



Personal appropriation of ICT by immigrants: capabilities, social capital and mediation

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents some reflections on the personal appropriation of ICT by immigrants, inspired by an empirical study with international immigrants in Spain²⁶. Our research brief was to explore the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to promote cultural diversity in the European Union (EU). In particular, our team focused on the case study of the country of Spain, while other teams considered France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Within this framework, our main concerns have been with the social and economic participation of immigrant and ethnic minorities (IEMs) and their integration. To this end, we considered three communities in two autonomous regions of Spain: the first case in Catalonia, of Romanians and Bulgarians living in Barcelona and the second and third in Andalucía, of Ecuadorians in Vera, Almeria province and of Argentineans and other foreign nationals residing in Tarifa, Cadiz province.

Our first task was to explore the supply and demand of ICT services amongst our communities of interest and next we compiled a case study report for the country. With respect to the evolution of our research, while the use of locutorios by Ecuadorians in Vera can be compared to that of online resources by Romanians and Bulgarians in Barcelona and demonstrates some convergence, the case study of Tarifa has diverged. In the first two cases, the research methodology is similar and the focus of interest occurs at the communal level, whereas in the third case, the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews places its focus at the personal level. A brief note on Tarifa may help to contextualize the current chapter.

The fieldwork with immigrants from different nationalities has led us to realize the importance of individual similarities and differences in coming to appropriate ICT. Both the individual/personal and social/communal axes of analysis appear necessary to address our overarching topic adequately, especially since ICT is simultaneously

²⁶ This chapter is based in the project “The potential of ICT for the promotion of cultural diversity: the case of socio-economic integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities” (SI-024/08). Tender n° J04/18/2007. Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, European Commission’s Joint Research Centre. (Ver Maya-Jariego, 2009; y Maya-Jariego et al., 2009).

a social and a personal phenomenon. Hence, our ‘microscopic’ findings and proposals based on inter-personal comparisons serve to complement our more ‘macroscopic’ inter-communal, societal investigations.

Given that within the umbrella of ICT and the promotion of cultural diversity we are targeting the economic and social *participation* and *integration* of immigrants, we felt it necessary to consider approaches to well-being. In this regard, we attend to Amartya Sen, who criticizes the splitting off of economics from ethics. He notes that in ‘ethical calculation’, we can conceive of the person dually, as follows:

“in terms of agency, recognizing and respecting his or her ability to form goals, commitments, values, etc., and we can also see the person in terms of well-being, which too calls for attention...once that straitjacket of self-interested motivation is removed, it becomes possible to give recognition to the indisputable fact that the person’s agency can well be geared to considerations not covered- or at least not fully covered- by his or her own well-being.”²⁷

This statement is highly significant, for with it Sen diagnoses a major problem with mainstream ‘utility-based welfarist economics’, namely, that it ignores agency.²⁸ Given that agency and well-being are interdependent, Sen will opt to focus on the former.

In recognizing the importance of this achievement, Deneulin et al. observe that “the underlining philosophical intuition behind Sen’s work is that the standard of living lies in the living and not in the consumption of commodities.”²⁹ The result is his “capability approach” to human well-being, which Martha Nussbaum has since developed by itemizing a normative list of so-called “central human capabilities” and which we shall now gloss.

²⁷ 1987. On ethics and economics. 41.

²⁸ Sen, 1987:43-45.

²⁹ Deneulin et al, 2006:1.

2. PARTICIPATION: THROUGH THE LENSE OF AMARTYA SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH

In *Development as Freedom*, Sen notes that economic unfreedom “can breed social unfreedom, just as social or political unfreedom can also foster economic unfreedom.”³⁰ This would seem to be the case especially amongst communities of newly arrived immigrants or ethnic minorities, who are not only restricted in their freedoms but also subjected to poverty, that is, poverty according to Sen’s own definition, namely, “a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely...low income.”³¹

In the light of poverty as “unfreedom”, then, Sen chooses to focus on freedom, the exercise of which, “is mediated by values, but the values in turn are influenced by public discussions and social interactions, which are themselves influenced by participatory freedoms.”³² It is for this reason that he promotes the use of public policy to advance human capabilities, which he sees as inter-related, instrumental freedoms. Likewise, he advocates the use of participatory capabilities by the public to direct public policy. This dialectical relationship is regarded as central to his now-famous ‘capability approach’, which Sabina Alkire sums as follows: “social arrangements should be evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve objectives they value” and moreover, “policy-makers should aim to equalize the capability each has to enjoy valuable activities and states of being.”³³

In terms of the capability approach itself, Sen targets ‘functionings’, namely, the various things a person values being or doing. He regards these as more appropriate to assess social welfare than utility since, following Aristotle, he claims that functionings are constitutive of personal being.³⁴ An exclusive focus on functionings is counterproductive, however, as Alkire notes, because it does not consider freedom, or agency, as Sen conceives of it. Hence,

³⁰ Sen, 1999:8.

³¹ Sen, 1999:20.

³² Sen, 1999:9.

³³ Alkire, 2002. Valuing freedoms. 4.

³⁴ Alkire, 2002:5.

capabilities connote the freedom of a person or a group to promote or achieve valuable functionings.

