



technology, children, schools and families

## **Communities and citizenship: paths for engagement?**

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with current issues in the constitution and maintenance of communities and the effect on notions of citizenship and public engagement. This review looks at a number of studies concerned with the building of communities and the effects of structural changes on the maintenance of communities. It uses the decline of the nation as dominant scale for collective identification as the starting point for two parallel trends: the increased importance of local and everyday practices in the formation of communities and the development of cosmopolitan/global identities and citizenships. Examples are drawn from research into regeneration of former industrial regions as well as studies on youth engagement in rural and urban settings. Notions of politics and engagement need to be reconsidered to include small-scale, everyday political engagement which is based on residence rather than a status of citizenship conferred by the state. Technology can enhance and facilitate this process of becoming a local citizen. Digital inclusion can foster social inclusion. Accessibility to technology is therefore a major concern, not only in terms of affordability but also in terms of skills, confidence and trust. The ability to negotiate the offline world of changing boundaries and places for engagement translates into the ability to do so online: social and cultural capital becomes digital capital.

**Keywords:** community, citizenship, engagement, participation, place, accessibility, global identities, digital inclusion, social inclusion, youth engagement, industrial regions, political engagement, public engagement

## Assumptions

The starting point for this review is the assumption of a globalised world characterised by interdependent network spaces, the diminished importance of distance, and the existence of multiple spatialities of organisation and practice, as well as the availability of multiple geographies of belonging (Amin, 2002). From a theoretical perspective, Bourdieu's (1990, 1999) work on fields and the concept of *habitus* recurs due to an increased sociological research emphasis on and interest in embodied practices in a world characterised by fluidity and flexibility. This fluidity has also been recognised by Cliff, O'Malley and Taylor (2008: 18) who argue that:

"...the blurring of distinctions between boundaries, at multiple levels: blurring between the personal/private and the public; between the individual identity and group identity, and therefore between individual output and group output; between what is part of the digital landscape and what is "reality"; between formal and informal learning; between work, play and education..."

will be key issues in the future. The flexibility of residence and increasing mobility is present in contemporary society in the form of migration and the fact that today's societies are both emigrant and immigrant societies. The new kind of migration characterised by extra-territoriality and anchors instead of roots for identification then "casts a question mark upon the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, neighbourhood and belonging" (Bauman, 2008). Another trend which has been recognised by academic and policy circles alike is the decline in formal political engagement (Cornwall, 2008) and therefore "alternative ways of ensuring that voices are heard are required" (National Consumer Council, 2004: 10 quoted in Clarke and Newman, 2007).

## Argument: locality, place and territories matter through virtual and material boundaries

Although globalisation processes are characterised by a diminished importance of space, they are also evident in a "transformation of practice and experience which is felt *actually within localities*" (Tomlinson, 1999, p9, emphasis in original). While there is an argument for the blurring between public and private spheres, there is also a debate about the growing diversification of social fields (Fowler, 1997). As people occupy multiple relationships and multiple subject positions, there are two opposing trends: a striving for belonging (feeling similar) and a striving for distinction (feeling separate).

Conceptions of citizenship and belonging need to be rethought as the nation-state as the preferred scale of political involvement has been de-centred. This means including practices such as social action, volunteering (Lister et al, 2002) and other than nominally formal political practices in the community (both real and virtual) in the notion of citizenship as well as allowing belonging to multiple communities (cf. Pell, 2008; Purcell, 2003). This leads to the evolution of different political practices in emerging public spheres – sites of emergent democratic citizenship.

Citizenship is an embodied practice and can be seen as a consequence of dispositions acquired in the private sphere. In this sense, the boundaries between public and private are indistinct and thus the personal is political and the political personal. Technology facilitates and exacerbates this blurring and thus opens avenues for direct democracy and widened access but unevenly distributed access can also reproduce existing hierarchies of power (cf. Cass, Shove and Urry, 2005).

Accessibility then becomes the main concern. Penetration of digital technologies has increased over the years but access to technology remains linked to patterns of social exclusion, with the most socially disadvantaged being the least likely to have or use access to digital technology. Barriers to access are then not only determined by inappropriate market provision and affordability but also by lack of confidence, skills and support. With the lack of digital technology skills becoming the new illiteracy stigma (OPM, 2008), the digital and social divide amplify each other.

