including many disadvantaged groups, to participate in the Information Society on an equal basis.

Moreover, the lack of physical cues on the Internet enables disadvantaged groups, such as physically handicapped or shy people, to participate more equally with other people. Café users thus feel a greater sense of equality with other residents, other areas and countries, and show a higher degree of general social trust, supporting theories about the relationship between trust and the perception of equality (Wilkinson, 1996; Uslander, 2001).

Although the differences in terms of expressed institutional trust between Café users and non-users failed to achieve statistical significance, the Internet is valued as a potential tool for contacting local politicians. According to Woolcook (1998), this is one of the mechanisms for building linking social capital and institutional trust. As suggested by Sproull and Kiesler (1991), the Internet is perceived as promoting connections across hierarchical barriers and hence of enhancing institutional trust.

The Internet Café also fulfils an important role in community building. The public provision of ICT has helped to strengthen the sense of community in the area. The participants in Community Portraits exhibit this trend in a marked fashion. More generally, Café visitors feel a significantly higher sense of local identity than do non-visitors. The sense of local identity expressed by the Café users is much higher than that revealed in the official surveys carried out in the area during the last ten years.

The significance of the Café for the community is stressed by all residents taking part in the focus groups. It is argued that the Café is being successful in its effort to enhance social integration and to deepen the sense of identity in the area. As discussed earlier, the residens relates the higher sense of community in the success of the Internet Café as a meeting-place between different groups. It is also argued that the provision of the new service makes Skarpnäck more attractive, creating a stronger sense of pride, local identity and community. This confirms Ivarsson's (2000) earlier findings in the area, but contrasts to Damer's (1989) arguments that it is difficult to improve the image of a stigmatised area.

In short, the Internet Café is an arena where residents can meet, celebrate ties and exchange support, which increases social trust and widens their sense of local identity. Residents from different walks of life gather and build bridges across age and ethnic lines based upon their

common interest in the Internet. In addition to its role as a portal or gateway to the Internet, the Internet Café acts as an arena for face-to-face communication between residents, which, according to much of the literature (e.g. Oxyx & Bullen, 2000; Putnam, 2000) is a prerequisite for the creation of social capital and community. The question remains how communication *online,* and the use of the Internet in general in the Café, can influence social capital and community.

10.4 THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Skarpnäck evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that the Internet has the potential for the enhancing social capital (e.g. Harasim, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Lin, 2001; Wellman, 2001). The results of the Skarpnäck studies suggest that the Internet is already helping to create social capital in the area, through online communication and the exchange of information on the Internet.

10.4.1 Online Communication

While there were some doubts among respondents that the Café can function as a physical meeting-place for the whole of Skarpnäck, the vast majority of Café users view the Internet as a new and effective meeting place, substituting for the third places described by Oldenburg (1989) and contributing to the sense of place postulated by Meyrowitz (1985).

Social activities, such as email and chat, are especially popular among young users. In accordance with the description offered by Wellman and Haythornwaite (2002), it seems that online communication has become an integral part of young people's lives in modern societies. Some of the young visitors to the Internet Café even claim to be addicted to email and chat. The Internet is seen as an important tool among young people for keeping in touch

with each other. It has become an important complement to other forms of communication. The argument in this thesis is that CMC can play an important role in the creation of social capital: weak as well as strong, bonding as well as bridging ties.

In contrast to the 'either/or' polarisation in the literature (Wellman & Gulia, 1999), computers and the Internet are often used as another means of communication with already established contacts - mainly strong ties. However, email also facilitates the creation of weak ties, as it is easier to email a distant contact than to phone him or her. As Stoll (1995) points out, email is less intrusive and intimidating than other forms of contacts. The perceptions among Café users seem to be in accordance with the recent literature: online contacts are becoming more and more integrated with offline contacts (e.g. Müller, 1999; Wellman, 1999; Rheingold, 2000; Castells, 2001; Hampton, 2001).

In conformity with the views expressed by many writers (e.g. Wellman, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Castells, 2001; Lin, 2001), the findings from Skarpnäck also indicate that the Internet is well designed for the creation of new contacts, bridging as well as bonding (global and interest-specific). It is especially valued for its possibilities for reaching the outside world, making the residents in a deprived area, such as Skarpnäck, feel more included in the wider society. The Internet opens up possibilities for new connections with different types of people from all over the world - or indeed, in the case of immigrants, for maintaining connections with representatives of their old communities.

The Internet is also highly appreciated for facilitating meetings with people of similar interests, possibly expanding social networks and increasing the number of weak ties. There are thousands of interest groups online, which offers a unique opportunity to meet people sharing highly specific interests, for example in music, football or politics. The creation of interest-specific ties can provide the base for a sense of solidarity and commonality, which

can build new friendships and romance. The Internet is described as being an excellent arena for flirting and for finding a partner: it is relatively easy to leave the arena if the relationship is not developing in the hoped-for direction and participants in online sessions have the chance to get to know each other before judging on looks. The number of potential partners is huge and the expression of interests up-front provides a useful marker.

However, there may be some difficulties in the creation and maintenance of relationships online due to the fragility of trust between users. According to the findings, trust is different online compared with that in face-to-face encounters. The absence of physical cues makes it easier to lie online, but, at the same time, it creates fewer prejudices. It is argued that it is easier to trust and to take risks, but at the same time it is easier to mistrust.

Galston (quoted in Putnam 2000) argues that if entry and exit is too easy online, trust will not develop. Conversely, Wellman and Gulia (1999) argue that Internet users tend to trust strangers, much as some people trusted hitch-hiked rides in the 'flower/child' era of the 1960s. Both views are represented among the visitors to the Internet Café in Skarpnäck. The general opinion, is that trust is thinner or more abstract online, as suggested by Miztal (1996), a strategy adopted in order to manage the complexity, uncertainty and risks online (Luhmann, 1988). According to the findings from Community Portraits, the development of relationship and trust is slower online.

In support of the position outlined by Reid (1995; 1999), some Café visitors argue that thin trust allows people to be more intimate online, particularly in the early stages of a relationship. The lack of physical cues and abstract trust online facilitate the exchange of social support, as the provision of anonymity and abstraction makes it easier to open up and talk about sensitive issues. The Internet can fill an important function, for example in personal crises, as a complement to other forms of support and communication. It also

enables the exchange of support across distances. However, like critics in the literature (e.g. Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995), many Café visitors are skeptical about the quality of online support. Most of them prefer face-to-face rather then online encounters when talking about personal problems. When discussing online support, the Café visitors tend to refer to online information, such as medical information rather than to more emotionally-involved forms.

10.4.2 Online Information

As suggested by some scholars (e.g. Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Rheingold, 2000), the findings indicate that information is an important form of support that is offered online. In contrast to Wellman et al (2002), I do not think the search for and consumption of online information have to be regarded as asocial activities. Rather than forming a passive object of consumption, online information often features in rather active forms of participation, frequently involving exchanges between Internet users. This form of participation is an important element in the development of social capital (Coleman, 1990). Even when information is simply posted online, it is put there by someone for others to read, an act of generalised reciprocity. In common with Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000), I argue that information provision and consumption, online and offline, are important elements in the formation of social capital.

The Skarpnäck findings show that although young people especially use online communication, information seeking is carried out by most users regardless of demographic factors, young as well as old. The Internet is regarded as an excellent source of information by all users. Easy access to free and vast amounts of information is much appreciated. As pointed out in the literature (e.g. Dutton, 1999; Lin, 2001), the development of the Internet has meant that information is freer and more readily available than ever before. Information

can be found online about everything and anything, including highly specific information about music, poetry, travelling, sport, health etc.

However, as pointed out by Dutton (1999), there are also some downsides with the explosion of information since it is as easy to access irrelevant and harmful information, such as pornography, as it is to find relevant and beneficial material. Some Café-visitors think it is difficult to search for relevant information on the Internet, confirming Steyaert's (2002) argument that the digital divide concerns not just being able to access information, but also being able to actually access relevant information. Overcoming the digital divide not only involves providing access to computers, but also helping people make effective use of the access. It is important to give people the skills to enable them to use the Internet. The digital divide should therefore be defined in terms of inequality in computer skills rather than solely inequalities in access to them.

In order to find relevant information in 'the Internet jungle', users have to be relatively skilled and confident. Those who are not skilled enough to use computers fully may be regarded as digitally excluded even when they have physical access. Attempts to overcome the digital divide need to ensure that naïve users are provided with the training and support necessary for them to become confident online citizens. This is something the Internet Café in Skarpnäck, in distinction from the Local Net, has accomplished well. It provides users with guidance in the skills to use computers as well as access to them and backs this up with the provision of a secure environment for both online and offline meetings.

10.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTION REVISITED

In the introduction I stated that the purpose of this study is to investigate the question whether the use of ICT can (re-)create social capital and a sense of local community in the urban environment. The simple answer is 'yes'.

The use of ICT has enormous potentials for the creation of social capital in a disadvantaged area like Skarpnäck. The Internet provides access to local and worldwide information. It also provides a cure to isolation by enabling contact with people who are not in the same physical environment. ICT facilitates social participation, as a complement to participating face-to-face or through the telephone. The use of ICT can thus play an important role in increasing social capital.

