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Community Networks
And FreeNets;
The Community Informatics
Framework

Week 8

Nov 9, 2009

Early CN Development Factors

- Computer Expertise & Organizational Expertise
- Convergence of common interests in increasing access to ICT & complementary skills
- Excess computing power at universities
- Collaboration among organizations
- Library as both **Place** & Community Resource
- Missionary Zeal
- Major Grant Funding external to community (ex. US Dept Commerce-NTIA, Canada Industry & Commerce; Foundations; Industry funding)
- Critical mass needed for conferences & a professional organization

Core Services for a Community Network (Doug Schuler of SCN)

- Conviviality & Culture
- Education
- Strong Democracy
- Health & Well-Being
- Economic Equity, Opportunity, & Sustainability
- Information & Communication

Schuler's Core CN Services

Conviviality and Culture

- Forums for ethnic, religious, neighborhood interest groups
- Community Histories and Lore
- Recreation and parks information
- Arts events
- Community calendar

Education

- On-line homework help
- Forums for educators, students, and parents
- Q&A on major topics
- Distributed projects
- Pen pals
- On-line reading lists and syllabi for self-paced education

Schuler's Core CN Services

Strong Democracy

- How to contact elected officials
- E-mail to elected officials
- E-mail to government agencies
- Forums on major issues
- On-line versions of legislation, regulations, and other government information
- Community action campaigns

Health and Well-Being

- Q&A on medical information
- Information on environmental hazards in the community
- Community policing information
- Tobacco and alcohol education
- Access to health-care information
- Self-help forums

Schuler's Core CN Services

Economic Equity, Opportunity, and Sustainability

- Want ads
- Job listings
- Labor news
- Ethical investing
- Community-development projects
- Unemployed, laid-off, and striking worker discussion forums

Information and Communication

- Access to alternative news and opinion
- Media literacy campaigns
- E-mail to all Internet addresses
- Cooperation with community radio, etc.
- Access to library information and services
- Access to on-line databases
- On-line "Quick Information"
- Access to on-line periodicals, wire services

The Cleveland Free-Net Pre-Web Community Computing

- Case Western U-1984 computing power-St Silicon's –bulletin board
- Cleveland Free-Net-1986
- FN in a box: "National Public Telecomputing Netwk" 1989
- Key concepts: information & communication including free email accounts

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WELCOME TO THE...                        /\
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            !         CLEVELAND FREE-NET                 !
            !      COMMUNITY COMPUTER SYSTEM             !
            !_____!