## **Studies and data**

### **1. Communities and place**

#### **The concept of community**

There is an extensive sociological and anthropological literature on the changing meanings of community (Davies and Jones, 2003; Pahl, 2005; Philipson and Thompson, 2008) paying attention to the questions of disembedding and de-territorialisation of social relations in modernity which seem to have become accepted trends in the field (starting with Bell and Newby, 1971 and continued in Giddens, 1990; Tomlinson, 1999). Diminishing importance of space has also been claimed by Castells (1998, 2001), with special reference to the influence of ICT and the internet as appropriate medium of communication for the type of society and social relationships that he envisaged. Despite the ubiquity of the disembedding and de-territorialisation claims, local identifications, ie "communities-on-the-ground" (Pahl, 2005; Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2005) and attachment to place have remained salient.

These questions have also been examined in the context of socio-economic transformation and regeneration where place identity and the forms it takes through community engagement have been considered central issues. Such studies have covered deprived neighbourhoods especially in old industrial regions (eg the author's own research; Bennett, Beynon and Hudson, 2000; Harding, 1997; Waddington, 2003) and dynamic city centres (e.g. O'Connor and Wynne, 1996, Binnie and Skeggs, 2004) as well as (middle-class) residential areas (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2005).

A particularly promising attempt seems to be an approach which links networks, ie people's interconnectedness, class and place as suggested by Blokland and Savage (2001). Liepins (2000) examines different approaches to the concept with particular reference to rural communities, and highlights the move away from community as a "fixed object" to a scale of inquiry, a symbolic construction (eg Cohen, 1985) or investigations of power where the politics of contrasting voices, spaces and actions can be considered. Neal and Walters (2008) also deal with the contentious nature of community, stressing the need to explain it rather than seeing it as the explanation (Alleyne, 2002). They highlight the importance of the material aspect of community, ie the actual social relations and groupings in addition to the symbolic aspects of community as repository of meaning. Community remains both a discourse and a practice; it operates on the symbolic and the personal (and therefore physical) level. This means that places continue to matter as the basis of shared socio-spatial practices.

There seem to be two trends concerning the challenge of the meaning of place and space for individual and collective identities and their expression in "communities": a re-definition of the local and the development of cosmopolitan identities.

## **Redefining local identity and belonging – ‘elective belonging’**

In a society characterised by flexibility, mobility and fluidity the construction of local identity has become more precarious – less inherited and based on a shared past, but more practised and performed. The argument is that the emergence of mobile fields and the disjunctures between a growing number of fields has led to a heightened importance of “ordinariness”, a heightened importance of the commonality of shared positions. Belonging is fluid and contingent. This provides for a community of strangers, according to Simmel, those who come today and stay tomorrow. It also, however, presupposes agency and choice. Choice is here seen as a value, a sign of achievement – mobility is the norm (cf. Beck, 2000), staying in the place you were born and brought up in is deviant:

“[a]ll of us are , willy-nilly, by design or by default, on the move. We are on the move even if, physically we stay put: immobility is not a realistic option in a world of permanent change. And yet the effects of that new condition are radically unequal. Some of us become fully and truly ‘global’; some are fixed in their ‘locality’ – a predicament neither pleasurable nor enduring in the world in which the ‘globals’ set the tone and compose the rules of the life-game.” (Bauman, 1998, p2)

In tune with the idea of the “elective biography” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), local identity, too, has become a choice – “elective belonging” (Savage et al, 2005). This starts from the fact that (social and geographical) mobility has increased and thus life-long connections with one place to establish a particular “fixed” local identity and sense of belonging are becoming less likely. Referring to a study of middle-class residential areas in Manchester (Savage et al, 2005) Savage (2008) argues that “the actual lived history of the place in which they [interviewees] lived was less important as the way in which they could define the place as belonging to them through their conscious choice to move and settle in it” (p.152). For the “mobile classes” place then remains important as manifestation of their “lifestyle” or consumer choice. The element of choice is essential in this identification and understanding of place because according to Savage (2008: 153) for those who do not possess the necessary resources, “nostalgia becomes the counterpart to elective belonging.”