Capability can therefore be defined as, “a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another”, that is to say, the freedom to choose between different possibilities. Here, freedom refers to the “real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value”;³⁵ in other words a life of volition rather than duress. As Nicolas Savogsky observes, “the freedom to enjoy primary goods is empty unless there is a real opportunity to convert that freedom into well-being. This is precisely why Sen’s preferred term is ‘capabilities’ rather than, say, freedoms or rights.”³⁶ Akire notes that “at an operational level the single most important function of the capability approach is to make *explicit* some *implicit* assumptions in the basic needs approach about the value of choice and participation (and the disvalue of coercion).”³⁷ Furthermore, it “requires that changes in basic needs be valued with respect to the freedom of the same people whose needs are being affected.”³⁸

One of the truly valuable innovations of the capability approach appears to be that it allows alternative possibilities to become plausible reality since, as Sen recognizes, “extreme inequalities in matters of race, gender, and class often survive on the implicit understanding...that “there is no alternative.”³⁹ Hence the aim becomes to provide alternatives, namely, the affordance of different individual life possibilities, despite the fact that in reality, “the capabilities that a person does actually have (and not merely theoretically enjoys) depend on the nature of social arrangements, which can be crucial for individual freedoms. And there the state and the society cannot escape responsibility.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Alkire, 2002:6; Sen 1992:40.

³⁶ Sagovsky, 2006:70.

³⁷ Alkire, 2002:170. italics in original.

³⁸ Alkire, 2002:172.

³⁹ Sen, 1999:287.

⁴⁰ Sen, 1999:288.

3. CAPABILITY APPROACH: ASSESSMENT AND CRITIQUE

The capability approach has much explanatory power, both in theoretical and applied terms. Bonvin and Farvaque see it as, “a framework that may be used, both in practice and normatively, to assess issues related to living standards, poverty, quality of life, well-being, or agency. It encompasses both the assessment of individual situations, trajectories and potentialities, and the efficiency and fairness of social structures and arrangements. Its potential reach is thus very large.”⁴¹

Indeed, the CA has already started to show its profound influence. Deneulin et al note that within two decades it has become, “a hugely influential theory for international social justice.”⁴² It shows itself in the annual Human Development Report, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1990, which focuses on the furtherance of capabilities at national and regional levels, with more than 120 such reports having been commissioned by various social/developmental organizations.

Despite these successes, however, the question put to Sen and colleagues is: “does the capability approach address sufficiently the extent to which lack of human flourishing can be attributed to unjust social, political and economic structures and can it be deployed to bring about their transformation?”⁴³ Deneulin and colleagues argue that notwithstanding its successes, this approach “overlooks two elements that are crucial to engagement with questions of structural injustice: human sociality and human fallibility. To speak about “unjust structures” is to see such structures, which are necessary expressions of human sociality, as marked by human finitude and fallibility”.⁴⁴

While Sen notes that “Individual freedom is quintessentially a social product...and there is a two-way relation between

⁴¹ Bonvin & Farvaque, 2006:123.

⁴² Deneulin et al. 2006:2.

⁴³ Deneulin et al., 2006:3.

⁴⁴ Deneulin et al., 2006:3.

social arrangements and individual freedoms”,⁴⁵ he has been criticized for not being sufficiently socially-oriented in his thinking. The need thus arises for the ‘necessary thickening’ of Sen’s approach to development with a “vision of what is lacking in human relationships.”⁴⁶ As Deneulin recognizes, “Despite the importance that the capability approach gives to the deep social relationships that link individuals together, despite the crucial role of social arrangements in the construction of individual freedoms themselves, Sen is very reluctant to approach development with a supra-individual subject.”⁴⁷

This shortcoming, as we shall see, is itself significant and requires prompt attention; this will turn out to be the case especially since the person, as we shall define and discuss her to be, is supra-individual in her constitution. Before we advance those ideas, however, we need to attend to the remaining critique of the implicit ‘individualism’ in the CA and the swing to the supposedly opposite pole: that of the social.

Sagovsky, for example, is of the opinion that, “Sen’s focus on individual human flourishing is supported by a less than adequate account of social flourishing...his thought can fruitfully be complemented by that of thinkers for whom the social matrix of individual human flourishing is something to be considered and assessed in its own right.”⁴⁸ He suggests that Sen’s formulation of capability is ‘individualistic’, namely that it refers to functionings of reasonable individual value. Moreover, as he points out, “There are, however, ‘doings and beings’- and there are reasons- which pertain more to a society than an individual and some resources which pertain only to a society, but to which an individual gets access through membership of that particular society.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Sen, 1999:31.

⁴⁶ Deneulin, 2006:33.

⁴⁷ Deneulin, 2006:35.

⁴⁸ Sagovsky, 2006:63.

⁴⁹ Sagovsky, 2006:76.

Bearing this in mind, Sagovsky calls for an ‘assessment’ of ‘the capability of a society’. He conceives of this as “the ability of that society to sustain the institutions and practices which make for individual flourishing”, concluding that “the necessary, dialogical critique of unjust structures can usefully be seen as an exercise not only of individual but also of ‘social capability’.”⁵⁰

If we attend to the deficit of the CA in the social domain, of course it becomes apparent that the social context requires attention, both in terms of relations and structures, which combine to form the matrix in which individual human actors live. For this reason, an explosion of interest occurred in the social capital approach during the new millennium, especially as Robert Putnam popularized it. This approach too requires some glossing if we are to tackle effectively the issue at hand.

