Inclusion and exclusion in the Information Society

**Final Deliverable
The European Media and Technology In
Everyday Life Network, 2000-2003**

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EMTEL - General preface

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The European Media Technology and Everyday Life Network (EMTEL) was funded by the European Commission (grant number HPRN ET 2000 00063) under the 5th Framework Programme. It was constituted as a research and training network within the programme, Improving Knowledge Potential and oriented towards "creating a user friendly information society".

EMTEL conducted interdisciplinary social scientific research and training between 2000 and 2003. This report is one of 12 submitted to the EU in September 2003 as final deliverables for the project. Copies are available on www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EMTEL and a full list of the publications can be found as an Appendix to this report. Contributing partners were as follows:

- ASCoR, The University of Amsterdam
- COMTEC, Dublin City University
- IPTS, Seville
- LENTIC, The University of Liège
- Media@lse, London School or Economics (co-ordinating centre)
- NTNU, University of Trondheim
- SMIT, Free University of Brussels
- TNO, Delft
- SINTEF, Trondheim.

EMTEL sought to bring together young and experienced researchers in a shared project to investigate the so-called information society from the perspective of everyday life. It undertook research under two broad headings: inclusion and exclusion, and living and working in the information society. It then sought to integrate empirical work and developing theory in such a way as to engage constructively with on-going policy debates on the present and future of information and communication technologies in Europe.

Roger Silverstone
EMTEL Co-ordinator

Research Context

This study is for a substantial part the result of the collaboration between three individual institutions and their postdoctoral fellows. At Lentic in Liege (Belgium) and ASCoR in Amsterdam (the Netherlands Dorothee Durieux research ICTs and less abled people; at LSE (London, UK), Myria Georgiou mapped and analysed diasporic media across Europe and at ASCoR/TNO (the Netherlands) Bart Cammaerts focused on the ICT use of transnational social movements. Though separate studies, the overarching theme of inclusion and exclusion in the information society brought both researches and researchers together, thus having a pedagogic (a common learning and research theme) and a synergetic effect (three post doctoral researchers and their supervisors know more than the sum of the individual participants), the result of which has found its way into this report.

Exclusion from the information society and the existence of the digital divide are not new themes for academia and the policy domain. The policy focus and the empirical evidence, however, are usually based on statistical, aggregate data of demographically and social groups in society and less on the actual experience and sense making in everyday life. Without denouncing the value of quantifiable information, the surplus value of this study, and the separate components on which it builds, is that that it brings in an experiential, multi-dimensional and more contextual focus, which can shed a different light on the parameters of policy making re the question of in/exclusion.

The authors work at institutions that have a long tradition of information and communication research and policy analysis and advice. The Amsterdam School of Communications Research (ASCoR) of the University of Amsterdam houses a variety of researches and researchers, but includes a particularly strong contingency of Internet and ICT-related research. The department of strategy, technology and policy of TNO Delft combines a long-standing experience in technology research with consultation and policy performance and policy evaluation.

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Introduction

The debate about inclusion in and exclusion from the information society is wavering between a sombre and a shining vision. Pessimists point to the fact that ICTs tend to create a new domain of exclusion, often referred to as the digital divide, a development strengthening already existing divides and inequalities based on class, knowledge, gender, race, etc. Optimists claim that ICTs function as a new means of overcoming traditional forms of exclusion and inequality, referring to the Internet as an enabling technology leading to greater social justice. The sombre discourse of inequality and division is replaced by one of "empowerment" and equal opportunities; access to ICTs is considered a prerequisite for participation in a knowledge based information society. The policy discourse focuses here on improving access to and diffusion of ICTs in society.

The two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive and both seem to be inspired by a certain technological determinism. In fact, while trying to avoid being deterministic, the three research projects within EMTEL that specifically deal with the question of in/exclusion – the LSE Key Deliverable on diasporic communities, the LENTIC Key Deliverable on the less abled and the ASCoR/TNO Key Deliverable on transnational social movements. In doing so, they point to the complexity of the conceptual distinction and to a need for clarification. It shows that the digital divide is as much a hyped social construction as proclaiming ICT a medicine for overcoming it is technologically deterministic. There is some truth in both positions, but certainly not all of the truth. This not only begs for some debunking of a dogmatic dichotomy but also for using the concept of exclusion in a more dynamic way: with a clear sense of the multi-layered nature of processes of exclusion.