As the Internet is a potential source of social capital it is important to investigate how it can be delivered to and used by residents in disadvantaged urban areas. How can barriers like income and fear of computers, as suggested by Aldridge (2000), be overcome? To what extent are Local Nets and Internet Cafés successful in the provision of ICT and the increase of digital inclusion and social capital? What is the difference in terms of success between the two types of schemes?

Analysis of the two computer projects in Skarpnäck shows that the Internet Cafe has been more successful than the Local Net in increasing digital inclusion and social capital. Both projects provided subsidised access. The Café, however, provides this in a public space, which is marked by informality and the provision of face-to-face support and training. In disadvantaged areas such as Skarpnäck it seems probable that the provision of Internet Cafés is likely to be a more effective way of enhancing social inclusion than schemes, which depend on people having access only at home. Internet Cafés provide a unique combination of a physical meeting-place, encouraging online as well as offline interactions. The

subsidised public access to the Internet and the informal face-to-face training are important factors in overcoming barriers to digital inclusion, such as income and fear.

However, the conclusion is that the provision of local access to the Internet and local services, either in the form of a Local Net or an Internet Café, has great potential for the creation of digital inclusion, social capital and sense of community. Ideally the two schemes should be combined, with the Internet Café acting as the physical base for the virtual Local Net. It may be that this combination of public access and local focus will provide the most effective way of harnessing ICT in the struggle to enhance social capital in marginalised areas.

Like the role played by the local press, as described by Janowitz (1967), an Internet Café which provides a forum for local discussions can be an important weapon for changing the image of a community. The local newspaper in Skarpnäck, which ceased publication just before the Internet Café opened, was a much-appreciated source of local information, helping the residents to identity with the area. Like the local paper, the Internet Café provides a forum for shared communication among the residents, contributing to local identity, prestige and solidarity (Janowitz, 1967). The use of the Café for local information searches and its combination of online and offline communication suggests that it may be well suited for this role. A Local Net accessed through an Internet Café would probably be an excellent source of (local as well as global) social capital and community.

10.6 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

The study of Internet Cafés and Local Nets provides an opportunity for investigating the nature of the integration between online and offline communities. Despite the considerable amount of theorising that has accompanied the development of the Internet, this remains an

area in which the extent of empirical research is remarkably slim. Most studies of the impact of CMC have been in experimental, laboratory contexts, far removed from the concerns of everyday life. There remains a tendency for commentators to adopt utopian or dystopian perspectives, rather than conducting field studies. More generally, it is important to evaluate the effects of computer initiatives on the local community. The development of the Information Society foreshadows new relationships between the local and the global, community and society (Castells, 1996; 2001). Concerns with the role of communities and social networks in social cohesion require re-examination of the processes involved when ICT reshapes temporal and spatial geometries.

The research conducted on one of the earliest Local Nets, Skarpnet, gives a glimpse into the future, but the relative lack of success of the project means that it is difficult to generalise from it. Despite the problems, however, Skarpnet suggests that projects which are more firmly embedded in their communities, with good financial and management structures and robust technologies, can help meet many of the needs of residents of marginalised areas. A focus on local issues and local news enables Local Nets to take on the mantle previously worn by local newspapers. The development of Local Nets is rapid. A web search reveals the existence of several hundred Local Nets in Europe, North America and Australasia and more are being added almost on a daily basis. In common with Skarpnet, many Local Nets appear to have a rather brief existence, often dependent on the enthusiasm of a small number of pioneers. More research on the criteria for longer-lasting success needs to be conducted.

Public access to the Internet in Internet Cafés and other arenas is also expanding rapidly. The Internet Café in Skarpnäck has shown greater success than the Local Net in creating digital inclusion and social capital. It is dangerous to generalise from a single case, but it appears that the combination of virtual and real community, online and offline interaction makes Internet Cafés particularly important weapons in attempts to overcome the digital divide,

decline of social capital and loss of community. This is another area in which research is required.

The success of the Internet Café in Skarpnäck can also be attributed, at least in part, to the nature of the setting and the informality which it provided. It is unclear whether other arrangements, such as the provision of public access in local libraries, which are common in Britain, will be equally successful. Much previous research has used physical access as a proxy for digital inclusion, but this study stresses the role of informal support, training and motivation. The provision of physical access, by itself, however cheap it may be, is only the first step in overcoming digital exclusion. To take part in the Information Society it is necessary to have the skills and the confidence to go online and a reason to make the effort. Further work is required which will take the context of public versus home access into account and which will specify the nature of the required support and the reasons why people should wish to go online.

A number of findings that emerged during the course of the present study could not be followed up within the confines of the research design. Among these are the differences in the meaning of community between Scottish and Swedish respondents; the extent to which different dimensions of social capital hang together; differences in usage patterns between different groups in the population; the relationship between online support groups and offline problems; the 'natural history' of emotional relationships online. Again, all of these are suitable topics for future study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Description of the Study in Easterhouse,

Appendix II: Questions & Frequencies in the Local Net Study

Appendix III: Questions & Frequencies in the IT-Café Study

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APPENDIX A:

The Local Net project in Easterhouse, Scotland

In pursuit of the original intention to undertake a comparative study of Local Nets in disadvantaged areas in Sweden and Scotland, attention was focussed on Easterhouse: a large peripheral housing estates on the eastern fringe of Glasgow.

The Local Community

It was believed that there were many similarities between Easterhouse and Skarpnäck and in 1998 both communities were planning Local Nets. In common with Skarpnäck, Easterhouse is described as being deprived and has been publicly labelled as 'problematic' and stigmatised in the media. It is also physically separate from the rest of the urban area.

Like Skarpnäck, Easterhouse has relatively low educational levels and many single parents. A major difference between the two areas is that there are hardly have any immigrants in the Scottish one. A rather high percentage (55%) of the local population is female. This is also reflected in the household makeup with up to 42% of homes headed by a lone parent. This figure is over a third higher than the rate for Glasgow as a whole. Figures from Glasgow City Council show that a substantial proportion, 83% of Greater Easterhouse residents, are in receipt of some form of housing benefit. 80% of the total occupied homes were owned by the local authority (cf. 34% of occupied homes came under local authority control in Scotland as a whole).

Greater Easterhouse has a high percentage of young people under the age of 16 (27% - compared to a national percentage of 19%). Economic activity rates for the area are low, with only around 42% of residents under the age of 45 in work. The unemployment rate in

December 2000 stood at 11.6%, well above the Glasgow average of 7.4 and the West Scotland figure of 5.5. In common with other peripheral housing areas in Scotland, the area is reported to be plagued by the misuse of drugs. The educational level amongst Greater Easterhouse residents is much lower than among those in Skarpnäck, with only 11% of the population having a qualification more than a standard grade level. The destinations of school leavers, leaving from the area based school show a slightly higher number moving in to Further Education - 15.6%, but a significantly lower number moving into Higher Education - 5.2%, compared to the Scottish average. 17.6% of school leavers move into employment, and 6% into training (25% and 11% for Scotland) (http://www.gedc, 2001).

The Local Net

The Local Net was (or was planned to be) provided by a local development organisation called the Greater Easterhouse Development Company (GEDC).

Management

GEDC was formed in 1991, as one of eight local economic development companies in Glasgow. Their mission statement, stated on their web site, is: 'To lead and support the economic regeneration process of Greater Easterhouse, to create a sustainable community in which people are proud to live, work and play'. The aims of the GEDC more specifically were:

- To provide Local Businesses, Colleges and Community Organisations with networked access to the appropriate range of GEDC services and any other relevant information.

- To provide individuals within the households of Greater Easterhouse with access to relevant and useful community information to increase their opportunities in line with GEDC's remit.

Project partners involved in the Local Net were:

- Microcentre Ltd. - supplying hardware, professional services, applications training and part sponsorship for the Internet Café.
- NTL (CableTel) - Supplying the connectivity infrastructure within Greater Easterhouse, Internet Service Provision, Domestic Package bundling (TV, Internet Access and Telephone), part sponsorship of the Internet Café and sponsorship of the six-month pilot project (up to 100 households).

The Aims of the Local Net

The scheme had similar overall goals to those of the Swedish Local Net - increasing digital inclusion and social cohesion in the community. Both projects were designed as means to create a sense of community, prevent isolation and enhance the inclusion of the communities concerned.

The Intranet was to provide local communication and information services, such as email and community information.

- GEDC Database
- Notice Boards
- Contact Information

- Community Information

- Timetables

- Training Opportunities (including distance learning)

- Employment Opportunities

- CV Production

- Project Status

The Development Company recognised the importance of facilitating ICT access in order to deliver opportunities to the maximum number of residents. The initiative was embarked upon as a way of achieving this, by delivering the opportunities directly into the homes of individuals. The aim of the project was for everybody to have a networked computer or set top box – an NC very similar to the one used in Skarpnäck - at home. Everybody in the pilot was provided with set top boxes by the GEDC. The set top boxes were designed to be very easy to use. Televisions were used as monitors: a solution that is designed to be both cheaper and to have a more familiar interface than systems dependent on PCs and monitors. Training courses were offered to members of the pilot households.