4. SOCIAL CAPITAL: ROBERT PUTNAM AND DECLINING COMMUNITY

Putnam is concerned with what he considers to be the relatively recent decline in ‘community bonds’ in the USA, especially given that he prides American society for being a participatory democracy.⁵¹ In an attempt to analyse this phenomenon, he turns to social capital and proposes that its core idea is as follows: “social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups.”⁵² Accordingly, he defines social capital as “connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue’ [which] ...is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Sagovsky, 2006:78.

⁵¹ See Putnam, 2000:24.

⁵² Putnam, 2000:19.

⁵³ Putnam, 2000:19.

There are problems with Putnam's overarching approach, however. Mclean et al. question "the viability of Putnam's understanding of forces affecting civic engagement and the role of the individual in the democratic state, suggesting that his discussion of social capital is theoretically deficient on many fronts." Their consensus, however, is that "civic engagement in America has declined and that there is reason to be concerned."⁵⁴ Given Putnam's own interpretation of social capital as being used towards individually advantageous ends, manipulatively or not, he seems to stray, paradoxically, from the domain of the *social* in social capital to an individualistic perspective.

This interpretation appears to be far removed the actual context of his original fieldwork observations undertaken in the Mediterranean, in which communities the social relations served both a communal and personal purpose. In this regard, there are perhaps other, more appealing definitions of social capital. Pierre Bourdieu, for one, 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."⁵⁵

Huysman and Wulf, building onto this definition, extend it helpfully as follows: "Social capital refers to network ties of goodwill, mutual support, shared language, shared norms, social trust, and a sense of mutual obligation that people can derive value from. It is understood as the glue that holds together social aggregates such as networks of personal relationships, communities, regions, or even whole nations."⁵⁶

They make the very valid point that social capital refers to "the value derived from being a member of a society or community. By being a member, people have access to resources that are not

⁵⁴ Mclean et al. 2002. Social capital : critical perspectives on community and "Bowling alone". (S.L. McLean, D.A. Schultz & M.B. Steger. New York: New York University Press. 14.

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, 1985:248.

⁵⁶ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:1.

available to non-members.”⁵⁷ This notion is critical for our topic, since immigrant and ethnic minorities generally do not have the requisite resources upon their arrival or in the period thereafter to be held in their host community; they still need the ‘social’ glue that is required for them to adhere to their new social aggregate. For this reason, both forms of social capital are needed: bonding capital within their own communities and bridging capital with members of their new society.

It is precisely at this juncture that we can introduce ICT into the discussion; for as Putnam himself recognises, “Communication is a fundamental prerequisite for social and emotional connections... Social capital is about networks, and the Net is the network to end all networks.”⁵⁸

5. SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ICT

While several recent authors suggest that the relationship between social capital and IT is ambivalent, transforming, diminishing or supplementing social capital,⁵⁹ most researchers believe that it works complementarily, “positively influencing social capital.”⁶⁰ Indeed, it appears as if technological development and innovation are related to the changes that can be observed in the socialisation patterns of human persons. These changes in turn call for the need to devise fresh conceptions of community.

Given emergent technologies, contemporary socialising is no longer bound to physical neighbourhoods, leading Quan-Haase & Wellman to suggest that “useful approaches define community not in terms of locality but as social networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity.”⁶¹ They argue that “transformations in the

⁵⁷ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:1.

⁵⁸ Putnam, 2000:170.

⁵⁹ Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:116.

⁶⁰ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:8.

⁶¹ Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:115.

expression of community are related to the development and use of technologies.”⁶²

Concerning the use of ICT to sustain and enhance interpersonal well-being, Putnam notes (albeit with the respect to the conventional telephone), “many observers have theorized that the telephone fostered ‘psychological neighbourhoods’, liberating our intimate social networks from the constraints of physical space.”⁶³ Furthermore, paradoxically on his account, “the telephone seems to have had the effect of reinforcing, not transforming or replacing, existing personal networks”,⁶⁴ which seems to be a similar phenomenon to that which we are currently experiencing with the internet and mobile telephony.

Putnam, however, seems perplexed by the relationship between ICT and social capital. He puzzles over “One central question... whether ‘virtual social capital’ is itself a contradiction in terms... very few things can be said with any confidence about the connection between social capital and internet technology. One truism, however, is this: the timing of the internet explosion means that it cannot possibly be causally linked to the crumbling of social connectedness.”⁶⁵

This is clearly open to debate. First of all, many statements can be made concerning ICT and social capital. We know that these technologies enhance communication possibilities and make possible a boom in information, which usually plays out within a social context. Next, it may be in an effort to preserve or afford social connectedness, which, due to a combination of economic pressures and geographical separation, may otherwise be comprised that ICT shows its value. Hence, his ‘tougher question’, “whether that flow of information itself fosters social capital and genuine community... information needs a social context”,⁶⁶ is striking as far as for us the context is glaringly obvious.

⁶² Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:115.

⁶³ Putnam, 2000:168.

⁶⁴ Putnam, 2000:168.

⁶⁵ Putnam, 2000:170.

⁶⁶ Putnam, 2000:172.