                       brought to you by

              Case Western Reserve University
```

Free-Net Menu: A Community Metaphor in Gopher (go-for)

- [The Administration Building](#)
- [The Post Office](#) (email)
- [Public Square](#) (communication-bulletin boards)
- [The Courthouse & Government Center](#) (national, state, local—varying strength)
- [The Arts Building](#) (bulletin boards)
- [Science and Technology Center](#) (text and bulletin boards)
- [The Medical Arts Building](#) (text & bulletin boards)
- [The Schoolhouse](#) (Academy One) (isame)
- [The Community Center & Recreation Area](#) (including games & gaming)
- [The Business and Industrial Park](#)
- [The Library](#)
- [University Circle](#) (Case Western)
- [The Teleport](#) (protocols)
- The Communications Center (similar to above PO & teleport)
- USA TODAY HEADLINE NEWS

Cleveland Free-Net

- [http://ofcn.org/whois/ben/Free-Nets/ CFN/CFN_menus1.html#administration](http://ofcn.org/whois/ben/Free-Nets/CFN/CFN_menus1.html#administration)

- 1986-late 1990s

Other Early Community Network Adopters (not all survived)

- Santa Monica Public Electronic Network (city) start date: 1989
- Peoria (and other) Free-Nets Start date: early 1990s
- Seattle Community Network (1992-1994-)
- Blacksburg Community Village-Virginia Tech 1991-1993-
- National Capital FreeNet Ottawa 1992-
- Tallahassee Free Net 1993 (Collaborative-FSU Super Computing Center Tallahassee Public Library)
- La Plaza Telecommunity 1993 (NTIA, Kellogg)
- Champaign-Urbana PrairieNet (Univ of Illinois) 1993-
- Boulder Community Network (NTIA)1994
- Three Rivers Free Net 1994 (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh)

Tallahassee FL Public Library

http://www.leoncountyfl.gov/LIBRARY/

Steve Cisler: Visionary Who Connected Libns, Techies, Activists Around Community Computing

- Mentor, visionary, activist, catalyst, funder
- **Connected** those with common interests and diverse backgrounds world wide
- Aim: bring power of computing to communities
- Apple Computer—Apple Library of Tomorrow
- **First CN Conferences (1994, 1995) Ties that Bind**
- **Association for Community Networking (1995)**
- **Fostered international adoption of community computing especially in developing countries**

University of Michigan SI Community Network Initiative-1994-2000

the community connector

Search   Site Index   FAQ   About this Site

This site is **for community-serving organizations**, **funders**, **academics, and students** who are using technology to improve their local communities.

Link: http://databases.si.umich.edu/cfdocs/community/index.cfm

2001 CN CASE STUDIES

- Three Rivers Free-Net (Pittsburgh)

- CascadeLink
(Multnomah County)

- NorthStarNet
  (Chicago Suburbs—Survivor: SkokieNet)

CI Sought for Personal &Work-Related Situations

- Business
- Computer and Technical Info
- Education
- Employment Opportunities
- Financial Support
- Governmental and Civic
- Health
- Housing
- Library Services
- Local Events

- Local History & Genealogy
- Local Information
- Local News
- Organizations and Groups
- Other People
- Parenting
- Recreation and Hobbies
- Sale, Exchange, or Donation of Goods
- Social Services
- Volunteerism

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
http://www.clpgh.org

Three Rivers FreeNet
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Selected TRFN Subject Guide

- Business
- Community
- Education
- Employment
- Environment
- Government

- Health
- Non-Profit Resources
- Social Services
- Volunteer Opportunities

CascadeLink
Multnomah County Public Library

Benefits of Using CN

- Easier, increased access to hard to get and higher quality information (more comprehensive, better organized, linked to relevant sites)

- Decreased transaction costs (time, money, energy)

- Increased ability to identify trusted info

- Confidentiality protection; comfort in asking sensitive questions

- Skill and confidence building

- Employment and educational gains

- Increased knowledge and participation in community

Non-Profits & Local Gov'ts Noted Increased Ability to Exploit Info

- Groups valued organized/standardized information
- They started to link to and from other relevant resources.
- They valued unbiased, neutral sources
- They indicated the value of current information (their own and others)
- Org. leaders begin to think like librarians

Increased Effectiveness of Community Service Providers by

- Saving them time and money
- Increasing the visibility and ability to reach an expanded audience
- Fostering communication
- Helping a non-profit or local government become more responsive
- Allowing non-profits to serve their clientele more effectively

Personal, Family, Neighborhood Outcomes

- Connections made to other people and groups
- Confidentiality protection; greater comfort in asking sensitive questions
- Skill and confidence building
- Employment and educational gains
- Increased knowledge of community
- Value for family, friends, and neighborhood

Community Benefits of CNs

- Bridges built and increased social interaction across age groups among previously unconnected people and groups

- Linkages, connections, and partnership opportunities increased

- Communication among organizations increased

- Increased information sharing

- Increased trust among organizations

- Limits of geography reduced

1st & 2nd Generation of Community Networks Mostly Displaced

- Certain functions no longer needed (email-gmail, hotmail; local sales and exchanges-Craigslist)

- Hosting websites

- Training

- Other functions not fully realized (community conversations)

Readings on CNs

- Cohill & Kavanaugh

- Kubicek & Wagner

Community Informatics Basic Definition

- Community Informatics is the design and application of information and communications technologies to enable community processes and the achievement of community objectives,

- CI is concerned with the application of an interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical knowledge base to community information & technology problems

- Michael Gurstein—is a key developer of the terminology & definitions

The Dark Ages: Before Community Informatics

- Researchers like me had challenges framing and communicating our work
  - To others like ourselves
  - To relevant audiences
- Community-focused researchers had difficulty finding each other—even within UM
- University researchers had few cross-disciplinary venues
- My own 1984 book on Citizen Activists information use
- Enter Rob Kling--Social Informatics
- Community Informatics builds on Social informatics

Social Informatics--The Forerunner of Community Informatics

1996—the coiners:

- Rob Kling
- Phil Agre
- Andrew Dillon
- Brenda Dervin
- Ben Schneiderman
- Leigh Star
- Barry Wellman
- And others

Scholars were from diverse fields, including:

- information systems,
- LIS,
- anthropology,
- computer science, (HCI)
- communications,
- sociology,
- political science,
- Sci tech studies(STS).

Kling's Challenge to Researchers:

"Our job as researchers is not simply to document the various consequences of computerization, but also to theorize them." (Kling & Lamb: p. 306)

Community Informatics

- Impetus came from the community
- Cities in crisis; Digital divide
- Initiatives designed to respond to urban problems
- Experimentation with technology to respond to problems
- Development of **community networks**
- Availability of funding
- Community informatics seen by diverse scholars as a unifying concept
- [Journal of Community Informatics](#) JOCI builds interdisciplinary scholarship

CI: Interdisciplinary Framework Links Scholars & Practitioners

- Computer Science/Engineering as well as Social sciences
- Both academic disciplines & professionals
- Conferences such as those organized by Doug Schuler and others
- Journals—Like JOCI led by Michael Gurstein & Ann Bishop serve increase communication among scholars & between scholars & practitioners
- Books--e.g., Community Informatics: Enabling Communities with Information and Communications Technologies (Gurstein).
- Interdisciplinary funding opportunities
- CI Centers (University of Illinois a notable example)
- UM's Kellogg Chair in Community Informatics and SI's CI Specialization

SI Community Informatics Faculty

- Steve Jackson
- Paul Resnick
- Dan Atkins
- Tiffany Veinot
- Joan Durrance

Community Informatics Current & Former Doctoral Students

- Kate Williams (now at Illinois-ICT use)
- Erik Johnston (now at Arizona State)
- Maria Souden (has taught the CIC seminar; research now chronic illness info)
- Dana Walker (civic engagement-Fellow at Kettering)