There was also an Internet Café with 12 computers providing public access to the residents. Local volunteers work in the Café, which is said to be well visited by residents in the community, especially youngsters. Most visitors are young unemployed people, including school-age children who have been excluded from school. The Internet Café is also used by different community groups and small new businesses without access to ICT-facilities.

The Inauguration and Demise of the Local Net

The Local Net project, 'the GEDC Community Information Network', started officially in 1999. It was formally launched by Government Minister Helen Liddel, MP, on March 30, 1999. In terms similar to those being offered by Skarpnet, residents in the area were to be offered subsidised connection to the Intranet and also to the Internet. District connectivity was under way by summer 1998 and 100 households were randomly selected to take part in a six-month pilot project. In the pilot groups residents were offered free connection to the Intranet (though precisely how "free" this was turned out to be a bone of contention). GEDC planned to offer a subsidised connection to a further 1000 households in the next stage. The exact costs were not clear.

The first stages of the Local Net project were to upgrade GEDC's in-house systems as a powerful platform from which to operate. This was achieved by investing in a completely new Information System using the latest technologies backed by through and relevant training within the organisation.

In the event, for reasons that remain obscure, very little happened with the Easterhouse Local Net project. As far as can be ascertained, the focus groups had no more than an initial meeting and after six months, a period plagued by arguments about cost and technical break-downs, the project appeared to have been abandoned. Among the remains were, literally, unconnected wires coming out of walls. There was also considerable frustration among the residents.

Research Conducted

The questionnaires used to investigate social capital and the impact of the Local Net in Sweden were translated into English and were to be delivered to the same groups in Easterhouse. However, research in the Scottish community was confined to an initial questionnaire with a small sample of 27 people who were or were meant to be connected to the network. Only six questionnaires were returned.

Several meetings were conducted with the project manager and also with the local group that was to be connected. A presentation of the research was made at a meeting with the project partners and the potential users. The GEDC project group intended to use focus groups comprising users, in order to evaluate progress. It was agreed that I would attend these focus groups as well as conducting my own interviews. Contact, including several meetings, was made with a group of local women, Lone Parents, who had hopes of developing their own Internet facility and a visit was also made to the local Internet Café. In the event the focus groups did not take place and the IT-Café was unwilling to take part in the research.

APPENDIX B:

Analysis of Questionnaires: Connected and Not-Connected to the Local Net

Q1) Length of Living Time in Skarpnäck: *"How long have you been living in Skarpnäck"?*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
0 - 2 years	19	23	21		15	20	35
3 - 5 years	18	23	21		14	20	34
6 - 9 years	18	23	21		14	20	34
10 years +	46	31	39		37	27	64
n	100	100	100		80	87	167

Q2) Satisfaction with Information: *"Do you think you get enough information about Skarpnäck and about what is going on there?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Yes, absolutely	5	10	8		4	9	13
Yes	33	42	37		28	37	65
Neutral	38	37	37		32	33	65
No	20	10	15		17	9	26
No, absolutely	5	1	3		4	1	5
n	100	100	100		85	89	174

Q3) Sources of Information: *"How do you receive this information?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Regional TV	15	14	15		13	13	26
Local Radio	2	6	4		2	5	7
Daily Paper	21	31	26		18	28	46
Local Paper	66	83	75		56	75	131
Info Sheets	66	56	61		56	50	106
Local Net	7	0	4		6	0	6
None	13	6	10		11	5	16
n	100	100	100		85	90	175

Q4) Visits to the Culture House: *"How many times during the last 12 months have you visited the Culture House in Skarpnäck?"*

	%				frequencies		
Visits / Year	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
None	25	29	27		21	26	47
1 - 4 times	27	24	26		23	22	45
5 - 9 times	22	13	18		19	12	31
10 +	26	33	30		22	30	52
n	100	100	100		85	90	175

Q5)* Satisfaction with Meeting Places: *"Do you think there are enough meeting places for residents in Skarpnäck?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Yes, absolutely	5	6	5		4	5	9
Yes	15	20	17		13	17	30
Neutral	35	36	36		30	31	61
No	34	29	32		29	25	54
No, absolutely not	11	10	11		9	9	18
n	100	100	100		85	87	172

Q6) Contact with Local Politicians: *"Do you think you have good contacts with local politicians and officials in Skarpnäck?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Very Good	4	3	4		3	3	6
Good	9	8	9		8	7	15
Neutral	24	33	29		20	29	49
Bad	11	21	16		9	19	28
Very Bad	53	35	44		45	31	76
n	100	100	100		85	89	174

Q7a)* Local Identity: *"To what extent do you feel a local identity with and "rooted" in Skarpnäck?*
(state your level of identity on this scale from 0 to 10)"

		%			frequencies		
		Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
None	0	12	17	15	10	15	25
	1	7	6	6	6	5	11
	2	10	13	11	8	11	19
	3	12	14	13	10	12	22
	4	7	6	6	6	5	11
	5	13	13	13	11	11	22
	6	5	10	8	4	9	13
	7	6	5	6	5	4	9
	8	16	9	12	13	8	21
	9	5	3	4	4	3	7
Very Strong	10	8	5	6	7	4	11
	n	100	100	100	84	87	171

Q7b) Local Identity (Mean & STD)

	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Mean	5.8	5.1	5.5
std	1.21	2.99	3.1
n	100	100	100

Q8)* Social Cohesion: *"How strong do you think the sense of cohesion is among the people in Skarpnäck?*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Very Strong	2	2	2	2	2	4
Strong	15	22	19	13	19	32
Neutral	45	46	45	38	40	78
Weak	26	25	25	22	22	44
Very Weak	12	6	9	10	5	15
n	100	100	100	85	88	173

Q9)* Tension in Community: *"Do you think there is tension between different groups in Skarpnäck*
(e.g. between young people and older people, immigrants and Swedes, people in renting flats and private flats)?"

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Yes, a lot	11	12	12	9	11	20
Yes, some	35	27	31	30	24	54
Average	33	36	35	28	32	60
Not very much	17	18	17	14	16	30
Not at all	5	7	6	4	6	10
n	100	100	100	85	89	174

Q10)* Groups of Tension: *"If you believe there is tension which groups are you referring to?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Swedes-Immigrants	60	48	54	25	21	46
Immigrs-Immigrs	17	18	18	7	8	15
Old-Young	48	21	34	20	9	29
Rented-Owned Flats	7	7	7	3	3	6
Romany	19	23	22	8	10	19
Others	21	34	18	9	15	15
n	100	100	100	42	44	130

Q11) Sense of Commonality: *"How much do you feel you have in common with other residents in Skarpnäck?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Very much	5	3	4	4	3	7
Pretty much	21	28	25	18	25	43
Average	32	27	29	27	24	51
Not much	31	27	29	26	24	50
Nothing at all	11	16	13	9	14	23
n	100	100	100	84	90	174

Q12) Satisfaction with Living in Skarpnäck: *"How do you like living in Skarpnäck?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Very much	17	18	18		14	16	30
Pretty much	46	49	47		38	44	82
Average	22	19	21		18	17	35
Not very much	12	10	11		10	9	19
Not at all	4	3	4		3	3	6
n	100	100	100		83	89	172

Q13)* Gender: *"What gender are you?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Female	49	56	53		42	50	92
Male	51	44	47		43	40	83
n	100	100	100		85	90	175

Q14)* Age: *"How old are you?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
18 - 34	28	30	29		22	27	49
35 - 49	63	39	51		50	35	85
50 - 64	10	21	15		8	18	26
65 -	0	11	6		0	10	10
n	100	100	100		80	90	170

Q15) Family Constilation: *"How many people live in your household?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Single parent	31	21	25		25	18	43
Two parents	39	34	37		32	30	62
Single without children	16	35	26		13	31	44
Two adults without children	15	10	12		12	9	21
n	100	100	100		82	88	170

Q16) Birth Place: *"Where were you born?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
In the Stockholm area	43	28	35		37	25	62
In the rest of Sweden	32	38	35		28	33	61
In another Nordic Country	25	30	27		22	26	48
In a country outside of the N	0	5	3		0	4	4
n	100	100	100		87	88	175

Q17)* Mother Tongue: *"What is your mother tongue? (the language you first learnt)"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Swedish	75	66	71		62	55	117
Other language	25	34	29		21	28	49
n	100	100	100		83	83	166

Q18) Citizenship: *"Are you a Swedish Citizen?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Swedish	93	93	93		81	82	163
Other	7	7	7		6	6	12
n	100	100	100		87	88	175

Q19)* Educational Level: *"What education do you have? (Give your highest education level)"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Elementary School	6	13	10	5	11	16
Secondary School	34	41	38	28	35	63
University	60	46	53	49	39	88
n	100	100	100	82	85	167

Q20)* Employment: *"Which of the following best describes your employment situation?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Student	11	8	10	9	7	16
Employed	85	66	76	73	57	130
Pensioner	1	17	9	1	15	16
Unemployed	3	8	6	3	7	10
n	100	100	100	86	86	172

Q21) Income: *"Approximately, how big is the income for your household as a whole per month before tax?"*

	mean			std dev		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Total Household	24521	20453	22474	24521	20453	22474
Divided by Adults	16518	15607	16060	16518	15607	16060
Divided by Total Number	10191	11183	10690	10191	11183	10690
n						