Finally, Putnam proposes that, “social capital may turn out to be a prerequisite for, rather than a consequence of, effective computer-mediated communication.”⁶⁷ In contrast, as Quan-Haase and Wellman note that “The internet makes it necessary to redefine our understanding of what social capital is. We believe that the Internet will intensify the interpersonal transformation from “door-to-door” to “place-to-place” and individualised “person-to-person” networks.”⁶⁸

Whilst we hope for a positive transformation of interpersonal relationships, we need to remain aware of the ‘darker sides’ of social capital. Huysman and Wulf note that due to the digital divide, separating those with access from those without, “IT is able to connect people, but at the same time it contributes to depriving those who are not connected.”⁶⁹ Moreover, not all internet activity is social; besides using it to communicate, people also use it to engage in solitary or potentially isolated, individualistic activities. On the whole, however, the majority of evidence suggests that, “the internet adds on to existing patterns of communication...e-mail appears to support existing social contact, yet it does not become a substitute for phone and face-to-face communication.”⁷⁰

Quan-Haase and Wellman issue a note of caution that “not all uses of the internet are predictable. The internet may not affect social capital when it is used for one-to-one e-mail purposes, but it might affect it when used for other purposes such as virtual communities.”⁷¹ On the contrary, it seems as if ICT can be used to further social capital via the establishment and maintenance of social networks on a one-to-one basis, since it facilitates or rather mediates such contact. Accordingly, those who can access the internet have been referred to as ‘glocalised’, that is to say, “involved in both local and long-distance relationships.”⁷²

⁶⁷ Putnam, 2000:177.

⁶⁸ Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:126.

⁶⁹ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:12.

⁷⁰ Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:122.

⁷¹ Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:125.

⁷² Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004:120.

6. QUESTIONING RESEARCH APPROACHES TO SOCIAL CAPITAL

In their analysis of social capital and ICT, Huysman and Wulf note that the major research activity is undertaken by “social, political, economic, or organisational scientists... although computer scientists and information system scholars are increasingly open to incorporating social science research into their discipline, and vice versa on the part of social scientists, cross-fertilization between the various research fields is still not standard practice.”⁷³ For this reason, they advocate a more profound focus on “networks within and between organisations”, which in turn “makes research into the relationship between IT and social capital even more important.”⁷⁴ While the call for inter-disciplinarity is most welcome, we also need to call for a more integrated approach that does not purely focus on the ‘social’ domain when it comes to understanding ‘social capital’. In this regard, note that Huysman and Wulf point to the fact that all the contributions to their volume on social capital and IT “share an interest in communities as the social entities in which social capital resides”; hence they call for an analysis that advances a “sociotechnical research approach”.⁷⁵ This is where one needs to intervene and ask about the pressing need to examine the personal domain, and with it, the interpersonal relations that make up the social capabilities of the community. We now need to illustrate this argument somewhat further, by referring to the approach to social capital adopted by sociologists and economists.

In making this comparison, Francois proposes, “Sociologists have long emphasized the role played by culture in facilitating economic interaction and recently economists and historians have joined in...although difficult to precisely define, the term social capital has been forwarded as a catch-all phrase to encompass the economically relevant aspects of culture.”⁷⁶ However, the difference between the sociological approach, which considers types and the economic approach, which concentrates on incentives is significant

⁷³ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:7-8.

⁷⁴ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:8.

⁷⁵ Huysman & Wulf, 2004:9.

⁷⁶ Francois, 2002. Social capital and economic development. 6.

when considering economic development. Whereas an economic approach will focus on price variation and public infrastructure, a concern with personality types aims to improve the nurturing of people, in the main through trustworthiness.⁷⁷

Francois argues that whereas the economist sees the individual as “self-regarding, opportunistic and impervious to influence”, “it is still possible to generate actions which are other-regarding, and which correspond to what many have argued is an important component of social capital, trustworthiness.”⁷⁸ However, this approach would utilize incentives, which needn’t require much deviation from the standard economic model, whereas the sociological interventions require that an emphasis is to be placed on the construction of the individual; which is a key difference. The role of psychology as a mediator in this spectrum of possibilities ought not to be underestimated.

It is to this proposal that we now turn, in order to examine the potentially important contribution that cultural psychology has to offer, specifically as based upon a Vygotskian approach to mediated learning and proximal psycho-social development.

7. THE CONTRIBUTION OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY: DEEP ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Bridget Somekh introduces cultural psychology as follows: “[it] is primarily focused on the development of mind through social interaction, following the Vygotskian concept of mediation of human actions...since the actions of individuals are always mediated by their interaction with others, the self is not a separate unique identity but a participant in the co-construction of discourses and social practices, essentially public rather than private”.⁷⁹

Vygotsky recognized the convergence of language and action in human beings as representing “the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development”, observing that from our earliest

⁷⁷ See Francois, 2002:7.

⁷⁸ Francois, 2002:13.

⁷⁹ Somekh, 2007:12.

development experiences, the child's activities pass through another person.⁸⁰ This led him to propose that our optimal development occurs only through other persons.⁸¹ But before we pursue this line of psycho-social development in relation to the topic at hand, it is necessary to expose our analytic reason for doing so. Briefly, the Vygotskian worldview fits very neatly with deeper philosophical views on social emergence and interpersonal ontology, which have been under development and integration elsewhere⁸² and which need to be introduced at this point.