To juxtapose this story of nostalgia, a look at post-industrial, formerly “traditional” working-class communities is necessary. Valerie Walkerdine’s research on communities in the South Wales valleys and my research on mining communities in Kent has shown that individuals do not stay in these places out of a longing for an idealised past but due to the persistence of social networks linking family, friends and (former) work-places (see also Strangleman, 2001; Parry, 2003). Research participants explained how the social infrastructure which used to be supported by the economic infrastructure (ie the colliery or the local steel plant) is now predominantly linked to the particular village and individual residents’ commitment – and in this sense to a notion of local citizenship. There are opportunities and threats in this very local notion of belonging. On the one hand, this should strengthen the need for all local residents’ involvement in local affairs, including children and young people. On the other hand, in my study, this facilitated a sense of insularity and lack of awareness of similar issues and experiences in other places. Here, digital technologies can help to bridge gaps and facilitate links between “local citizens” within and between localities.

In Savage et al’s (2005) study individuals are assumed to be free in their choices – to move or to stay. This does not take into account economic or social necessities. It is presupposed that moving socially requires moving geographically while staying put equals displacement. Constraints posed by power hierarchies are neglected. Mobility and the capacity for mobile/multiple identities, however, are dependent on resources. In their study of East German youth, Horschelmann and Schäfer (2007) conclude that

young people's desire to travel, to become "cosmopolitan/global", was shaped by different motivations and expectations, which in turn were influenced by education, parental influence and material opportunity, or, in other words, social, economic and cultural relations of power. Mobility has a class dimension. DIY biographies and mobile selves are accessible to those with the necessary economic, social and cultural capital – and this is true for the offline and the online world, as those most socially disadvantaged are also those most likely to be digitally excluded.

### **Cosmopolitan identities**

Szerszynski and Urry (2002, 2006) argue for the emergence of a spatially dispersed culture of cosmopolitanism which involves awareness and knowledge of other places, cultures and people. It combines abilities and dispositions, eg a willingness to take risks, curiosity about other places, as well as an ability to read different images (Szerszynski and Urry, 2006). Such cosmopolitan ways of thinking need to be incorporated into people's identities, everyday practices, rituals and dispositions to become an effective force in the world (Beck and Sznaider, 2006). As with the concept of elective belonging, spatial mobility and spatial awareness become paramount to the knowledge and understanding of a particular place's history/histories. Being part of a cosmopolitan community is not dependent on a shared and collectively remembered past but on the experience and appreciation of similar socio-spatial practices and rituals. From a negative perspective, this can take on the semblance of tolerance when this actually means tolerance of a similarly "open" lifestyle, eg similar political, ethical, consumption choices. Thus, the internationally mobile professional can feel at home anywhere suitably cosmopolitan, eg New York, London, Berlin or Sydney, among other suitably cosmopolitan professionals. They might, however, face difficulties in participating in the leisure and work patterns of small rural hamlets.

The aims of education then become instilling a disposition towards, an acceptance of, and an ability to deal with, mobility – intellectually, physically, virtually. Education needs to prepare for flexibility and the possibility of multiple trajectories and ideally counteract the fact that the access to choice is still "heavily circumscribed by social, cultural, and economic relations of power" (Hörschelmann and Schäfer, 2007, p1869). As much as the global is increasingly present in the local and in young people's daily experience, this experience is also structured by existing power hierarchies where choice is easily turned into necessity and the tourist turns into the migrant or vice versa (cf Bauman, 1998).

## **2. Questions of citizenship**

"The common conception of citizenship is that of belonging to a political community, with the ensuing rights and responsibilities of membership." (Pell, 2008, p143)

Citizenship is a political project as much as it is a sociological concept. It is inextricably bound up with the powers that be at any point in time. Therefore, future projections of the meaning of citizenship are particularly difficult. It can be assumed, however, that "traditional" notions of citizenship have become problematic. There are different ways in which citizenship is currently being reconfigured:

- (a) A (passive) notion of citizenship which is based solely on citizenship activities which are predetermined and contained in the institutions of the state (Pell, 2008), eg voting rights and participation in the electoral process, has become obsolete.
- (b) Membership of traditional collective organisations such as parties and trade unions has been replaced by alternative forms of engagement, eg social movements, issue-based politics and the politics of the everyday.