The central issue in this paper is in what way the EMTEL studies of transnational social movements, diasporic communities and the less abled have been helpful in disentangling the conceptual complexity and in shedding light on the realities of in/equalities, in/exclusions and divides? And what questions and challenges do they pose for governance and policy? This paper will begin by disentangling the often confusing and ambiguous concepts of in- and exclusion and the digital divide. The findings from the three separate studies will be summarised and the this paper will elaborate the lessons learned from them about inclusion and exclusion and ask what alternative approach can be developed. Finally, it will discuss the challenges this poses for governance.

1. Inclusion/exclusion: conceptual and political ambiguity

A paper prepared by the young researchers involved in the Inclusion/Exclusion research strand of the EMTEL-project[21] critically assesses the literature on the relation between social exclusion and ICT. The authors propose an analysis that avoids the bipolar and static approach of inclusion versus exclusion, as well as the too easy assumption that access to ICT will necessarily change conditions of exclusion and foster social and political inclusion of less-abled citizens. While concerned with the *problematique* of the digital divide, they critically question the somewhat unwarranted use of this concept and propose a more dynamic, multidimensional approach towards the relationship between ICTs and social exclusion.

The notion of social in/exclusion usually refers to social processes in which financial resources and skills, knowledge and abilities enable or impede one to participate in (all aspects of) everyday life. In the common sense notion of social exclusion and the way it is usually applied in policy, the concept often suffers from a certain one-dimensionality. Particularly in policy discourses it is often assumed that social exclusion is a condition experienced by marginalised groups, mainly caused by a lack of *financial resources*. In academic literature, other related dimensions of exclusion are pointed too as well. Some stress the *capabilities* that are needed to fully function in society (cf. Sen, 1992). Others also refer to *cultural qualities* and *well-being* as factors that correlate with social in- and exclusion. The different processes and dynamics that may lead towards exclusion are often intertwined and strengthen each other. These include work, education, living conditions, income, mobility, (communicative) skills, social security status and health

More recently, a new form of social exclusion has come to the fore in this debate, labelled as the "digital divide". This specific form of exclusion is both seen as a *result* of these other forms of social exclusion (those who suffer from a lack of financial resources, skills or capabilities will also have trouble accessing ICTs and handling the information that is accessible through ICTs) and as a *factor that will aggravate* the other dimensions of social exclusion. As ICTs become increasingly important for citizens to participate and to enjoy the "blessings" of modern society, those who lag behind in this respect will also become increasingly marginalised in social, economic and political terms. It is therefore no surprise that the digital divide problematique is concerning academics and policy makers.

The concept of the digital divide is, however, problematic for a number of reasons (cf. Frissen, in press). It is based on many unwarranted assumptions about how and why citizens use or *do not use* ICTs and it is based on the empirically unsound assumption that lack of access to ICTs automatically leads to or sharpens other forms of exclusion and thus is a barrier to the opportunities for citizen participation. This assumption too easily leads to

policies in which access to ICTs is promoted as the answer to all our troubles. Western governments, along with international institutions and non-governmental organisations, are seeking to increase their profile in this area by declarations to the effect that reducing the digital divide is an absolute priority. Closing the digital divide is not only seen as a social policy objective, but also perceived as an economic objective in terms of raising the competitiveness or productivity of a nation.

More specifically, the problems the concept confronts society with the following problems (Cammaerts et al, 2002):

- The digital divide is conceptually confusing given that the term is used both as a function of the North-South divide and as a function of access in the West. These are in fact two fundamentally different problems, each with its own dynamic and each to a certain extent requiring its own policy solutions (Nulens *et al.*, 2001).

- The digital divide refers in a sense to a static situation, but it is in fact something very dynamic. The situation can alter rapidly for specific groups. F or example, women and senior citizens are rapidly catching up in the area of the Internet (cf. Frissen, in press). Moreover, the enormous success of mobile services in all strata of the population demonstrates that the digital divide discourse is too one-sidedly focused on specific technologies such as the PC and Internet.