In comparison with conventional 'Western' models that seek to polarise theoretical and practical emphases either on the 'individual' or on the 'social', alternative philosophies such as the sub-Saharan African *ubuntu* philosophy seek to emphasize relationality as key by synthesizing personal human relations within a communal context. The key maxim of *ubuntu* is that "a person is a person with other people".

Of course, this is not to suggest that European thought is devoid of reference to relationality; authors such as Hegel certainly have ruminated on this, albeit from a stricter 'subject'/'object' divide. Likewise, Marx, in his thinking on social being is often thought to tend towards the collective but attention to his early writings still locates this within an individualistic perspective, namely, to social *individuals*.

If, rather than considering human beings as isolated, atomised individuals, we opt for a position more aligned to *ubuntu*, namely that by our very definition as persons we 'institute', 'constitute' and sustain one another; then certain implications follow. For one, recognising that our actions influence the development and being of

⁸⁰ Lev Vygotsky, 1978:24, *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA; 1986:30. *Thought and language*. Translated and edited by A. Kozulin. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA. 30.

⁸¹ Vygotsky, 1978.

⁸² See Alain Tschudin, 1998. *Relative neocortex size and its correlates in dolphins: comparisons with humans and implications for mental evolution*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal; Tschudin, 2007. *Being in communion and becoming reconciled: social evolution, interpersonal ontology and the ethics of relationality*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Cambridge.

other persons for better or worse places us in a greater position of ethical responsibility towards the other. Lévinas has suggested that the presence of the face of another instigates “*entry into relation with me- the ethical relation*”.⁸³

The philosophical school of ‘personalism’ draws its popular inspiration from naturalistic philosophies such as *ubuntu* and assumes that “the basic impulse in a world of persons is not the isolated perception of self (*cogito*) nor the egocentric concern for self, but the communication of consciousness...we should prefer to call it the communication of existence, existence with the other. Perhaps we should say co-existence (*Mitsein*).⁸⁴

This co-existence or relationality is essential to the personalist worldview. Martin Buber, remarking on this phenomenon with respect to the basic “I-You” relation notes that, “You has no borders. Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation.”⁸⁵ This relationality is central to our being and becoming, for as he notices, “All actual life is encounter”.⁸⁶ Hence, “whoever stands in relation, participates in actuality”.⁸⁷ John Macmurray, advancing the theme of relationality, notes that, “the personal relation of persons is constitutive of personal existence; that there can be no man until there are at least two men in communication.”⁸⁸

Macmurray’s core thesis, which we adopt and extend is that “the Self is constituted by its relation to the Other; that it has its being in its relationship; and that this relationship is necessarily personal.”⁸⁹ On this reading, any discussion of human ‘agency’ cannot focus on an individual, ‘isolated agent’, since this serves as a contradiction of terms, since we exist in relation with and to one another. For

⁸³ Lévinas,1969:181.

⁸⁴ Mounier,1951.

⁸⁵ Buber,1970:55.

⁸⁶ Buber,1970:62.

⁸⁷ Buber,1970:113.

⁸⁸ Macmurray,1961:12.

⁸⁹ Macmurray,1961:17.

Murray then, the unit of personal existence is, “that we are persons not by individual right, but in virtue of our relation to one another. The personal is constituted by personal relatedness. The unit of the personal is not the ‘I’, but the ‘You and I’.”⁹⁰

If we accept that interpersonal relationality is key to our personal being, then it follows, as the analytical philosopher Robert Spaemann notes, that, “Persons have one face, through which they point themselves out as persons to one another. Persons are persons for one another. Persons are only given in the plural.”⁹¹ The personal domain then mediates between the individual and the social. To elaborate somewhat, it focuses on intersubjectivity, which is neglected both by the reduction of human being to the individual and by collectivist, totalitarian ideologies which dilute human existence to an amorphous mass.

More than being ‘enacted’, however, these relations are ‘embodied’. To explicate this concern, dialogue can serve ‘as a principle of radical otherness’ or as Bakhtin suggests, it can “sustain and think through the radical exteriority or heterogeneity of one voice with regard to any other.”⁹² The interplay of dialogue and action, however, despite having been noted elsewhere, requires more thorough attention. Bakhtin writes: “Dialogue...is not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already-made character of a person... To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end...”⁹³ As it has been noted elsewhere, “Being, as embodied relational activity, implies more than dialogue, which in the absence of action can fall into rhetoric.”⁹⁴

One further step needs to be made. If we accept the fact that our constitution as persons is deeply interpersonal, we have already

⁹⁰ Macmurray, 1961:61.

⁹¹ Spaemann, 1996:144.

⁹² De Man, 1989:109.

⁹³ Bakhtin, 1984:252.

⁹⁴ Tschudin, 2007.

moved into the philosophical territory of recognition. At its most elementary level, recognition is the “identification of any item as being itself and not anything else”;⁹⁵ as we shall see subsequently, both capabilities and rights relate to recognition and especially so in the case of immigrants as ‘other’. For now, however, suffice it to note that our philosophical detour has been necessary, precisely to recognize the meaning of human being; having done so, we can better appreciate why Vygotsky’s focus on mediated activity is so crucial.