Q22) Family/Relatives in Skarpnäck: *"Do you have family/relatives in Skarpnäck?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Yes	17	16	16	14	13	27
No	83	84	84	70	71	141
n	100	100	100	84	84	168

Q23) Contacts with Family/Kin in Skarpnäck: *"Approximately, how often are you in contact with any of your family/relatives within Skarpnäck (not living in your household)?"*

a) Face-to-Face

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	33	42	37	5	5	10
A few times a week	40	42	41	6	5	11
A few times a month	20	17	19	3	2	5
A few times a year	0	0	0	0	0	0
More rarely or never	7	0	4	1	0	1
n	100	100	100	15	12	27

b) Telephone

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	56	58	60	5	7	12
A few times a week	33	42	35	3	4	7
A few times a month	0	0	0	0	0	0
A few times a year	0	0	0	0	0	0
More rarely or never	11	0	5	1	0	1
n	100	100	100	9	11	20

c) Letter

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	0	0	0	0	0	0
A few times a week	0	20	9	0	1	1
A few times a month	0	0	0	0	0	0
A few times a year	0	20	9	0	1	1
More rarely or never	100	60	82	6	3	9
n	100	100	100	6	5	11

d) E-mail

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	0	0	0	0	0	0
A few times a week	14	0	9	1	0	1
A few times a month	0	0	0	0	0	0
A few times a year	14	0	9	1	0	1
More rarely or never	71	100	82	5	4	9
n	100	100	100	7	4	11

Q24) Contacts with Family/Kin Outside Skarpnäck: *"How often are you in contact with any of your friends/aquaintances outside Skarpnäck?"*

a) Face-to-Face

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	4	3	3		3	2	5
A few times a week	17	34	25		12	24	36
A few times a month	45	42	44		31	30	61
A few times a year	30	15	23		21	11	32
More rarely or never	4	6	5		3	4	7
n	100	100	100		70	71	141

b) Telephone

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	24	33	29		19	26	45
A few times a week	47	47	47		37	37	74
A few times a month	24	13	19		19	10	29
A few times a year	4	5	4		3	4	7
More rarely or never	1	3	2		1	3	4
n	100	100	101		79	80	159

c) Letter

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	2	2	2		1	1	2
A few times a week	0	4	2		0	2	2
A few times a month	6	11	9		3	5	8
A few times a year	34	28	31		17	13	30
More rarely or never	58	54	56		29	25	54
n	100	100	100		50	46	96

d) E-mail

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	9	6	8		5	3	8
A few times a week	17	14	15		9	0	9
A few times a month	22	27	25		12	13	25
A few times a year	17	12	15		9	6	15
More rarely or never	35	41	38		19	20	39
n	100	100	100		54	42	96

Q25) Friends in Skarpnäck: *"Do you have friends/acquantainces in Skarpnäck?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Yes	79	75	77		66	62	128
No	21	25	23		18	21	39
n	100	100	100		84	83	167

Q26) Contacts with Friends in Skarpnäck: *"Approximately, how often are you in contact with any of your friends/acquaintances within Skarpnäck?"*

a) Face-to-Face

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	17	21	19		11	13	24
A few times/week	31	29	30		20	18	38
A few times/month	31	34	32		20	21	41
A few times/year	17	10	13		11	6	17
More rarely/never	6	7	6		4	4	8
n	100	100	100		66	62	128

b) Telephone

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	14	20	17		8	10	18
A few times/week	34	38	36		19	19	38
A few times/month	31	30	30		17	15	32
A few times/year	11	8	9		6	4	10
More rarely/never	11	4	8		6	2	8
n	100	100	100		56	50	106

c) Letter

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	0	3	2		0	1	1
A few times/week	0	6	3		0	2	2
A few times/month	0	11	6		0	4	4
A few times/year	6	8	7		2	3	5
More rarely/never	94	75	84		34	26	60
n	100	100	100		36	36	72

d) E-mail

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	7	6	6		3	2	5
A few times/week	9	17	13		4	6	10
A few times/month	21	8	16		9	3	12
A few times/year	5	3	4		2	1	3
More rarely/never	58	67	62		25	24	49
n	100	100	100		43	36	79

Q27) Contacts with Friends Outside Skarpnäck: *"Approximately, how often are you in contact with any of your friends/acquaintances outside Skarpnäck?"*

a) Face-to-Face

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	11	7	9		9	6	15
A few times/week	25	41	33		20	33	53
A few times/month	50	35	43		40	28	68
A few times/year	14	15	14		11	12	33
More rarely/never	1	4	3		1	3	4
n	100	100			81	82	173

b) Telephone

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	13	20	17		10	15	25
A few times/week	60	51	56		45	38	83
A few times/month	21	24	22		16	18	34
A few times/year	4	4	4		3	3	6
More rarely/never	1	1	1		1	1	2
n	100	100	100		75	75	150

c) Letter

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	0	2	1		0	1	1
A few times/week	0	4	2		0	2	2
A few times/month	8	13	11		4	6	10
A few times/year	25	26	26		12	12	24
More rarely/never	67	55	61		32	26	58
n	100	100	100		48	47	95

d) E-mail

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	10	16	13		6	8	14
A few times/week	23	18	20		14	9	23
A few times/month	36	16	27		22	8	30
A few times/year	18	6	13		11	3	14
More rarely/never	15	44	28		9	22	31
n	100	100	100		62	50	112

Q28) Contacts with Neighbours: *"Approximately, how often are you in contact with any of your next door neighbours in Skarpnäck?"*

a) Stay and Talk

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	25	21	23		21	18	39
A few times/week	31	24	27		26	22	48
A few times/month	20	24	22		17	21	38
A few times/year	6	19	13		5	16	21
More rarely/never	19	12	16		16	10	26
n	100	100	100		85	87	172

b) Face-to-Face

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	5	5	5		3	3	6
A few times/week	9	5	8		6	3	9
A few times/month	11	7	9		7	4	11
A few times/year	22	16	19		14	9	23
More rarely/never	55	67	60		36	39	75
n	100	100	100		66	58	124

c) Telephone

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	2	4	3		1	2	3
A few times/week	13	13	13		8	7	15
A few times/month	7	0	4		4	0	4
A few times/year	8	7	8		5	4	9
More rarely/never	70	76	73		42	41	83
n	100	100	100		60	54	114

d) Letter

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	0	0	0		0	0	0
A few times/week	0	0	0		0	0	0
A few times/month	0	2	1		0	1	1
A few times/year	4	2	3		2	1	3
More rarely/never	96	96	97		54	49	103
n	100	100	100		56	51	107

e) E-mail

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Almost every day	2	2	2		1	1	2
A few times/week	2	2	2		1	1	2
A few times/month	2	4	3		1	2	3
A few times/year	0	0	0		0	0	0
More rarely/never	95	92	94		53	47	100
n	100	100	100		56	51	107

Q29)* Number of Close Friends: *"How many really close friends do you have (that you can talk to about anything that is bothering you)?*

	mean				std dev		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	1.63	1.48	1.55		2.74	3.42	3.08
Outside Skarpnäck	6.03	6.63	6.33		6.07	8.69	7.38
n	86	89	175		86	89	175

Q30) Satisfaction with Circle of Friends: *"Are you happy with the number of friends you have or would you like…?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
More	34	36	35		29	31	60
Good as it is	66	63	65		56	54	110
Less	0	1	1		0	1	1
n	100	100	100		85	86	171

Q31) Feeling of Loneliness: *"How often do you feel lonely?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Often	14	11	13		12	10	22
Sometimes	24	37	31		21	33	54
Rarely	37	30	34		32	27	59
Never	24	21	23		21	19	40
n	100	100	100		86	89	175

Q32)* Social Support: *"If you needed social support is there anybody who would be there for you.."*

a) *…if you are sick?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	59	48	54		50	41	91
Outside Skarpnäck	67	78	73		57	66	123
No, nobody	6	5	6		5	4	9
n	100	100	100		85	85	170

b) *… if you want company?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	58	53	70		58	53	111
Outside Skarpnäck	73	70	90		73	70	143
No, nobody	4	7	7		4	7	11
n	100	100	100		79	81	213

c) *… need to talk about personal problems?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	48	45	47		39	35	74
Outside Skarpnäck	78	82	80		63	64	127
No, nobody	6	6	7		5	5	10
n	100	100	100		81	78	159

d) *…if you have to borrow 35 pounds?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	50	35	43		40	26	66
Outside Skarpnäck	78	84	81		62	63	125
No, nobody	8	8	6		2	6	8
n	100	100	100		80	75	155

e) *… if you need help with baby-sitting?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	62	58	60		39	30	69
Outside Skarpnäck	62	65	64		39	34	73
No, nobody	14	10	13		9	5	14
n	100	100	100		63	52	115

Q33) Source of Social Support: *"Who would help you if you needed social support?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Family/Kin	75	88	82		63	76	139
Friends/Acquain-tances/Neighbours	81	73	78		69	63	132
n	100	100	100		84	86	170

Q34) Satisfaction with Social Support: *"Would you like more social support or are you happy as it is?*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
More Support	22	26	24		19	23	42
Happy as it is	78	74	76		67	65	132
n	100	100	100		86	88	174