- (c) Citizenship is being rescaled, re-territorialised and re-oriented away from the nation-state as the predominant political community (Purcell, 2003).

Following on from the argument above, ie that place retains meaning both as a basis of a particularly local as well as a cosmopolitan community, this has implications for citizenship. As belonging to place is performed and thus contingent, so is citizenship. It is no longer solely defined by the nation-state but by other forms of engaging with state power, which opens up opportunities for multiple belongings and thus multiple citizenships.

As the role of the state shifts and as more complex and 'messy' governance mechanisms evolve (Woods and Goodwin, 2003), future forms of citizenship might be based on mundane, proto-political forms of engagement and community-making, especially as a manifestation of belonging. While Bauman's (2008) analysis stresses the diversity of lifestyles and options, ie the fact that territorially determined citizenship turns into the right to remain different, Savage et al (2005) see this as the basis for solidarity and potential for collective action. Bauman emphasises the precarity and ephemeral nature of such bonds as "it is a moot question whether it is fit to conceive group solidarity in any other form than that of the fickle and fray, predominantly virtual 'networks', galvanised and continually re-modelled by the interplay of individual connecting and disconnecting, making calls and declining to reply [to] them." For Savage et al (2005) the potential for collective action lies in the fact that a lack of feeling at home all the time increases the importance of feeling at home some of the time. This would motivate individuals to opt into shared practices. Place thus becomes valuable to the individual even if they are no longer part of a community rooted in place, the community is rooted in practice.

Place and residence becomes the basis for civic engagement (cf. Purcell, 2003). Pahl (2005) argues that common awareness of a social situation is required for any community to act as collectivity. Such common awareness, if it is no longer provided by a shared past, can only be drawn from a shared present, the co-presence in the everyday which is manifest in local social capital. This is evident in community participation, especially in local planning and governance processes, which has been seen as indicative of a combination of local identification and social cohesion. Another example is parental involvement in schools which can also be redefined as proto-political, civic engagement (cf. Savage et al, 2005). These practices are not place-specific but place-bound in that they have to be enacted in a particular place and thus provide the basis for "community" in contrast to "local" involvement.<sup>1</sup> Sociological literature has dealt with the concept of active citizenship in the context of mechanisms of governmentality (Marinetto, 2003).

This is often linked to ideas of the state enabling and empowering citizens but the notion of empowerment through engagement has been heavily criticised and contested. In this conceptualisation the state confers the status of citizenship onto the individual, which highlights the passivity assigned to citizenship. New forms of engagement, however, are more creative and proactive and are linked to individuals creating their own political spaces, their own emergent public spheres, virtual or material. An example of this is the trend towards the citizen-consumer. Here citizenship is found in life-politics (eg Giddens, 1991) and the everyday act of consumption is a site for individuals' political involvement. The supermarket becomes a political space. Digital technologies and especially the internet then provide access to a greater consumer choice and information which will enhance the (political) power of the consumer (Scammell, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Potential rise in home-schooling as Cliff et al (2008) hint at due to decreasing cost of teaching material, however, would mean one less opportunity for the performance of belonging. Given the salience of locality and place in the evidence put forward by several studies, however, this is unlikely.

Part of the drive for active citizens has been the emphasis on inclusive and accountable networks for citizens, ie the manifestation of different practices of citizenship. Davies (2007) describes this as the current network 'orthodoxy' in UK policy studies. The citizen-consumer as envisaged by New Labour, ie the individual exercising choice in pursuit of individual wants (Clarke et al, 2006), can be motivated to be involved in the institutions providing public services. Recent research has therefore focused on the partnership approach as one form of democratic inclusion/deliberative democracy (Ball and Maginn, 2005; Perrons and Skyers, 2003). Davies (2007) and the author's own research showed that "community" knowledge and understanding of partnerships or the regeneration/planning process can contrast dramatically with policy understanding and knowledge. Residents in a former mining community in Kent who were included in the local regeneration forum still felt excluded from the actual decision-making process. Their idea of involvement also meant ownership of the regeneration outcome, the regenerated space (in this case through heritage displays, ie a performance of a shared past). As their plans were not incorporated for a number of economic/political reasons, the residents felt powerless rather than empowered and thus ultimately disadvantaged.