8. DEVELOPMENT AS MEDIATED SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Given our preferred orientation towards human being as personal being, which itself is contingent upon the nature of the interpersonal relations that we share, let us return to Vygotsky’s notion of higher cognitive functions. Indeed, on his reading, these functions initially manifest themselves externally, becoming internalised through the mediation of the cultural guide (usually the mother). Through mediation, therefore, the cultural ‘neophyte’ is able to enter into the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which can also be conceived of as “the range of possibility of achievement”.⁹⁶ Bridget Somekh notes that, “The concept of development of mind through social interaction and, in particular the notion that students’ learning can be accelerated by providing support (or scaffolding, as Brunner termed it) within the ZPD, has been used extensively by innovatory programmes in education...some theorists go as far as to say that all communicative action (sign making) is a form of learning and all learning is transformative.”⁹⁷

Given this phenomenon, Somekh suggests that “Socio-cultural understandings of identity support the notion of a confluence of the individual and the group.” She follows Wenger, who proposes that: “Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so

⁹⁵ Ricoeur, 2006:1.

⁹⁶ Somekh, 2007:14.

⁹⁷ Somekh, 2007:14.

that each can be talked about in terms of the other.”⁹⁸ This sentiment combines very well with the notion of the sense of personal identity as mediating between the private and public worlds.

Now, drawing our attention back to our contemporary milieu, however, we need to probe how current life and environmental circumstances impact on our social interactions and personal identities. Somekh argues that, “The changes in the way that knowledge is produced and communicated have dramatically shifted the social role of the learner. Drawing on the ideas of Vygotsky, it is clear that learning is a product of inter-relationships between learners and adults using cultural tools (both cognitive tools and artefacts).”⁹⁹

In this regard, the key insight concerning modern technological innovation is contributed by Somekh: “how knowledge is constructed, stored, reported, accessed and used changes radically through using it (ICT) as a mediating tool in social practice.”¹⁰⁰ In the light of this assertion, she suggests that the state must enable change proactively, by stimulating learning and facilitating education. She thus follows Ridgway and McCusker (2003) by proposing that in societies undergoing technological transformation, it is critical to: “map a new cognitive agenda, since cognitive abilities valued by one culture may be ‘rendered redundant by a new technology’”.¹⁰¹

9. MAPPING A NEW COGNITIVE AGENDA WITH ICT?

Rather than perceiving ICT as a menace to our being, she argues that it allows our cognitive powers to become amplified, via an “effect with ICT”.¹⁰² In socio-cultural theory, ICT can “afford” development, especially when considered as a tool, with “latent possibilities for

⁹⁸ Somekh, 2007:16.

⁹⁹ Sometkh, 2007:32.

¹⁰⁰ Somekh, 2007:22.

¹⁰¹ Somekh, 2007:35.

¹⁰² Somekh, 2007:35.

mediating human activity.”¹⁰³ The overarching position concerning the relationship between ICT and social activity can be summarised in terms of development and capabilities, “the core insight [is] that there is the potential of expanding human capability through integrating ICT into action and co-creating new ICT-mediated practices.”¹⁰⁴

The task for the remainder of our chapter precisely will be to focus on this insight, namely, how can ICT be appropriated by persons, in our case, by immigrants, to mediate their social activity, in order to facilitate their participation and integration. In the light of our interpersonal focus, we have to note that ICT cannot serve as a substitute for personal relations. Rather, it can foster what Putnam referred to earlier in the context of the telephone as ‘psychological neighbourhoods’. The maintenance of existing relations and the fostering of new relations are critical within the context of immigrants who are often faced with radically different life circumstances away from family, friends and social networks and who are at risk of alienation and ‘culture shock’.

Hence ICT can be used to nourish and transform what Quan-Haase and Wellman have termed “person-to-person” networks”, based on shared interest, rather than dependence upon geographical proximity, thus enabling people to become ‘glocalised’, that is, able to sustain both local and distant social interactions and relationships.

Viewed from the perspective of the capability approach, the fostering of these life conditions are essential; ‘unfreedoms’ as Sen presents them, are not merely economic but social and political. As the CA promotes an interest in well-being through agency, we might consider that ICT serves precisely to provide alternatives to the status quo that there ‘is no alternative’. This appears to be true both with respect to facilitating communication and information exchanges, whether for occupational, health and safety or socialising purposes, amongst others.

¹⁰³ Somekh, 2007:12.

¹⁰⁴ Somekh, 2007:3.

In the light of our own presentation, however, we have suggested that more attention has been focused on the social domain, to the detriment of the personal. In the final part of this chapter, to further our discussion of the personal appropriation of ICT by immigrants, we need to consider the notion of integration in relation to trust and recognition, before turning to policy considerations.

10. IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Ricard Morén-Alegret notes that, “the word ‘immigration’ is often uncritically linked to ‘integration’ issues, taking for granted that those who migrate always face more problems than the rest of the population...[h]owever...migration often serves as a front for other phenomena, and social conflicts that are considered to be associated with migration often conceal more fundamental conflicts.”¹⁰⁵

In exploring the notion of integration, Morén-Alegret provides a wide variety of definitional terms, citing with approval the distinction made by Durkheim concerning the two different forms of social integration, namely mechanical solidarity, that is, the attraction of like for like and organic solidarity, that is attraction organised according to complementary differences.