Q35) Organisation Membership: *"Are you member of any of the following organisations/associations?*

a) Political Party

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	40	86	50		2	6	8
Outside Skarpnäck	100	43	50		5	3	8
n	100	100	100		5	7	12

b) Religious Organisation

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	25	13	15		1	1	2
Outside Skarpnäck	75	100	79		3	8	11
n	100	100	100		4	8	12

c) Sports Association

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	27	54	36		6	7	13
Outside Skarpnäck	73	62	65		16	8	24
n	100	100	100		22	13	35

d) Environment Association

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	0	40	23		0	2	2
Outside Skarpnäck	100	80	78		3	4	7
n	100	100	100		3	5	8

e) Tenant Organisation

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	78	83	78		31	34	65
Outside Skarpnäck	25	22	23		10	9	19
n	100	100	100		40	41	81

f) Youth-, Pensioner- or Parental Groups

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	70	57	63		7	8	15
Outside Skarpnäck	30	43	38		3	6	9
n	100	100	100		10	14	24

g) Women's Organisation

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	0	20	12		0	1	1
Outside Skarpnäck	100	80	89		4	4	8
n	100	100	100		4	5	9

h) Other Organisation

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	33	33	32		7	10	17
Outside Skarpnäck	76	67	68		16	20	36
n	100	100	100		21	30	51

Q36) Difficulties in participating in Skarpnäck: *"Do you feel that you have difficulties in taking part in community activities due to lack of time (or any other cause)?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Often	43	41	42		36	35	71
Sometimes	32	36	34		27	31	58
Rarely	17	16	17		14	14	28
Never	8	7	8		7	6	13
n	100	100	100		84	86	170

Q37) Vote in Local Election: *"Did you vote in the last election?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Yes	86	82	85		74	71	145
No	13	17	16		11	15	26
n	100	100	100		85	86	171

Q38) Spare Time Activities: *"What do you normally do in your spare time?"*

a)* Watch or participate in Sports

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	64	59	49		28	24	52
Outside Skarpnäck	68	59	51		30	24	54
n	100	100	100		44	41	85

b)* Theatre, Cinema, Concerts or Exhibitions

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	24	24	24		14	12	26
Outside Skarpnäck	98	96	98		58	48	106
n	100	100	100		59	50	109

c)* Go out Dancing, go to Night Clubs, Cafes or Pubs

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	29	34	26		17	14	31
Outside Skarpnäck	90	90	75		53	37	90
n	100	100	100		59	50	109

d)* Go to the Library

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	91	87	90		41	36	77
Outside Skarpnäck	36	32	24		16	13	29
n	100	100	100		45	41	86

e)* Attend Evening Courses or other Courses

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	7	22	16		1	4	5
Outside Skarpnäck	100	83	91		15	15	30
n	100	100	100		15	18	33

f) Play Bingo

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	100	50	67		4	2	6
Outside Skarpnäck	25	50	34		1	2	3
n	100	100	100		4	4	8

g)* Attend Meetings, Debates or Lectures

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	70	56	64		14	10	24
Outside Skarpnäck	75	67	71		15	12	27
n	100	100	100		20	18	38

h)* Others

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Within Skarpnäck	8	68	67		5	19	24
Outside Skarpnäck	31	61	49		6	17	23
n	100	100	100		7	29	36

Q39) Satisfaction with Contacts with People Sharing Similar Interests:*"Would you like to get in touch with more people with similar interests to yourself or are you happy as it is?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
More	42	37	40		36	32	68
Happy as it is	58	63	60		50	55	105
n	100	100	100		86	87	173

Q40) Anomia: *"Whatever people say most things is getting worse for the average person"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	17	17	17		14	15	29
Partially Agree	29	34	32		25	30	55
Neutral	32	24	28		27	21	48
Partially Disagree	12	16	14		10	14	24
Totally Disagree	11	9	10		9	8	17
n	100	100	100		85	88	173

Q41) Anomia: *"It is hardly fair to bring children into the world in this day and age"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	6	7	7		5	6	11
Partially Agree	6	16	11		5	14	19
Neutral	37	23	30		31	20	51
Partially Disagree	12	18	15		10	16	26
Totally Disagree	39	36	37		32	31	63
n	100	100	100		83	87	170

Q42) Anomia: *"Nowadays you must live pretty much for the day and take the future as it comes"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	8	15	12		7	13	20
Partially Agree	31	24	28		26	21	47
Neutral	27	32	29		22	28	50
Partially Disagree	17	23	20		14	20	34
Totally Disagree	17	7	12		14	6	20
n	100	100	100		83	88	171

Q43)* Anomia: *"These days you do not really know whom to trust"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	14	20	17		12	18	30
Partially Agree	38	46	42		33	41	74
Neutral	20	15	17		17	13	30
Partially Disagree	12	11	11		10	10	20
Totally Disagree	16	8	12		14	7	21
n	100	100	100		86	89	175

Q44)* Anomia: *"There is no point in writing to officials since they are rarely interested in the problems of the average man"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	29	22	25		25	19	44
Partially Agree	27	35	31		23	30	53
Neutral	15	26	21		13	23	36
Partially Disagree	20	8	14		17	7	24
Totally Disagree	9	9	9		8	8	16
n	100	100	100		86	87	173

Q45)* Computer Experience: *"How long have you used a computer?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
5 years or more	61	39	50	52	35	87
3 - 5 years	18	17	18	15	15	30
1 - 3 years	17	12	14	14	11	25
Less than a year	5	12	8	4	11	15
Never	0	19	10	0	17	17
n	100	100	100	85	89	174

Q46) Location of Computer Usage: *"Where do you use a computer?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
At Home	94	74	73	81	53	134
At Work	67	63	66	58	45	104
Elsewhere	13	19	16	11	14	25
n	100	100	100	86	72	158

Q47) Computer Usage: *"What do you mainly use the computer for?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Word-Processing	87	79	83	72	56	128
Games	39	45	42	32	32	64
Surf on the Web	82	63	73	68	45	113
Email	73	67	70	61	72	133
Local Information	19	6	13	16	4	20
Chat	9	11	10	7	8	15
Other	40	36	38	33	26	59
n	100	100	100	83	71	154

Q48) Confidence in Computer Usage: *"How confident do you feel in using a computer?"*

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Very Confident	33	18	25	27	16	43
Confident	39	35	37	32	30	62
Neutral	23	17	20	19	15	34
Uncertain	5	12	8	4	10	14
Very Uncertain	1	18	10	1	16	17
n	100	100	100	83	87	170

Q49) What do want to use the Local Net for?

	%			frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total	Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Comm with local politicians	55	57	56	44	40	84
Comm with other residents	65	59	62	52	41	93
Contact services	74	79	76	59	55	114
Info housing company	76	79	91	61	55	136
Local information	80	76	78	64	53	117
Ordering food	43	43	43	34	30	64
Bookings, e.g. cinema	48	61	54	38	43	81
Laundry Booking	71	51	62	57	36	93
Education / Courses	55	56	56	44	39	83
Computer Support	74	50	63	59	35	94
Access to the Internet	71	71	72	57	50	107
Games	31	37	34	25	26	51
Others	6	13	10	5	9	14
n	100	100	100	80	70	150

Q50)* Opinion about the Local Net Project: *"What is your opinion about the computer project?"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Very positive	37	33	35		30	27	57
Positive	36	35	35		29	28	57
Neutral	24	24	24		19	19	38
Negative	4	5	4		3	4	7
Very negative	0	4	2		0	3	3
n	100	100	100		81	81	162

Q51) Expectations of the Local Net: *"How well do these statements agree with your expectations of the computer project? It will probably lead to…"*

a)* b*etter contacts among residents"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	5	26	8		4	20	24
Partially Agree	22	17	23		18	13	31
Neutral	54	35	50		45	27	72
Partially Disagree	11	10	10		9	8	17
Totally Disagree	8	12	10		7	9	16
n	100	100	100		83	77	160

b) *better contact with local politicians"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	8	18	24		7	31	38
Partially Agree	34	40	26		28	14	42
Neutral	37	30	34		31	23	54
Partially Disagree	10	3	6		8	2	10
Totally Disagree	11	9	10		9	7	16
n	100	100	100		83	77	160

c) *improved local information"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	22	37	28		18	27	45
Partially Agree	47	36	42		39	28	67
Neutral	27	24	25		22	18	40
Partially Disagree	2	1	2		2	1	3
Totally Disagree	2	3	3		2	2	4
n	100	100	100		83	76	159

d)* *decreased gap between different groups"*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	4	16	10		3	12	15
Partially Agree	18	8	13		15	6	21
Neutral	55	49	52		45	37	82
Partially Disagree	11	15	13		9	11	20
Totally Disagree	12	12	12		10	9	19
n	100	100	100		82	75	157

e)* *stronger social cohesion*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	5	4	5		4	3	7
Partially Agree	28	27	27		23	20	43
Neutral	42	44	43		34	33	67
Partially Disagree	12	12	12		10	9	19
Totally Disagree	13	13	13		11	10	21
n	100	100	100		82	75	157

f) *less face-to-face contact among the residents*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	7	12	12		6	13	19
Partially Agree	26	18	19		21	9	30
Neutral	28	32	30		23	23	46
Partially Disagree	15	21	17		12	15	27
Totally Disagree	24	18	21		20	13	33
n	100	100	100		82	73	155

g)* *more attractive housing area*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	17	32	24		14	24	38
Partially Agree	41	22	32		34	16	50
Totally Disagree	2	5	3		2	4	6
n	100	100	100		83	74	157

h)* *less participation in the community*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	1	7	4		1	9	10
Partially Agree	13	13	13		11	5	16
Neutral	43	49	46		35	36	71
Partially Disagree	22	14	18		18	10	28
Totally Disagree	21	18	19		17	13	30
n	100	100	100		82	73	155

