UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ICT USE IN CONNECTIVITY OF MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN WALES
AHRC CONNECTED COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

Changing nature of ‘connectivity’ within and between communities, including connectivity between communities and their broader environment and the impact of new communication technologies

Possible Approaches to Exploring Communities

Types of Community
- Lifecycle (e.g. children, adolescence, older people etc)
- Social, cultural, economic group, ethnic origin, class, religion etc
- Spatial / temporal location, neighbourhood, rural/urban etc
- Method of connection e.g. Virtual Community

Cross-cutting Themes e.g.
- Participation & self-reliance
- Regeneration
- Health & well-being
- Cohesion & diversity
- Community spaces & sustainable community environments

Connected Communities

Method / Approach to study
- Theoretical / conceptual / historical / comparative
- Systems, models, complexity
- Case studies (initiatives, neighbourhoods, cities etc)
- Intervention / experimental / action
- Sustainability assessment
- Evaluation
- Participatory & ethnographic research
- Synthesis & Data Integration

Underpinning factors e.g. infrastructure, ecosystems, services
Drivers of Change e.g. Economic (e.g. public spending, squeeze), Environmental, Population, Technological, Cultural Change, Globalisation, Political, etc
WHAT IS THE PROJECT ABOUT

A systematic review of research evidence to explore how ICTs and the ‘new’ and ‘old’ ways of using them are influencing connectivity within and among minority communities in Wales and the forms of community cultures and practices resulted.
PROJECT AIM

To gain an understanding of the impact of ICTs on changing cultures and patterns of connectivity within and between minority communities and the potential of multifaceted digital divides in constraining or shaping these forms of connectivity in Wales.
PROJECT ACTIVITIES

CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS
- Digital divides
- Community
- Connectivity
- Minority community

LITERATURE REVIEW
- Evidence
- Gaps
- Implications
- Questions

WORK TO FOLLOW
- Research review
- Methodological recommendations
- Policy recommendations
Although the term ICTs constitutes the foundation of this project, our work mainly refers to and explores the Internet.

We argue for the value of a community-based approach to digital divides so as to adequately identify their nuances and effects on connectivity of community groups and minority groups in particular.

Community and connectivity both appear in the literature as highly ambiguous and nebulous concepts.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

- ICTs provide a new focus for conceptually understanding the bridging and bonding forms of social capital and thus for fostering connectivity within and between communities.

- The concept of minority communities appears to be the subject of much debate in terms of how it is defined, discussed and researched > how do we distinguish minorities from the ‘mainstream majority’?

- Ethnicity (and related language attributes) and disability are the key parameters in examining minority communities in the project.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS: EVIDENCE

- The potential role of ICTs in the revitalisation of communities must be researched beyond any optimistic views and predictions and by considering community attributes, conditions and prospects.

- Importance of examining the role of ICTs in strengthening minority communities, enhancing their within and between ‘connectedness’ and responding to their perceived problems of social exclusion and limited social or community cohesion.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS:
EVIDENCE

- **Economic, educational/skills, psychological, cultural and political barriers** prevent minority communities from fully appropriating ICTs.

- **Limited literature base** that consistently, systematically and thoroughly discusses the dimensions, causes and effects of digital divides with regard to special or minority groups such as people with disabilities and ethnic minorities with language and other cultural attributes.

- **Ethnic minorities** who use ICTs get involved in the dual practice of bridging with the host country and bonding with the home country.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS: EVIDENCE

- Language groups can use their language online and minority languages can be revitalized through social, learning, information and multi-media software and content.

- Existence of barriers to ICT access and use by minority language groups (e.g. lack of access to resources in a group’s own language, technical problems concerning how computers and web browsers manage language scripts, training gaps etc).

- Emphasis on the problematic character of the term ‘disability’ / social construction of ‘digital disability’.

- ICTs enhance connectivity of disabled people through online support groups, disability-related networks and communication patterns which provide an escape from stigma and social isolation.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS: EVIDENCE

- The cost of purchase of adaptive technologies, negative feelings towards the use of the Internet and heightened concerns about Internet security constitute barriers for disabled people to access and advantageously use the Internet.

- Conflicting evidence regarding the significance of ethnicity, language and disability as standalone explanatory factors influencing variations in Internet access and use.

- Conflicting and insufficient evidence about the possible links of ethnicity, disability and language with socio-demographic and other population-wide barriers to digital inclusion.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS: EVIDENCE

- The literature confirms for Wales most of the arguments put forward for digital divides and connectivity of minority communities in other contexts.

- The evidence in the published literature on social and community variations in Internet take-up and its effects in the Welsh context is limited.

- Acknowledged paucity of data on digital exclusion and a lack of demographic analysis > key challenges in drawing up digital inclusion policies that support priority communities in Wales.
LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS: KEY GAPS IN THE EVIDENCE

- Need for more systematic, comprehensive, consistent, longitudinal and user- or community-grounded accounts of the use of ICTs by ethnic, language and disability minorities.

- Need for better understanding intra- and cross-community, as well as broader social and political connectedness, thus enabling us to depart from the broad notions of ‘information’, ‘communication’ and ‘networking’ when we examine the concept of ‘connectivity’.

- Survey or quantitative research prevails over qualitative evidence and ethnographic studies. More qualitative research is needed to provide more depth and understanding in the analysis of appropriation or non-appropriation of ICTs.
A systematic review of available research data on ICT adoption in Wales is required.

- It will review research examining Internet use and not ICT use broadly, while accounting for all different platforms – desktop computer, mobile phones, portable computers etc.

- Connectivity will be approached on the basis of the concept of social capital and the associated process of bonding and bridging (e.g. sociability, community engagement, political engagement, mobilisation, participation, personal development, social inclusion etc.).

- Will reflect on what quantitative and qualitative data exist.

- The research review will explore the following questions:
  - The geographical and population coverage of research;
  - The aspects of digital inclusion/exclusion tackled;
  - Participation of minority communities in research;
  - The question of community connectivity and its various facets;
  - The balance between qualitative/ethnographic and quantitative and ethnographic research;
  - Richness of data available for Wales and implications for UK-wide research; and
  - Relevance of research to policy-making, industry practices and future initiatives in this area.
LITERATURE REVIEW: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORK THAT Follows

- **‘Methodological recommendations’** paper to be produced at the end of the project.
  - The research review will make methodological recommendations so as to offer a ‘best research practice guide’ on what research is needed and what research questions to be addressed at regional and national levels.

- **‘Policy recommendations’** paper to be produced at the end of the project. This paper will:
  - draw upon the findings of the research review to summarise and reflect on issues of policy-making interest.
  - critically discuss policy initiatives regarding affordability, accessibility, usability, training and continuous support, as these appear to be some of the most pressing policy areas to bridge digital divides between minority communities and the rest of the population.
  - provide a critical review of policy initiatives in Wales in comparison to initiatives in England, Scotland and the Northern Ireland.
  - make recommendations on how policy-makers in Wales should collaborate with researchers to encourage more and better research in the future and in close communication with minority communities and their representatives in the region.
RESEARCH REVIEW: NEXT STEPS

- A sharepoint platform where **two proformas / categorisation forms** will be used to meta-analyse empirical data *(DEMONSTRATION)*.

- The sharepoint platform will go live later this week – data centrally stored and exportable into SPSS.

- A **database** is currently being formed – the team currently collecting empirical data (e.g. Living in Wales, National Wales Survey, Experian data, Consumer Focus Wales Surveys, etc.).

- Database will become available on the project website late September (when the first round of the review will be completed)