As he recognises, both are necessary, as Durkheim suggested; namely organic solidarity (functional integration) is insufficient, a degree of mechanical solidarity (moral integration) is also required.¹⁰⁶ *A fortiori*, Sztompka recognises that “our world has become extremely interdependent. Within every society the differentiation and specialization of roles, functions, occupations, special interests, lifestyles, and tastes has reached immense proportions, rendering ‘organic solidarity’ in the Durkheimian sense more imperative than ever.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ricard Morén-Alegret, 2007:10. Globalisation, integration and resistance.

¹⁰⁶ Alegret, 2007:12.

¹⁰⁷ Sztompka, 1999:12.

Hence Morén-Alegret discerns three components to consider vis-à-vis the integration of social reality: social integration (integration of society), systemic integration (integration of the system) and habitat or environmental integration (integration of the habitat). Changing the emphasis to integration *in* social reality foregrounds the social whole, while the institutional and physical aspects remain in the background.¹⁰⁸

On his reading, whereas social integration is direct and based on ‘communicative action’, systemic integration is mediated by the institutional ‘field’ and depends on ‘power and instrumental action’.¹⁰⁹ Importantly, for our purposes, Alegret makes reference to Habermas’ ‘lifeworld’; conceived as supporting social and habitation integrations it is “not characterized by isolation but by being a place of socialization (thus to reach the latter, solidarity is necessary).”¹¹⁰

This statement, and especially the fragment in parentheses, is central to the argument at hand, especially since we have elsewhere defined the primary virtue of interpersonal being as solidarity.¹¹¹ Viewed from the systemic perspective, however, “the system can also foster several divisions among people in order to better colonise the lifeworld. One of such possible divisions is based on the place of origin or nationality, in other words, the creation of categories like ‘immigrant’ or ‘foreigner’.”¹¹²

Indeed, as he notes, “the concept ‘immigrant’ is a category without juridical translation. It is a demographic, geographical or socio-geographic concept which defines those persons established in a place and whose origin is in another area, region, country, state, etc.”¹¹³

The profound insight here occurs in relation to social institutions, namely that, “associations or social organizations at a given moment

¹⁰⁸ Alegret, 2007:14.

¹⁰⁹ Alegret, 2007:14.

¹¹⁰ Alegret, 2007:15.

¹¹¹ See Tschudin, 2008.

¹¹² Alegret, 2007:18.

¹¹³ Alegret, 2007:19.

and in a given place can perform in a systemic way, supporting the rule of capital or becoming safety-valve institutions, but they can also act in a social way, supporting the improvement of people's lives."¹¹⁴ Regrettably, as Alegret has observed, contemporary life tends towards the former, namely, "social life has been losing ground in social organizations in favour of systemic processes (e.g. increasing provision of services instead of mutual help among members). Associations may be used by governments to alleviate or control social problems without being directly involved."¹¹⁵

He concludes by returning to need for solidarity: "in post-fordist times, when systemic processes are boosted and social processes are weakened, mutual aid can be a way forward to improve peoples lives at a world level. From a geographical perspective, solidarity can be done locally, regionally, nationally, trans-nationally, continentally or globally (or at several scales at once), but unequal relations are a key issue to be addressed."¹¹⁶

Indeed, in reflecting on the above collection of themes concerning participation and integration, we initially suggested that the capability approach held a potentially valuable contribution, with the qualification that more attention be paid to the social dimension of its application; likewise we proposed that social capital complements this approach very well, but only when greater attention is paid to the person. Given the traditional divide in approach between the sociological focus on social and its economic counterpart on the individual, we suggested that cultural psychology, which considers the individual in society, can serve as a valuable mediator. This was argued to be the case because of the deeply interpersonal underpinnings of human existence as personal being. We then proposed that ICT can serve as a mediator of social activity and as such, can boost personal capabilities and supplement social capital.

¹¹⁴ Alegret, 2007:231.

¹¹⁵ Alegret, 2007:231.

¹¹⁶ Alegret, 2007:233.

The utility of ICT is seemingly especially important for immigrants and ethnic minorities, in the light of the challenge of integration with which they are confronted. Yet, the face of the immigrant only represents one side of the coin, while the other is that of the host society, most notably through its social institutions. For this reason, we entertained the call for greater solidarity and a boosted inter-personal relationality, during times of impersonal systemic dominance. The question that remains and which begs an answer is, how exactly might such practices come into being and be sustained? The response begins with reference to trust.

11. TRUST

Piotr Sztompka defines trust as “a bet about the future contingent actions of others”, which involves beliefs and commitment; firstly specific (anticipatory) expectations and second, commitment through action.”¹¹⁷ He suggests that trust serves six primary functions: it is an important dimension of civic culture,¹¹⁸ of civic society; and implicitly, of cultural capital; it is crucial for social capital; linked to postmaterialist values and finally, it is necessary for civilizational competence.” Hence trust is a prerequisite for political participation, entrepreneurial efforts, readiness to embrace new technologies.”¹¹⁹

As Sztompka notes, several ‘primary targets of trust’ exist. In his opinion, “The most fundamental are other persons (actors), fully-fledged individuals with whom we come into direct contact...behind all other social objects, however complex, there also stand some people, and it is the people whom we ultimately endow with trust.”¹²⁰ With reference to Japanese ‘high-trust culture’, for example, he notes that it exists in “the visibility of every individual in the life-world: in the family, at work, at leisure, and so on. To attain familiarity and visibility, a dense network of groups, communities, voluntary

¹¹⁷ Sztompka, 1999:25-26.