- Related to this is the strong emphasis in the digital divide discourse on quantitative data, such as PC ownership, Internet subscriptions, telephone penetration, etc. This data is often correlated to socio-demographic characteristics of potential users, such as levels of income, education, skills, etc. These figures can be helpful in determining which groups in society are lagging, but also tend to stigmatise the groups that are usually already considered marginalised. They do no tell us much about the skills and capacities or other dimensions of the everyday life of the stragglers. Qualitative parameters, such as what it is that users do with the PC and internet, what functions these ICTs have in their everyday life and what they mean to their users are rarely investigated. Precisely these factors may shed an interesting light on the dynamics of exclusion.

- The explicit connection made between the digital divide and exclusion – *if you are not online, you do not belong* – misses out on other reasons given for the non-use of a particular technology. Research has shown that non-users also point to other reasons for their non-use than the classic "victim" reasons, such as lack of skills or financial resources. Negatively perceived functionality, fear, social networks and aversion of technology play an equally prominent role (Punie, 2000, p. 398), and – from a critical consumer perspective - some of these negative attitudes towards technology are certainly quite warranted.

- Finally - and herein probably lies the most important fallacy - the implicit connection made in the digital divide discourse between ICT use and participation is too simplistic and fails to take account of other forms of participation. Research shows that citizens' social participation or involvement in, for example, voluntary organisations has been increasing over the last decades without any clear (positive or negative) correlation with the use of ICTs by these citizens (Elchardus, et.al. 2000; Frissen, 2001).

To summarise the points made above, an approach towards (digital) in/exclusion first needs to take into account the <u>multi-dimensionality</u> of the concept. Second, an understanding of the <u>complex relationships between the different dimensions</u> is needed. Third, these relationships must not be seen as static, but <u>vary across different contexts</u>. Fourth, an approach towards in- and exclusion needs to be sensitive to the <u>subjective</u> experiences and processes of meaning construction that underlie in/exclusion. And finally, it is important to be <u>sensitive to the normative assumptions</u> that are often underlying the in/exclusion discourse. All these conclusions need some further explication.

1.1. In/exclusion is multi-dimensional

Exclusion is often discussed in a rather one-dimensional sense, that is, in relation to participation in economic life. However relevant, exclusion can take place in many other dimensions of everyday life as well: the political, cultural, social as well as the economical. From civic engagement and political rights such as voting, to be elected in a representative function or to demonstrate, cultural citizenship or the right to express and enhance one's own identity, to ordinary processes that take place in everyday life, social welfare and well being, all are areas and aspects of the everyday where inequality and exclusion can take place. Strategies that focus on ICT should take into account all these different aspects of exclusion, including the exclusion that relates to communication, information and signification.

1.2. The relationships between different dimensions of in/exclusion are complex.

As Wyatt et al. (2000, p. 4) have noted, equality is often "judged by comparing one particular aspect of an individual, such as income, wealth, health, happiness or education with the same aspect of another". But they approvingly quote Sen (1992, p. 2) who has concluded that equality in terms of one variable may not necessarily coincide with equality in another. For example, equal opportunities can lead to very unequal incomes, and equal wealth can coexist with unequal happiness. In the same vein, digital "exclusion" may well coexist with a sense of well being. Furthermore, those who are marginalised in an socio-economic sense may still be quite well equipped with ICTs. This poses difficult questions,

such as: how to "weigh" the relative importance of inclusion in, for example, political processes and, at the same time, exclusion in wealth? Or how can it be explained that digital inclusion increases the potential for social networking (social inclusion) but at the same time decreases the inclusion of citizens in political processes? In short, in order to get a clear picture of what is actually referred to when talking about in/exclusion and what policy may contribute here, it is important to investigate how, within specific contexts, the different dimensions of in- and exclusion affect each other.

1.3. In/exclusion is not static

Over time, the hierarchy of basic needs of goods and services, which differs between people, will change. Ownership of a mobile telephone, a home computer and access to the Internet, recently more a desire than a need for self-actualisation, now more or less functions as aggregate statistical indicators of inequality between social groups. All walks of life feel it and "live" it as a basic need or a life style sign of inclusion, of being part of a social group. Thus, the importance of specific dimensions of exclusion may change over *time*. Moreover, the implications (dimensions) of in/exclusion may vary considerably in different *contexts*.