Thus particular forms of community participation reproduce existing power inequalities rather than empower the residents. The problem arises because the gap between the cultural capital needed to participate in "legitimate" nominally participatory structures, and the cultural capital available in those groups which are supposedly most able to benefit from those structures is not acknowledged or articulated (cf Davies, 2007). Questioning the empowerment effects of particular governance mechanisms then leads to questioning the neo-liberal idea of "active citizenship". Active citizenship might not be achieved within the constraints of state institutions but requires the creation of political and public places which resonate with the social and cultural capital of the affected communities. Here, access to and use of digital public spaces might be particularly helpful as a recent community campaign in Kent ([www.save-wye.org](http://www.save-wye.org)) has shown.

As residence and the politics of the everyday take on more prominence in the constitution of citizenship, the question of permanence and sustainability arises. Amit and Rappaport (2002) emphasise the short-lived nature of circumstantial associations such as with neighbours, work colleagues, club members and also fellow parents at parents' associations. The importance and feeling of belonging of such consociate relationships depends on the continued involvement in the contexts in which they were formed. This is of particular importance in communities undergoing major socio-economic transformation where the traditional forms of association (trade unions, working-men's clubs) lose their centrality. In these cases a focus for the maintenance of community becomes essential. Neal and Walters (2008) argue that the material relationships are enhanced through the dual belonging to a material place and an imagined community, in their case the rural community (cf. also Anderson, 1983).

In my research, this is similarly true, as the notion of the (symbolic) mining community was regularly mobilised and referred to in the description of everyday life in the village. The symbolic community is then constructed through campaigns for statues representing the preferred image of the village, village carnivals or newsletters. These place-making activities also need to allow space for young people as citizens and competent actors within the community, so that they can make their own communities as part of (or even in spite of) the local everyday spaces of (adult) community (cf. Panelli et al, 2002). As Weller (2003, p164) describes, "local boundaries shape the everyday spaces of citizenship and belonging for the teenagers (...) [so that] in the immediate future citizenship will be acted out at the local level."

In conclusion then, citizenship is increasingly linked to the local and local, everyday practices. So the emphasis is then placed on recognition of citizenship practice rather than the bestowal of citizenship rights and it could be argued that this citizenship

practice is undergoing transformation in the light of technological advances. Community-making practices encompass both community responsibility and care, and social pleasure and conviviality. The line between a citizen and someone practising community then becomes blurred as the proto-political, small-scale activities as a result of convivial practices make the social and political capital of social organisations visible. This means that social organisations can wield power and influence in local governance processes despite being nominally outside of the political process which illustrates the idea of the emergent public sphere. Although Neal and Walters (2008) discuss this in the rural context they also draw parallels to Thrift's (2005) analysis of "lighter touch urban politics".

The common denominator in studies of participation and citizenship seems to have become the importance of everyday activities and the resonance of the everyday in the political sphere and vice versa (cf Macnaughten, 2003). The argument is especially important when coupled with the recommendation by FreshMinds (2008) which highlights the importance of meaningful benefits of digital technologies in mundane activities for non-users to integrate them into their daily life. If, therefore, small-scale activities which lead to a feeling of belonging and an affective connection with place- or non-place-based social groups can be enhanced by digital technologies this can facilitate their uptake and prohibit a deepening of the digital divide.

## Conclusions and directions

"Technology alone does not transform government, but government cannot transform to meet modern citizens' expectations without it ... The vision ... is also about making government transformational through the use of technology..."  
(Cabinet Office, 2005)

As I discussed above, the role of the state in the construction of community and citizenship is changing. Digital technologies can drive this process forward and the integration of ICTs into the mechanisms of government has been described as a goal for transformational government. Enhanced ICTs can have particularly beneficial effects for organisations, institutions and for individual citizens, employees or social groups in the form of access to new opportunities and capabilities (CIOG, 2006). An important potential benefit is the integration of "direct democracy", ie citizen engagement and polling, with the existing form of representative democracy where decisions are made via elected representatives. Commentators on the Obama campaign emphasised the successful engagement of the grass roots through digital technologies. Citizenship education, therefore, will mean making visible all the different routes to political participation with digitally enhanced ways of community-making and political action providing particularly fruitful opportunities for the creation of new public spheres.