I)* *more interested and knowledge of computers*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	28	38	33		23	28	51
Partially Agree	52	14	33		43	10	53
Neutral	15	37	26		12	27	39
Partially Disagree	4	7	5		3	5	8
Totally Disagree	2	4	3		2	3	5
n	100	100	100		83	73	156

j)* *stronger sense of local identity*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	14	13	14		11	10	21
Partially Agree	28	12	20		23	9	32
Neutral	46	37	42		37	28	65
Partially Disagree	6	16	11		5	12	17
Totally Disagree	6	21	14		5	16	21
n	100	100	100		81	75	156

k)* *increased isolation of residents*

	%				%		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	4	12	8		3	9	12
Partially Agree	13	13	13		11	10	21
Neutral	42	37	40		34	28	62
Partially Disagree	22	16	19		18	12	30
Totally Disagree	20	21	20		16	16	32
n	100	100	100		82	75	157

l)* *increased trust among the residents*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	5		5		3		3
Partially Agree	23		23		14		14
Neutral	55		55		33		33
Partially Disagree	8		8		5		4
Totally Disagree	8		8		5		4
n	100		100		60		60

m)* *increased social support among the residents*

	%				frequencies		
	Connected	Non-Conne	Total		Connected	Non-Conne	Total
Totally Agree	3		3		2		2
Partially Agree	23		23		14		14
Neutral	52		52		31		31
Partially Disagree	10		10		6		6
Totally Disagree	12		12		7		7
n	100		100		60		60

Responses to Open-ended Question : What do you use the Local Net for?

1. Local Information
2. The Internet
3. Local Information, the Internet
4. Communication, Political Local Information, Education/Courses
5. Help, Computer Problems, the Internet
6. Information, Contact with Local Politicians
7. Local Information
8. The Internet, bank, support
9. Local Information
10. I don't care. Live Life Natural!
11. I'm not that Interested.
12. Other + Booking: Education/Courses, Help with Computer Problems, Access to the Internet, Play Games
13. It is not Very Updated.
14. Laundry Booking, E-mail, Information Search
15. Every thing on Communication and Information. On Other only Booking of the Laundry Room
16. Communication with Other Residents
17. The Internet, Games
18. Nothing since it doesn't work on our Computer
19. Booking of Tickets, the Internet, Games
20. Nothing
21. Contact with Bank, the Internet
22. Info from Housing Company, Local Informaiton, Newspaper (the Internet), Games
23. Bank, Info from Housing Company, Shopping at NK, Cinema Booking, www
24. Informaiton and Communication
25. Bank, Stockholmshem, the Internet
26. The Internet
27. I don't use Anything, as it Doesn't seem to Work. If it Does would be Grateful to be Informed about It.
28. Bank, Cinema, the Internet
29. Ticket Booking, Games, the Internet
30. Nothing
33. Information from Housing Company, Bookings, Courses-Education, www.
34. Nothing
35. Bank, Stockholmshem, the Internet
36. The Internet
37. Info from Housing comapny, Local Info, the Internet
38. No Services
39. Bank, Cinema Booking, Surf on the www., info from housing company
40. Communication with other residents, education, courses, the Internet
41. Cinema, Info from Housing Company
42. Nothing
43. Surf on the www.
44. Bank, www
45. The Internet
46. The Web
47. Booking, Info Housing Company, Community Info, Internet, Games
48. The Internet, www
49. School and communication with residents
50. The Internet
51. Booking of cinema and travel
52. Locally: Nothing
53. Nothing: Haven't looked at what there is.
54. Information, Games
55. www, email, computer problems, work and social contacts.

Responses to Open-ended Question: What do you think about the Local Net?

1. Do not know much yet (pretty good). Other comments: Want to learn more first.

2. It makes it easier to search for information (very good). Other comments: About the computer net: one ought to have a stable connection. About Skarpnäck: that the democracy is re-established so that we citizens get rid of the right-wing politicians' "democracy oppression". The local newspaper Kontakt has ceased to exist.

3. You cannot get any help (pretty bad). Other comments: There should be someone who looks out for lonely elderly people! I mean morally

4. It goes via cable, which makes the Internet faster (pretty good).

5. Cheaper phone bill since my son surfs on the Internet a lot (very good).

6. Fast and smooth - when it works (very good)

7. Problems all the time. It doesn't work, as it should (pretty bad).

8. Have had too short time (neutral)

9. A good effort to increase availability and information exchange in Skarpnäck (very good)

10. The global possibilities (pretty good).

11. Fast connection. The Intranet can become good - increased contact between residents (very good).

12. Good with cheap Internet for children (pretty good).

13. It is important to be part of the IT-development, especially for children who can find knowledge and information online (very good). Other comments: We would like to be able to shop from ICA (the local grocery store) online, due to lack of time, and get replies from local politicians, who we have emailed about child issues.
Except from that, we are very happy and satisfied with the project.

14. To improve the knowledge (very good).

15. What computer project? Do you mean broad band or…? (neutral) Other comments: Computers are good for studying and search of information, but cannot substitute human contact and influence on for instance society development.

16. It doesn't work on our computer (neutral)

17. Good that the Internet is available, but it is a shame that it works poorly with Telia. The Internet is often down and their support is very bad. Do not know anything about the local computer network - have never been connected to it (pretty good).

18. It doesn't work so well at my home. Otherwise, most of it is super good. Can work from home at night. Can spend more time with my children. If you have the Internet you can become more involved as one can sit in Pyjamas and look at what is going on. You can also comment on stuff immediately. As a lone parent time there is Not enough time otherwise. When the children are in bed I can start caring about life outside home and work. (pretty good)

19. Today there are lots of information online, for example different associations. (very good). Other comments: The net works slowly pretty often.

20. You follow the development (pretty good). Other comments: Computerization has helped people a lot.

it has made certain things easier, such as searching for information, but at the same time,
in general, it has influenced isolation. It feels like it has gone too fast, it feels like we are not ready for it.

21. A good tool if you are heavily handicapped (pretty good).

22. It gives people the possibility to be part of the IT-world (pretty good).

23. It could be very good, but the current Intranet does hardly work today (neutral). Other comments:
I hope that this evaluation makes the Intranet work in a functional way.

24. To increase knowledge (very good).

25. I have not got involved in it (neutral).

26. I know nothing about it (neutral).

27. Skarpnäck becomes a bit boosted by the project. It can lead to a positive strengthening (very good).

28. Easier to do practical things, such as send a letter (email) (very good).

29. Easier to receive information (very good).

30. The initiative is good, but the technology bad. Broadband would have been better. (pretty good).

31. IT and communication is the future and it is important to be part of it (very good).

32. Cannot write good Swedish, but it sounds good (pretty good).

33. I think it leads to increased contact between residents (very good).

34. The possibility to contact politicians from home. The local identity can increase (pretty good).

36. Cheaper Internet (neutral). Other comments: Skarpnäck is just becoming more and more hostile. You
cannot walk in Skarpnäck without someone trying to provoke you. Young people are the worst - both
Swedes and immigrants. Even the children are provoking. We will move out from Skarpnäck as soon
as we can!!!

37. Poor information (pretty bad).

38. Have not received any information about the computer project (neutral). Other comments: Far from
everyone has a computer or computer access. If a computer project is to work on equal conditions
then everyone needs the possibility to have a computer, but many in Skarpnäck do not even have a
telephone. All the talk about local computer projects becomes empty as long as we live in a society that is
becoming more and more segregated. Computers do not solve any problems with, for example, cut downs
in schools. The pupils need educated staff and not more computers since a computer cannot satisfy elemental
needs.

39. Is not used to a maximum in terms of information (neutral).

40. Can take part of information direct from home whenever it suits me (pretty good).

41. It will increase interest in computers and IT.

42.Get rid of telephone costs per minute. Faster (pretty good). Other comments: What computer project?
Is it the connection to broad band you refer to? Then it was sad to be stuck with Telia. In our house we are
Working on alternatives (cheaper and better). In my flat, the connection works bad. Unfortunately!

43. I have too little knowledge about it (neutral). Other comments: The modems are far too expensive.
Single mothers, for example, will not be able to afford a connection.

44. It is important to follow the development (very good).

45. People get increased access to information (very good).

46. If its the cable modem so "I love it" - cheap and fast which is demanded in my work. Easier to communicate with organisations and people. New contacts (very good). Other comments: What is the computer project? What is the local computer net? Information is lacking. If to create more contacts in Skarpnäck, someone Must deal with it properly and pump out information about the possibilities.