1.4. In/exclusion is subjective

Related to the former point, in/exclusion has an objective and a subjective component, a material and a symbolic aspect, or as it is put in the LENTIC KD, a hetero- and a self - designation side. The objective aspect is usually based on aggregate, quantitative data, mapping structural factors that impede social inclusion. The subjective aspect usually builds on more qualitative and ethnographic data, on the experiences and meanings underlying in/exclusion. Thus, depending on certain social or structural criteria or indicators, someone may be considered excluded, but "feel" quite differently and may even be happy with his lot since others are worse off. An analysis of access to ICTs should thus go beyond the strictly material, and include the experiential side: what does it mean to have or not to have access to ICTs? Or, in other words, the analysis of social structures underlying in/exclusion should be complemented with a study of social meanings and the way these are embodied in culture, identities, subjectivities and individual agency (cf. Wyatt et al., 2000, p. 7).

1.5. In/exclusion is a normative concept

Finally, inherent in the in/exclusion dichotomy is that being socially excluded is defined as bad and inclusion the preferred state of being, worth striving for and putting an effort into. Emphasising human agency runs the risk that inclusion will not only be seen as a right, but

also as an obligation: empowerment as an opportunity to participate is propagated as a necessity to be active too. That begs for in-built disappointment, when barriers are lowered and access is improved but "nothing happens"; not everyone is a social or political animal driven by an urge to articulate and to mobilise.

Non-participation, non-activity and even exclusion may reflect a voluntary individual choice (cf. Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997, p. 415). Moreover, low-key forms of participation such as "lurking" in IRCs or news groups are often considered a problem or at best a secondary level of involvement, while they could also be seen as a way of learning and engaging, and a style of non-participatory communication certainly worth studying.

Thus, to conclude, both the complexity of the in/exclusion concept and the discourse underlying the debate on the digital divide, which is strongly based on empirically unwarranted normative assumptions, point to the need for an alternative approach towards in/exclusion. This approach needs to focus on different dimensions of in/exclusion, and on the way these dimensions relate to and interact with each other in a specific context. It also needs to include a subjective or experiential dimension, as these experiences may give us clues for sometimes surprising reasons for exclusion. Studying the role and position of ICTs in this complex situation should also take into account that they can be considered a tool or a strategy to overcome exclusion and to be included, but also a new domain of inequality in itself. After a short summary of the three studies carried out in the context of EMTEL, this paper will go on to analyse how such an approach has contributed to the understanding of processes of in/exclusion in these studies.

2. The three studies

The <u>LENTIC Key Deliverable</u> on *ICT and less abled people,* focuses on <u>economic and social exclusion</u> and on constructing a multidimensional inclusion through ICT use. The first of three separate case studies in this report deals with unemployed and unskilled people. Work and training are perceived as prior domain to participate in society and to be socially included or integrated. The interviewed trainees have different perceptions of ICT and develop different kind of uses (from searching for a job to interpersonal communication and playing games) and they ascribe different kinds of meaning to ICT (from a tool in job finding and learning new skills to constructing new relationships). The appropriation or transfer processes from the training context to everyday life experiences and the incorporation of the different meanings is part of "a construction of inclusion or exclusion in negotiation with various social factors and everyday contexts".

The second case study of disabled workers being hired by a call centre showed that the

disability plays an important role in the construction of their professional and social identity. As with the discourse of the unemployed, the disabled had different perceptions of ICT and relate various meanings to ICT use and inclusion or exclusion experience - from a tool for practising their job to communicating with friends. For some, ICT potentials may be used in other spheres of everyday life when it is appropriated in various dimensions of their everyday experience and transferred from work to domestic use. People who are not using an ICT as an inclusion tool do not wish to spend hours on a PC or the Internet, but prefer to spend time on other everyday activities. In that sense, they differed from the unemployed who were less keen to accept their situation and had high hopes of ICT-based or related jobs. The disabled workers were more prone to accept their professional situation and conferred less potential to ICT as an enabling technology.