Digital inclusion is linked to social inclusion. FreshMinds (2008, p5) argue that digital equality can mitigate "social inequalities derived from low incomes, poor health, limited skills or disabilities." There could therefore be a virtuous circle: digital inclusion can enhance social inclusion and thus community engagement and social cohesion. Digital inclusion does not only mean the provision of ICT skills, it also means building up of trust among disadvantaged groups – in the public service providers as well as ICTs (DIT, 2007) so that the danger of a reproduction of offline exclusion in the online world can be addressed, and the potential of virtual communities as providing open, accessible, more democratic, alternative and safe spaces (Evans 2004) can be achieved.

Active citizenship does not only require cultural capital in the sense of openness and awareness of spaces for creative engagement but also digital literacy. This is becoming necessary to participate in contemporary and future society as lack of ICT skills is

perceived to “greatly restrict” what adults can do privately and professionally (FreshMinds, 2008, p34). This suggests a particular subjectivity to participate fully:

“Access is still not enough: nearly two fifths of non-users fail to see the need or benefit of using the internet and other ICTs or *feel that they are not the right kind of person to use them*. The greatest share of the population who hold this view is the elderly and those on low incomes. These groups were also the most likely to not use the internet – even if they had a connection at home.” (2008: 37, my emphasis).

This means that attitudes towards technology are as important as affordability: both cultural and economic capital are required to deal with the information society. Here it is possible to refer to the discussion of “Digital Natives” by Prensky (2001) and Ellen Helsper in the context of this project. It could be argued that the 65+ generation of 2030 will have been socialised into the use of digital technologies and therefore the problem of lack of motivation and perceived need might not arise. This, however, does not address the lack of motivation and perceived need for those on low incomes – the digital divide is deepening for those who are not included and are not using digital technologies and thus are at risk at being left behind even further (FreshMinds, 2008, OPM, 2008). There remains a spatial element to social inclusion, however. As long as affordability of access rather than motivation to access is an issue, rural areas miss out on the availability of cheaper technology which is based on residential clusters. If these inequalities can be reduced then motivation becomes the main factor in digital inclusion.

## **Trends, surprises, predictions**

“Attention to continuity is important for a number of reasons, among which is the capacity of social arrangements to persist despite expectations to the contrary.” (Crow, 2005, p3.2)

### **Trends**

*Places, territories and boundaries – both symbolically and materially – will continue to matter in everyday practices*

In the discussion above, socio-spatial practices matter for the performance of citizenship has been regularly highlighted. The notion of the nation-state based citizenship is becoming obsolete as a result of the parallel tendencies towards localised and cosmopolitan identities. Residence becomes the basis for the political community (cf. Purcell, 2003). At the same time, the political is being redefined to include everyday and so-called “proto-political” activities. With regard to the interplay of belonging and technology, Savage et al (2005, p207) illustrate that fields of practice vary in their spatial extension, while some fields (eg cinema, music) “deploy IT to permit considerable spatial extension, yet other fields, notably that of residence, do not.” Following from this, then, it is possible to say that locality and boundaries remain important for identification. This can be translated into the digital world and efforts to construct and conceptualise digital territories are evidence for this: “without digital boundaries, the fundamental notion of privacy or the feeling of *being at home* will not take place” (Beslay and Hakkala, 2007, p69, emphasis in original)<sup>2</sup>. Beslay and Hakkala (2007) therefore suggest

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2 Another interesting point here is an issue around ownership: while Andrew Harrison in his submission to Futurelab argued that ownership of property is becoming less and less important, it is interesting to note as Angus Cameron (2008) does that even virtual universes such as Second Life are based on land ownership principled copied from the politico-economic system of the “real” world.

the concept of a virtual residence to tackle concerns about privacy, security and identity<sup>3</sup>.

Belonging, whether offline or online, is performed through everyday practices. Therefore notions of citizenship need to be linked to the everyday, the individualised, embodied experience of social/political issues. Citizenship is thus no longer a status that is granted but a practice that is performed. Top-down-initiated participatory regimes will falter as more and more "community" activists will chose an exit-action strategy (Davies, 2007) and build their own stages and public spheres – both offline and online – for engagement and action.