¹¹⁸ Sztompka, 1999:14.

¹¹⁹ Sztompka, 1999:15.

¹²⁰ Sztompla, 1999:41.

associations and friendship circles, providing opportunities for personal contacts, seems necessary.”¹²¹

Trust is identified as integral for wider community flourishing, since, amongst others, it “encourages sociability, participation with others...it increases what Emile Durkheim called the ‘moral density’ and what modern authors describe as ‘social capital’...favours the spread of communication...encourages tolerance, acceptance of strangers, recognition of cultural or political differences as legitimate...strengthens the bond of an individual with the community, contributes to feelings of identity, and generates strong collective solidarities leading to cooperation, reciprocal help, and even the readiness for sacrifice on behalf of others...transaction costs are significantly lowered and chances for cooperation increased.”¹²²

Distrust, on the other hand, “erodes social capital...closes channels of communications...mobilizes defensive attitudes...alienates and uproots an individual, expands toward interpersonal dealings as well as relations with outsiders...the transaction costs due to the necessity of constant vigilance are significantly raised and the chances of cooperation hindered.”¹²³

As Francois observes, regarding social capital, “A common feature to all positive definitions of social capital is an element of regard for others.”¹²⁴ For him, trustworthiness and social capital are synonymous, whereas trusting “does not constitute the economy’s social capital, but is rather a reflection of it.”¹²⁵ Hence, notably, if trust is the reflection of social capital, the underlying key to building up a ‘trust culture’, which Sztompka sees as “a product of history”,¹²⁶ comes through trustworthiness, or reliability. But with this turn, we have arrived back at the central significance of recognition, as the

¹²¹ Sztompka, 1999:81.

¹²² Sztompka, 1999:105.

¹²³ Sztompka, 1999:1105.

¹²⁴ Francois, 2002:9.

¹²⁵ Francois, 2002:10.

¹²⁶ Sztompka, 1999:99.

capability to make an identification of something or someone with a degree of certainty.

12. RETURNING TO RECOGNITION

In linking with our reflections on capabilities, Ricoeur arrives at the interesting ‘minimal’ definition of capability as “*the power to cause something to happen* ; it is this power that is liable to self recognition.”¹²⁷ This notion ties in well with what Sen refers to as agency or participation. For Ricoeur, the first capability is the capacity for speech, followed by the capacity for action, with the third the capacity to tell or what he terms, narrative identity. He suggests that “to a large extent, what we call personal identity is linked to this capacity and may be characterised as narrative identity...[which] relies rather on the ongoing dialectic between *idem* and *ipse* identity, between sameness and selfhood...this dialectical constitution of personal identity...claims to be recognised at the level of juridical, social and political relationships.”¹²⁸

To this, Ricoeur adds a ‘complementary hypothesis’, which is necessary to permit “the transition from self recognition to mutual recognition”. It relies on the reversal of the verb use “to recognise” from the active to the passive voice. This reversal shifts the meaning from “the claim to recognise to the need to be recognised.” Such a process requires the constant mediation of institutions to ensure stability and durability through dynamic transitions. Simultaneously, as Ricoeur notes, “the category of alterity or otherness assumes the form of reciprocity or mutuality which was lacking- or remained implicit- at the previous stage of self-recognition in terms of capabilities.”¹²⁹

Finally, in relation to alterity, he notes that there is “another dialectic than that of the *idem* and the *ipse*, the dialectic of identity confronted by otherness. The question of identity in this sense has two sides,

¹²⁷ Ricoeur, 2006:1.

¹²⁸ Ricoeur, 2006:3.

¹²⁹ Ricoeur, 2006:5.

one public, and one private. The story of a life includes interactions with others...”¹³⁰

For Ricoeur, the “small miracle of recognition” is that it resolves the “oldest enigma of the problematic of memory- that is, the present representation of something absent. Recognition is the effective resolution of this enigma of the presence of an absence, thanks to the certitude that accompanies it.”¹³¹ Interpreted with some licence, does not this also refer to trustworthiness, in the sense that I am able to rely on someone or something absent precisely because of the certainty of his or her presence?

13. FINAL NOTE

According to Hellsten “Using a capability approach as a normative ethical framework for distribution and implementation of ICT means that we need to reconsider the role of ICT in relation to what people can do with the new technology or what the technology can do for them in different cultural, political and economic settings, and geographic or environmental conditions, rather than assume that technological development has some intrinsic value.”¹³²

In this chapter we have reflected on the personal appropriation process of ICT using the concepts of capability and social capital. Then we have shown that cultural psychology serves as mediator between both approaches, interpreting then ICT as a mediator of social activity. Following this outline, we have tried to show the implications of a relational approach. These theoretical tools may help to understand the complexities of the personal appropriation of ICT by immigrants.

¹³⁰ Ricoeur, 2005. The course of recognition. 103.

¹³¹ Ricoeur, 2005:124-5.

¹³² Hellsten, (2007:4).

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