The third case study of ICT users of elderly over 50, for whom the working sphere may not any longer be a prior domain for participating in society, showed that ICTs were seen as a tool and an enabler to fill in new kinds of activities when facing a new social life. In parallel with the discourses of the two other groups, the interviewees had different perceptions of ICTs and ascribed different meanings and appropriations to ICT use, from a value of usefulness (to access information, save money and time, communicate with relations) to a means of keeping socially and physically "up to date" and not to be "outmoded". When a rationally argued value of usefulness is absent, it is seen as a reason and an argument for non-use. They seem to critically relate the appropriation and usefulness of ICT to the question of whether it can also be done in a traditional and for them more gratifying way: "they do not want to be slaves of technology".

Durieux, using these studies and self-designated trajectories, develops a typology of ICT appropriation and inclusion experiences. This comprises: (i) the "utopians" who develop various ICT uses and incorporate a wide range of values in ICT; (ii) the "rationalists" who are appropriating ICT for specific purposes and in relation to specific values; (iii) the "dystopians" who do not appropriate ICT outside the specific training or working environment or who develop a very low level of use. In that sense, ICTs are not only seen as a potential tool for overcoming exclusion, but also as a new area where exclusion can develop.

The LSE-Key Deliverable on *diasporic media across Europe* introduces the cultural element to to social, political and economic exclusion, as well as everyday life and the formal and institutional processes of employment, education, political participation. It highlights how the informal and ordinary processes that take place in everyday life, which are structured and informed by media cultures, can both broaden inclusion and – at the same

time - lead to informal and cultural forms of exclusion in local, national and transnational spaces. The local is where the every day is lived; the national is where citizens' rights and obligations are formed and where formal rules for political and cultural exclusion/inclusion are set; the transnational is the space where global diasporic networks expand and communities are sustained. ICTs in general have a dual functionality: they enable or obstruct participation in economic processes and they play an articulating, agenda setting and framing role in ideas, (problem) definitions and stereotyping. As alternative diasporic media they can and do function as a network of communication across the three spaces, as a domain of representation, and as a tool for voicing that presence.

Based on a study of these spaces, of different media and their uses and appropriations by specific minority cultures in thirteen European countries and of a number of specific cases, this study locates opportunity structures, which often highlight areas of tension as well. Internet cafes and communication centres (international calls and fax service) not only "mushroom" in multicultural neighbourhoods, reflecting new dimensions of ethnic public spaces and of ethnic identity performance in public, they also reflect migrants' economic position and their social and cultural integration. National multicultural media projects and new generation radio programmes give a shared space to different diasporic minorities, their languages, sorts of music, religions and political ideas. By distancing and "distincting" themselves from separate and sometimes separatist ethnic media within local and national communities, they indicate a project of integration and the development of a multicultural sphere.

Comparison of minority media production indicates limited policy and marginal funding. At the same time it points to the significance and effect of support by the state and through policy for development of media cultures (licensing, frequency control, must carry rules) and vice versa to the effect of a restrictive and highly controlled broadcasting space and lack of support. Minority media challenge the mainstream agendas and exclusion of minorities. However, this has more of an effect on the kind of media representations available to minorities themselves - strengthening self esteem and identity - than the representations frequently heard and seen by majorities. Satellite television has become one of the most important components of diasporic media cultures by offering alternatives to the mainstream representations and a global space for communication within the country of origin and the global diaspora. At the same time, this affects their position of exclusion and policies *vis-à-vis* multicultural media.

Finally, the Internet offers diasporic groups broader access to information, challenges the centrality of their country of origin in their gaining a space in the "global commons", and

gives opportunities for decentralised web presence. This again, highlights a double dialectic of inclusion/exclusion. Diasporic participation in transnationally mediated networks both relieve and confirm their relative exclusion from national, majority networks; However, finding a voice in the "global commons" creates tension and potential power struggles between both 'home' and diasporic groups and between minority and majority groups.

The ASCoR-TNO Key Deliverable on the *use of ICTs by transnational social movements* focuses particularly, but not solely, on the political and questions of access and participation. This study investigates how transnational social movements use the Internet in organising themselves on and off line; how the web facilitates and mediates online civic engagement and digital divide strategies, and; how they develop strategies to influence politics and policy. The net clearly allows social movements inter-organisational networking, control over content while bypassing state control, and all of that with relatively high impact on a low cost basis.