*Accessibility matters – social and cultural capital becomes digital capital and vice versa*

Communities and engagement are both based on sharing of, and access to, information. Future technological developments open up a range of avenues, eg the ubiquitous access to information via ambient intelligent systems. The question remains, however, whether the fact that access can be limited to certain groups of people on the basis of their membership of the information-"owning" (producing) institution or their access to the technology is qualitatively different to mechanisms of distinction and exclusion available and practised now. FreshMinds (2008) argue that the digital divide between those who are confident and motivated to use digital technologies and those who are not is deepened despite being narrowed. Although there are fewer people who are excluded, those who are, are so on a deeper level. This also applies to the idea that communities can become the basis of participation. Therefore, engagement is based on information and the access to information. "In the future, people will be able to leave virtual yellow post-it stickers where they want to. The only difference is in the visibility; they may be seen by everybody or only those who are allowed or only those who are able to see them" (Beslay and Hakkala, 2007, p75). This highlights the importance of equal access to technology and the necessary skills and confidence.

## **Surprises**

Discussions of residence as the basis of citizenship and political engagement have neglected the class dimension. Little has been said about the geometries of power and social, economic and cultural constraints in building multiple identities and citizenships, especially for young people. There is a need to bring this dimension into any discussion of belonging and paths to citizen engagement. Class remains one of the determining factors of the embodied experience of the everyday and especially manifest in the places we live in. It therefore also remains a determining factor in the social relationships and communities that individuals form.

## **Predictions: possible – plausible – preferable futures**

In the future, digital technologies will be part of everyday life, more so than now. From a dystopian perspective then, if the current importance of consumption as dominant mode of expression is combined with the proliferation of citizenships which are based locally but can also be exercised through digital technologies, then there could be a market for online political engagement and expression. Multiple identities and citizenships can then also mean a proliferation of interest groups which cater for ever more extremist tastes and interests. A more positive view would see a growth in political awareness and literacy through a sense of global citizenship. This would lead to mass grassroots mobilisation for global issues such as the environment, poverty, and human rights as digital technologies make the actual embodied experience of these issues accessible for everyone, even the privileged middle class in Western democracies.

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3 The scenario painted by them is very much reminiscent of Marge Piercy's *He, She, It* (1991).

Access to digital technologies is dependent on confidence, skill and dispositions. It is therefore plausible that cultural capital will become "digital capital." Skill refers here not only to digital literacy but also to the ability to live in a globalised world and deal with mobility and flexibility. Digital technologies will enable multiple identities as several places "happen" at the same time and several time periods can "happen" at the same time with information about past, present and future on constant display.

Access to the past provides a basis for a shared awareness of one place and thus "community", awareness of the relevance of everyday actions for a potential future can mobilise social action, and combining this sense of shared issues and their impact on a shared future can enhance the sense of the "global imagined community." The response can be in self-reflective individuals building their own DIY biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) which are expressed in socio-spatial practices characterised by mobility and thus enabling openness and creating opportunities to deal with the o/Other rather than constructing imaginary boundaries, be that virtually or materially. Technology can help prepare for change and movement but can also provide a much needed anchor in a de-territorialised world and biography. The availability of multiple citizenships and the increased engagement through everyday practices and experiences facilitated through technology then also means a greater sense of ownership in more and more personalised campaigns around social issues.

Before such a normalisation of ICTs in everyday practices is achieved, however, it is of utmost importance to close the digital divide and motivate non-users to engage with digital technologies and promote transcending the offline/online dichotomy. Only when those who are perceived to be excluded and who perceive themselves to be excluded from the digitised world can be motivated and access for them can be facilitated can digital technologies contribute to dealing with social inequalities. Without the necessary (state-led) support to develop skills and confidence to deal with the opportunities and the threats of the risk society, then young people might "stay put" which will pose significant risks for personal biographies in locations where work and training opportunities are scarce (cf Hörschelmann and Schäfer, 2005).

The role of education is then the provision of skills and abilities to deal with plurality, ambiguity and the adaptability to change (Springate, 2004). This means training for collaborative environments, understanding of complex systems and the encouragement of creativity. Society is faced with the consequences of complex political-economic systems and everyone, not only young people, needs to be prepared to be willing to learn about, understand and engage with them to enable change. The citizens of the future need to be able to navigate fluid material and virtual worlds and therefore need to be adaptable, familiar with complex systems and creative in their creation of engaging and engaged places.

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