47. It gives more people Access (very good).

48. Computer is what it is all about now (very good).

49. Easier to obtain information (pretty good).

50. Can access information direct from home whenever it suits me (very good).

APPENDIX D:

List of Publications

Ferlander, S. (2003 in press). Elearning, Marginalised Communities and Social Capital: A mixed method approach. In M. Osborne, J. Gallacher & B. Crossan (eds.), *Researching Widening Access: Issues and approaches in an international context.* London: Routledge.

Ferlander, S. (September 2001). Presentation at the European Research Conference on *Social Capital: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Exeter, United Kingdom, September 15-20.

Timms, D., Ferlander, S. & Timms, L. (June 2001). Building Communities: Online Education and Social capital. In A. Szucs, E. Wagner & C. Holmberg (eds.), *Learning Without Limits: Developing the Next Generation of Education. Proceedings of the EDEN 10th Anniversary Conference, held in Stockholm, Sweden* (pp. 119-123). Budapest: EDEN.

Ferlander, S. & Timms, D. (January 2001). Local Nets and Social Capital. *Telematics and Informatics,* 18: 51-65.

Timms, D., Crompton P., Ferlander, S. & Timms, E. (October 2000). Learning Communities and Social Capital. *Proceedings of the EADTU Millenial Conference: Wiring the Ivory Tower*. Paris: EADTU.

Timms, D., Ferlander, S. & Timms, E. (October 2000). Social Cohesion, Higher Education and Marginal Areas: Local Nets and Social Capital. *Proceedings of the EADTU Millenial Conference: Wiring the Ivory Tower*. Paris: EADTU.

Ferlander, S. & Timms, D. (October 1999). Computer-Supported Community Networks and Social Cohesion. In K. Stathis (ed.), *Local Nets, Community-based Interactive Systems.* Proceedings of the International Workshop on Community-based Interactive Systems, Siena, Italy: i3 net.

Ferlander, S. & Timms, D. (June 1999). Social Cohesion and Online Community. Paper presented at the 1st European Regional Telematics Conference, Tanum, Sweden. (Online: http://www.edc.eu.int/second.html).

Ferlander, S. & Timms, D. (1999). *Social Cohesion and Online Community,* SCHEMA Report 6.3. Brussels: EC. (Online: http://www.stir.ac.uk/schema/deliverables/D6.3.pdf). ISBN 1 85769 110 5.

Timms, D. & Ferlander, S. (May 1999). Learning Communities and Social Cohesion. *SocInfo Journal,* 4.

APPENDIX C:

Analysis of the Internet Café Questionnaire

Q1)* Gender: *"What gender are you?"*

	%	freq
Female	64	58
Male	36	33
n	100	91

Q2)* Age: *"How old are you?"*

	%	freq
0 - 34	30	27
35 - 64	42	38
65 -	28	25
n	100	90

Q3)* Education Level: *"What education do you have? (Give your highest education level?)"*

	%	freq
Elementary School	22	20
Secondary School	37	34
University	41	37
n	100	91

Q4)* Employment: "*Which of the following best describes your employment situation?"*

	%	freq
Student	20	18
Employed	32	29
Unemployed	9	8
Pensioner	40	36
n	100	91

Q5) Mother Tongue:

a)* *"What is your mother tongue? (the language you first learnt)"*

	%	freq	
Swedish	73	64	
Other language	27	24	Other languages: Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Italian,
n	100	88	Norwegian, Pakistani, Persian, Polish, Romans,

Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Urdu, Yugoslavian.

b) *"What is your mother's mother tongue?"*

	%	freq	
Swedish	75	66	Other languages: Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Italian,
Other language	25	22	Persian, Polish, Romans, Russian, Serbo-Croatian,
n	100	88	Spanish, Urdu.

c) *"What is your father's mother tongue?"*

	%	freq	
Swedish	68	56	
Other language	32	26	Other languages: Danish, Estonian, Finnish,
n	100	82	Indonesian, Italian, Persian, Polish, Romans,

Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, German, Urdu, Yugoslavian

Q6) Handicap: *"Do you have any handicap?"*

	%	freq
No	95	82
Yes	5	4
n	100	86

Q7)* Computer Experience: *"How long have you used a computer?"*

	%	freq
5 years or more	43	39
3 - 5 years	16	14
1 - 3 years	17	15
Less than a year	8	7
Just started	17	15
n	101	90

Q8) Computer Access: *"Do you have computer access at home?"*

	%	freq
Yes	59	54
No	41	37
n	100	91

Q9) Housing: *"What kind of accommodation do you live in?"*

	%	freq
Rented flat	61	54
Owned flat	29	26
House	10	9
n	100	89

Q10) Landlord / Housing Company: *"What is the name of your landlord / housing company?"*

	%	freq	
HSB	27	23	
Sthlmshem	45	38	
Other	28	24	Other: Eget, Svenska Bostäder,
n	100	85	Navigatören, Wihlborgs, Arsenalen,
			Riksbyggen, Brf Friheten, SKB

Q11) Living Area: *"Where do you live?"*

	%	freq	
Bagarmossen	13	12	
Kärrtorp	4	4	
Skarpnäcksfältet	70	62	
Skarpa By	6	5	
Other place	7	6	Other places: Hökarängen, Midsommarkransen,
n	100	89	Pungpinan, Sköndal, Värmland.

Q12)* Satisfaction with Meeting Places*: *"Do you think there are enough meeting places for the residents in Skarpnäck?"*

	%	freq
Yes, absolutely	2	1
Yes, more or less	24	11
Yes, partly	39	18
No, hardly	26	12
No, absolutely not	9	4
n	100	46

Q13)* Social Cohesion*: *"How strong do you think the sense of cohesion is among the people in Skarpnäck?"*

	%	freq
Very strong	0	0
Pretty strong	29	13
Neither strong nor weak	38	17
Pretty weak	33	15
Very weak	0	0
n	100	45

Q14)* Tension in Community*:

a) *"Do you think there is tension between different groups in Skarpnäck?"*
(e.g. between young & old people, immigrants & Swedes, people in rented & private owned flats.)

	%	freq
Yes, a lot	0	0
Yes, quite a lot	19	8
Neither nor…	44	19
No, not very much	35	15
No, not at all	2	1
n	100	43

b) *"If you believe there is tension, which groups are you are you referring to?"*

	%	freq
Swedes - Immigrants	35	8
Immigrants - Immigrants	13	3
Old - Young	30	7
Flat Renters - Owners	0	0
Others	22	5
n	100	23

Q15)* Anomia (Distrust): "How well do you agree with the following statements?"

a) *"There days you do not really know whom to trust."*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	14	11
Partially Agree	30	24
Neither Agree nor Disagree	32	25
Partially Disagree	14	11
Totally Disagree	10	8
n	100	79

b)^: *"There is no point in writing to officials since they are rarely interested in the problems of the average man."*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	12	6
Partially Agree	41	20
Neither nor…	27	13
Partially Disagree	14	7
Totally Disagree	6	3
n	100	49

Q16)* Social Support: *"If you needed social support is there anybody who would be there for you...*

a) *if you are sick?"*

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	60	44
Outside Skarpnäck	64	47
Nobody	7	5
n	100	73

b) *if you want company?"*

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	58	39
Outside Skarpnäck	61	41
Nobody	12	8
n	100	67

c) *if you need to talk about personal problems?"*

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	44	32
Outside Skarpnäck	63	45
Nobody	17	12
n	100	72

d) *if you have to borrow 35 pounds?"*

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	43	29
Outside Skarpnäck	72	49
Nobody	12	8
n	100	68

Q16) Continued
e) *if you need help with baby-sitting?"*

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	58	25
Outside Skarpnäck	51	22
Nobody	21	9
n	100	43

Q17)* Number of Close Friends: *"How many really close friends do you have (that you can talk to about anything that is bothering you)?*

	mean	std dev	n
Within Skarpnäck	2.6	3.72	76
Outside Skarpnäck	6.1	7.72	76

Q18)* Local Identity: *"To what extent do you feel a local identity and "rooted" in Skarpnäck?*
(state your level of identity on this scale from 0 to 10)

	%	freq	
0	5	4	
1	5	4	
2	3	2	
3	7	5	
4	4	3	
5	13	10	
6	3	2	
7	14	11	
8	25	19	
9	5	4	
10	16	12	Std Dev: 2.95
n	100	76	Mean: 7.4

Q19)* Spare Time Activities*: *"What do you normally do in your spare time?*
(you can tick more than one alternative)

a) Watch or participate in sports

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	54	7
Outside Skarpnäck	62	8
n	100	13

b) Go to the theatre, cinema, concerts or exhibitions

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	22	7
Outside Skarpnäck	97	32
n	100	33

Q19) Continued
c) Go out dancing, go to night clubs, disco, cafe, restaurant or pubs

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	44	15
Outside Skarpnäck	94	32
n	100	34

d) Go to libraries

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	81	21
Outside Skarpnäck	35	9
n	100	26

e) Attend meetings, debates or lectures

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	78	21
Outside Skarpnäck	67	18
n	100	27

f) Go to courses or attend study circles

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	44	7
Outside Skarpnäck	81	13
n	100	16

g) Others, namely

	%	freq
Within Skarpnäck	25	2
Outside Skarpnäck	75	6
n	100	8

Q20) Reasons for Visits: *"Why do you visit the IT-Café?"*

	%	freq	
Meet People	11	10	
IT-Support	31	27	
Computer Access	55	48	
IT-Courses	29	25	
Cannot afford computer	8	7	
Other	19	17	Spanish association, the low prices, applying for
n	100	87	jobs and doing home work.