The case studies of the organisation, content and web presence of APC, as an advocacy umbrella organisation, LabourStart, as an issue-oriented portal organisation, ATTAC, as a counter-discursive platform organisation and Indymedia, as a forum-like journalistic web organisation. In-depth studies of three online civic engagement examples revealed, firstly, that transnational social movements are neither truly transnational nor solely virtual. The poorer countries are usually conspicuously absent; the language is predominantly English and the culture western and liberal. The online is very present, but particularly as organisational enabler (decentralising work through cheap means, bridging time and space) for real life activities at the national and local level.

Secondly, the interactive potential of the Internet provides the social movements the possibility to construct public or semi-public spaces for discussion and civic engagement. At the same time, there were: (i) sometimes conflicting, constraints of access (certainly on a global scale); (ii) the risk of excluding oppositional thinking because of a homogeneous ideological framework; (iii) a limited, like-minded number of active participants; (iv) of flaming when moderation is lacking and diversity of opinion is strong; (v) of no clear goals and conclusions; (vi) of the bias in demographic composition (mainly male).

Finally, in spite of a fairly homogeneous and exclusionary leftist ideology, these organisations are slowly succeeding in climbing on and being accepted as a legitimate voice at the political agenda. All organisations aim to influence the political. In terms of direct actions, ICTs are relevant in raising awareness, voicing concern and mobilising for action. Only those organisations with a real life component and a certain degree of

institutionalisation are recognised on the political playing field where decisions are taken; however, direct impact on governance and policy is limited.

A major constraining factor to online participation turned out to be the unequal distribution of technologies, means and aims. In the first place, the socio-economic issues tackled by social movements often relate to communities affected by a digital divide (the South, migrants, the socially weak). In the second place, some organisations have considerably more human and financial resources that allow them to develop more dynamic and interactive services. Finally, as they often exclusively use the Internet to communicate with the outside world, transnational social movements are very dependent on access to and distribution of technologies and capabilities.

3. An alternative approach to in/exclusion

The complexity of the in/exclusion concept and the discourse underlying the debate on the digital divide, which is strongly based on empirically unwarranted normative assumptions, underscore the need for an alternative approach towards inclusion and exclusion. Key elements of such an approach are a focus on different dimensions of in/exclusion (*multidimensiona*l), and on the ways these dimensions relate to and interact with each other (*relational*) in a specific context (*contextual*). It also needs to include a subjective or *experiential* dimension. The following analysis focuses on how such an approach has contributed to the understanding of processes of in- and exclusion in the studies that have been carried out in this EMTEL-project.

To do justice to the multidimensionality of the concept, the three studies, focus more or less on three different dimensions of in/exclusion: the *socio-economic* (LENTIC), the *political* (ASCoR/TNO) and the *cultural* (LSE). All of them also criticise the assumption that giving access to technology leads automatically towards (social) inclusion. The potential of ICTs for participation is recognised, but the use of these technologies is not seen as an absolute condition guaranteeing inclusion. A closer look at the findings of the LENTIC study shows that the inclusive potential of ICTs for the "less abled" is clearly there. ICTs are experienced as an opportunity to be active, to (temporally) structure ones life, and to create new social relationships. More specifically, it allows the unemployed to get in touch with working life reality and to see employment as more accessible. On the other hand, this study clearly shows that the *subjective* experiences related to ICT-use are quite different in different contexts. The elderly, the unemployed and the disabled vary substantially in their perception of ICTs. The unemployed perceive ICTs as an enabling technology, which is functional in their search for a job. The disabled attribute more various meanings to ICT: in

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their everyday life ICT is seen both as a tool for practising their job as an instrument for communicating with others. They seem to be less "utopian" about the potential of ICT as a means to become more included. For the third group, the elderly, the attitude towards ICT and the perception of ICT is more critical: they seem to be wavering between conflicting meanings such as "not to be a slave of technology" and "not to be outdated" at the same time.

A labelling of these ambiguous experiences into conclusions about being in- or excluded is not self-evident. But these findings do show the relevance of an approach, which points to both the contextual and the experiential as important elements of understanding processes of in- and exclusion. This may lead to the conclusion that it is not enough to focus on mere access to ICT or on the improvement of ICT-skills in order to enhance (socio-economic) inclusion. It is also necessary to know how ICTs are experienced in the contexts of people's everyday life in order to define adequate policy strategies.