Q21) Reasons for Few or No Visits¤: "If you do not visit the Café very often or not at all, what is the reason for that?"

	%	freq	
Bought a computer	16	4	
Do not have time	40	10	
It is too expensive	4	1	
Not enough help	0	0	
Poor equipment	0	0	
Too many visitors	4	1	
Too few visitors	0	0	
Poor environment	0	0	
Lost interest	4	1	
Access somewhere else	12	3	
Other	20	5	attended all Micke's courses in the Cafe, no or little
n	100	25	need for the use of computers, need to write at
			other times and maybe only short, moved to Gävle.

Q22) Computer Usage: *"What do you mainly use the computer for?"*

	%	freq	
Word-processing	23	18	
Calculating	0	0	
Games	7	6	
Surf on the Web	64	51	
Local Information	6	5	
Emails	49	39	
Chat	7	6	
Others, namely	21	17	Other: Printing, searching for information, looking
n	100	80	for jobs and paying bills.

Q23) Number of Visits: *"Approximately, how many times have you visited the Café?"*

	%	freq
The first time	20	18
2 - 5 times	26	24
6 - 10 times	26	24
More than 10 times	27	25
n	99	91

Q24) Regularity of Visits: *"Approximately, how often do you visit the Café?"*

	%	freq
Several times a week	15	12
A couple of times a week	28	23
A couple of times a month	19	15
More rarely	28	23
Never	10	8
n		81

Q25) Opinion about IT-Café: *"What is your opinion about the IT-Cafe?"*

	%	freq
Very positive	66	62
Pretty positive	32	30
Neutral	2	2
Pretty negative	0	0
Very negative	0	0
n	100	94

Q26) New Contacts¤: *"Have you got in touch with people similar to you in term of..."*

	%	freq
age?	47	8
gender?	18	3
nationality?	18	3
interests?	35	6
no	24	4
	100	17

Q27) New Contacts¤: *"Have you got in touch with people different from you in term of..."*

	%	freq
age?	43	9
gender?	38	8
nationality?	43	9
interests?	18	4
no	14	3 |?
n	100	21

Q28)* Expected Outcome of the IT-Café*: *"How well do these statements agree with your expectations of the IT-Cafe? It will probably lead to…*

a) *more contacts among residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	33	17
Partially Agree	37	19
Neutral	23	12
Partially Disagree	2	1
Totally Disagree	6	3
n	100	52

b) *decreased gap between different groups"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	15	8
Partially Agree	25	13
Neutral	48	25
Partially Disagree	4	2
Totally Disagree	8	4
n	100	52

Q28) Continued
c) *stronger social cohesion"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	11	6
Partially Agree	37	20
Neutral	44	24
Partially Disagree	6	3
Totally Disagree	2	1
n	100	54

d) *more attractive housing area"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	44	24
Partially Agree	36	20
Neutral	16	9
Partially Disagree	2	1
Totally Disagree	2	1
n	100	55

e) *more participation in the community"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	29	15
Partially Agree	40	21
Neutral	29	15
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	2	1
n	100	52

f) *more interest in and knowledge of computers"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	61	36
Partially Agree	34	20
Neutral	3	2
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	2	1
n	100	59

g) *stronger sense of local identity"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	33	18
Partially Agree	33	18
Neutral	32	17
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	2	1
n	100	54

Q28 Continued
h) *decreased isolation of residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	30	16
Partially Agree	37	20
Neutral	28	15
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	6	3
n	100	54

i) *increased trust among the residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	19	10
Partially Agree	34	18
Neutral	40	21
Partially Disagree	2	1
Totally Disagree	6	3
n	100	53

j) *increased social support among the residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	14	4
Partially Agree	28	8
Neutral	41	12
Partially Disagree	7	2
Totally Disagree	10	3
n	100	29

Q29) Perceived Outcome of the IT-Café¤: *"How well do these statements agree with your perception of the Café?*

a) *better contacts among residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	22	6
Partially Agree	26	7
Neutral	37	10
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	11	3
n	100	27

b) *decreased gap between different groups"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	25	7
Partially Agree	14	4
Neutral	50	14
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	7	2
n	100	28

c) *stronger social cohesion"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	11	3
Partially Agree	26	7
Neutral	48	13
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	11	3
n	100	27

Q29) Continued
d) *more attractive housing area"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	46	13
Partially Agree	39	11
Neutral	11	3
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	4	1
n	100	28

e) *more participation in the community"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	26	7
Partially Agree	26	7
Neutral	33	9
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	11	3
n	100	27

f) *more interest in and knowledge of computers"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	57	17
Partially Agree	27	8
Neutral	13	4
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	3	1
n	100	30

g) *stronger sense of local identity"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	22	6
Partially Agree	52	14
Neutral	22	6
Partially Disagree	0	0
Totally Disagree	4	1
n	100	27

h) *decreased isolation of residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	27	7
Partially Agree	42	11
Neutral	15	4
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	12	3
n	100	26

i) *increased trust among the residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	7	2
Partially Agree	30	8
Neutral	48	13
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	11	3
n	100	27

j) *increased social support among the residents"*

	%	freq
Totally Agree	12	3
Partially Agree	31	8
Neutral	42	11
Partially Disagree	4	1
Totally Disagree	12	3
n	100	26

Q29) Other opinions: "Do you have any other opinions?"

Comments about the price:

Good price.
Good prices.
It has to keep on being cheap, otherwise the whole idea is wrong.
Good prices.
The price for the monthly card is good (100 SEK), but 20 SEK per hour is a lot, especially for the unemployed.
It is cheap to be on the Internet.
I can surf and send emails cheaply.
Reasonable prices.
The prices are good.

Comments about the staff:

GOOD staff.
Micke is doing a good job, he is calm and kind, and one gets nicely approached by him.
Lots of help.
Access to computers with great help from Micke Cullgert.
Nice staff!
Good staff.
Nice staff.
One gets good help by Micke.
Good supervision.
Nice staff.
One gets help by the staff.
Help when needed.
Nice treatment/approach.
Nice atmosphere.
The staff is not good.
Advice and support from competent staff.
The staff is helpful and nice.
Not enough staff and too little individual help.
One gets help when needed.
Good service.
It is good because there is staff to provide help.

Comments about the opening hours:

Have been here too little so far. Perhaps decided lunch times would be good, so people know when the Cafe is closed.
Saturday and Sunday opening. Have it open more evenings than only one evening a week.
More evening open hours.
Good opening hours.
Problems with opening hours and if it is open at all.
Good with some late evenings.
More evening open hours!
Have the Café more open! Find a substitute if the staff (read manager) is ill! Never close during opening hours!
The opening hours were previously a bit random. Otherwise very good!
The Café should have more evenings open for youngsters: until 22.00 for chat. The openings hours seem to be aimed towards unemployed at the moment. Have more stuff during evenings!

Comments about the room:

Lights and ventilation are below all critique. Individual lights at each place and powerful ventilation is necessary.
Better room and ventilation.
The room is big enough.
Nice rooms.
Can get better. Bad working lights.
Pleasant and tidy. At least when we have classes.
The room is so small that the air gets bad.

Comments about the courses:

Short and cheap courses about IT.
More courses!
Good course-leader.
One has the possibility to learn something.
Few pupils. Good supervision.
More basic courses or other courses would be good.
I learnt something!
I can now manage on my own since I have attended all Thomas's courses in the Café.

Comments about the computers and the access:

Enough computers.
Positive that there is a place with computers.
It is absolutely necessary.
Access to computers with great help from Micke Cullgert.
Accessible. Many computers.
Many computers.
Good access to computers.
Active, new and exciting.
Access to the Internet.
It gives everyone the possibility to deal with and use computers.
There is the Internet and many computers, so one can sit as long one needs.
It is needed.
Accessibility. Help when needed.
Easy accessibility.
Good connection.
Comments (continued)

Funny, many computers, fast connection.
Important initiative!
It is crucial since everyone cannot afford to have a computer at home.
Good that there is a possibility to use computers even if you don't have your own.
There is always access to a computer.
Good with access to computers and the Internet if you don't have it.
Good to learn more about computers and for those who cannot afford one.
I did not have access to computers and would have kept on going if I had not moved out.
It is nearby.
Access to modern computers.
Many computers.

Comments about the social aspects:

Good meeting point.
Nice atmosphere. Meet acquaintances.
Good meeting people for learning about computers.
More similar meeting- and services places for collaboration!
Meeting-place!

Other comments:

There should also be tee.
A more living culture house with other activities as well, for example different work shops and activities.
It would be good if there were other activities, such as wood work, textile handicraft, exhibitions, performances etc.
That the IT café never closes down!
Old people should learn to shut up!
Everything has been satisfactory.

* questions included in the Local Net study too
^ questions included only in the first Cafe questionnaire
¤ questions included only in the second Cafe questionnaire