The findings of the ASCoR/TNO Key Deliverable show that the use of ICTs by transnational movements has an empowering (inclusive) and at the same time a disempowering effect in political terms. In most cases studied here the Internet can be seen as an enabler, allowing transnational CSOs to organise themselves more (cost-) efficiently, mobilise beyond their constituency, build networks with like-minded organisations, facilitate participation and control their own information flow. Especially in linking up local branches within the transnational network and internal organisation ICTs are crucial. The Internet also enables short-term as well as result- and issue-oriented participation through mailing lists, public forums and other interactive tools. However, although this potential of ICT increases the possibilities of these organisations to do what they want to do and to do that well – and thus to be potentially *included* in processes of opinion formation, political pressure etc. - The political impact seems to be limited which, after a while, can become a reason for disengagement. Moreover, the organisations described in this study are to a certain degree *excluding*. It is quite clear that only a limited number of people are really actively participating and there is a gender-gap, as most of the participants appear to be male. A major constraining factor is the unequal distribution of technologies and capabilities, between and even within transnational CSOs. Some CSOs have considerably more human and financial resources, which allow them to develop more dynamic and interactive services and thus empowers those organisations that are already relatively capable. Yet, another indication for exclusion is that it is questionable, according to the author, whether ICTs actually contribute to the political power of CSO's organisations, and thus, whether it is possible to actually speak of political inclusion here: a growing impact on governance and policy cannot be observed here. Another study has observed that ICTs tend

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to increase the internal orientation of CSOs, and thus may lead to a certain fragmentation of public interests and political influence (Frissen & Ponsioen, in press). This highlights the relative character of in/exclusion and certainly the ambiguous character of the concept.

Finally, the LSE study on diasporic communities also underpins this highly ambiguous nature of in/exclusion processes. The LSE-study has focused on the cultural dimension of in/exclusion, by researching the use of media and ICTs by minority and transnational communities in Europe. What is evident here is that it is quite problematic to reach uniform conclusions about the degree of cultural in/exclusion these communities are confronted with. According to the author, the implications of ICTs in the production of minority media and in the increase of content that interests niche and often-segregated ethnic groups are complex. On the one hand, the possibilities for production expand as cost decreases and as autonomy and access to ICTs broadens. This becomes directly visible in the increasing numbers of such products and in the growing success of on-line and transnational satellite television ethnic/diasporic media. These media projects open possibilities for alternatives to the mainstream content, including products in minority languages, information regarding migration and integration and links between transnational diasporic communities. In offering information about local, national and transnational events, in allowing people to communicate in their first language and in feeding their everyday repertoires with ethnic cultural products, it can be argued that minority media offer their users knowledge and power to participate as more equal players in local, national and transnational communities, in ethnic and multi-ethnic public spheres. On the other hand, the voluntary exclusion or exclusivity of the communication within the ethnic group may limit and even hinder integration or inclusion of these diasporic communities in the autochthonous community.

This study introduced differentiation on yet another contextual level, namely the local, the national and the transnational. On the local level, this study has made clear that there are many informal local projects and initiatives taking place, resulting in a highly differentiated new kind of multicultural public space, both in a physical sense (Internet cafes, call shops, radio stations, etc) and in a virtual sense (cultural content, websites, etc.). Indeed, this can be understood as inclusion, as media and ICTs offer minorities many possibilities for voicing, representation and identification. On the transnational level this empowering potential is evident as well; ICTs and media enable these communities to exist and to expand across national borders and to create a cultural space of their own and thus live and enrich their diasporic existence. Particularly on the national level, however, it is evident that, although these minority media offer an alternative to the mainstream, the latter is not really challenged. The exclusion of minorities from the mainstream has not changed at all.

In this sense the use of ICTs in this case seems to stimulate the rise of a separate but not of a more inclusive public sphere.

4. A question of and for policy?

Such an alternative approach to in- and exclusion does have a number of consequences for policy or at least for the parameters of and the discourse around it. Firstly, in taking into account the multi-dimensional, the relative, relational, contextual and experiential, data gathering and analysis, focusing and choosing in policy making becomes much more complex and less self evident. The consequence may well be less policy and more governance, the many ways in which individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It may also mean more focused and small group oriented problem solutions or creation of opportunity structures.

Secondly, access is not necessarily, not only and may be even not at all the policy medicine for a digital divide. National and supra-national governments do have a specific task re guaranteeing as broad as possible access to the enabling capacity of ICT's. One could think here of, for example, "must carry" rules for TV channels in minority languages, support for training projects of less abled, etc. But focusing on access to the technology and the capabilities to make use of these information and communication technologies tends to emphasise the one-dimensionality of the digital divide concept. Actual use is not necessarily the outcome of creating access, as non-use is not by definition problematic; exclusion can be a voluntary and conscious strategy. Access may be a necessary pre-condition for participation and inclusion, it is not a guarantee and it may not even be desired.

Thirdly, governments should enable access and participation, create opportunity structures and break down the barriers limiting the opportunity of inclusion in the information society, but, paradoxically, governments should at the same time be hesitant and keep their distance where it concerns ICTs and political participation and empowerment. Governments and policy makers interfering in the information and communication potentialities of ICTs for political awareness, voice and mobilisation, run the risk of colliding with the individual freedom of communication. Political participation and empowerment are much more the domain of countervailing governance, informal arrangements strengthened by some form of financial support. At the same time, governments should take (more) seriously the outcomes of ICT-enabled participation.

Finally, this alternative approach to the question of in/exclusion and "the" digital divide touches upon, yes, even rocks the role of research in and for policy. Problem analysis and policy solutions tend to be based very much on statistical and aggregate data. This can be useful information, but the inherent bias towards the measurable and the solvable, undervalues and even misses the experiential of the every day, the individual and the personal, and thus the potential pleasure of voluntary exclusivity and the relative "pain" of non-voluntary exclusion. Research for ICT policy should thus be multi-method and in-depth.

Notes

[1] In consultation with Francois Pichault and Roger Silverstone

[2] Cammaerts, Durieux & Georgiou (2002) 'Exclusion and ICT: Beyond binary assumptions, beyond technological determinism.

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Appendix 1: EMTEL Deliverables

Final Deliverables

- Brants, K. and Frissen, V. (2003) 'Inclusion and Exclusion in the Information Society', University of Amsterdam (ASCoR) and (TNO Strategy, Technology and Policy)

- Pichault, F. and Durieux, D. (2003) 'The Information Society in Europe: Methods and Methodologies', LENTIC, University of Liege and ASCoR, University of Amsterdam.

- Preston, P. (2003) 'ICTs in Everyday Life: Public Policy Implications for Europe's Way to the Information Society.

- Punie, Y., Bogdanowicz, M., Berg, Anne-Jorunn., Pauwels C. and Burgelman, J-C. 'Living and Working in the Information Society: Quality of Life in a digital world', IPTS-JRC, European Commission, Sevilla; Centre for Technology & Society, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim; SMIT, Free University of Brussels

- Silverstone, R. (2003) 'Media and Technology in the Everyday Life of European Societies', Media@lse, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Key Deliverables

- Berker, T. (2003) 'Boundaries in a space of flows: the case of migrant researchers' use of ICTs', NTNU, University of Trondheim.

- Cammaerts, B. and Van Audenhove, L. (2003) 'ICT usage among transnational social movements in the networked society', ASCoR/TNO, University of Amsterdam.

- Durieux, D. (2003) 'ICT and social inclusion in the everyday life of less abled people', LENTIC, University of Liege and ASCoR, University of Amsterdam.

- Georgiou, M. (2003) 'Mapping diasporic media across the EU; addressing cultural exclusion', Media@lse, London School of Economics and Political Science.

- Hartmann, M. (2003) 'The Web Generation: the (de)construction of users, morals and consumption', SMIT-VUB, Free University of Brussels.

- Punie, Y. (2003) 'A social and technological view of Ambient Intelligence in everyday life', IPTS (JCR-EC), Seville.

- Ward, K. (2003) 'An ethnographic study of internet consumption in Ireland: between domesticity and public participation', COMTEC, Dublin City University.