

## Rethinking e-inclusion

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The first aim of this paper is to revisit the theoretical framework from which the notions of social inclusion/exclusion have developed. The second aim is to address four issues related to the notion of social e-inclusion, drawing on nine case studies carried out in Italy inside the European funded project SIGIS "Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society". The first of these e-inclusion issues is that it is impossible to discuss e-inclusion/exclusion in terms of digital divide without it becoming an a priori idea. The second issue is that e-inclusion is not a universal aspiration, in that all the societies automatically tend to realize in the same measure. The third is that the debate on e-inclusion/exclusion seems to lack not only a robust sociological and political vision, but additionally, an anthropological awareness which leaves wide gaps in our reading of cultural differences in this field. The fourth issue which will be addressed is that e-inclusion must be related to the notion of "administrative burden", which measures time and costs required to citizens in order to use online information and services provided by public administration. An increase in e-inclusion implies in fact an increase of administrative burden for citizens.

Key words: social inclusion, exclusion, social stratification, class, aporia, digital divide, administrative burden, SIGIS project.

### Aim and method

The aim of this paper is to provocatively discuss some premises which configure the framework in which all the debate on e-inclusion has developed. My reflections are drawn on nine case studies carried out in Italy inside the European funded project SIGIS "Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society" (Sørensen and Stewart, 2002; Lie and Sørensen, 2003; MacKeogh and Preston, 2003; Oudshoorn, Rommes, van Slooten, 2004). These case studies investigated the strategies of women's inclusion in some sectors such as the world of the press, the online health, the digitalization of the Public administration, the field of lifelong education, the new economy sector and the Tilab of Telecom Italia. The structure of the paper is the following: after discussing the rationale, I will address the question of the relationship between social inclusion and digital divide, then I will discuss the e-inclusion issue inside the dynamics between technology and society and conclude with a discussion of the imposition of an administrative burden on citizens as a result of "e-inclusion".

### Rationale

Social inclusion/exclusion is a hot topic, because in recent decades it has attracted considerable debate and scholarly work, and has attracted the attention of a variety of publics: from policy-makers to NGOs, from public administrators to scholars. The debate about social inclusion/exclusion has thus become very complex because scholars (and public figures) from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds have looked at this topic from different points of view and with different purposes and methodologies. In time, however, this debate has registered an increase in rhetoric, commonplace statements, stereotypes and so on. My purpose here is to address and discuss in a provocative way the theoretical framework to which this debate usually refers, with the aim to reconstruct shortly its development and conceptual tree. The hope here is, on one hand, to unpack rhetoric and stereotypes, and on the other hand to continue to observe what happens on the part of users and with the experimentation of ICTs in local communities.

To understand the notion of social inclusion/exclusion it is necessary to refer to the Weberian concept of social stratification. The term social stratification is usually applied to studies of any systematic inequalities between groups of people (Scott & Marshall, 2005, 639-40). This notion is crucial for the studies of the whole societies and social stability or change. Status formation and class formation represent the two opposite poles of social integration, which is the way in which people shape their social relationships. Studies on social stratification include three strands (Scott, 1996; Crompton, 1998): the first is focussed on measuring the extent to which class or status systems shape modes of social action; the second analyses class or status structures and their determinants; the third documents inequalities, as well as opportunities, and the ways in which social groups maintain or question class or status boundaries. Social stratification studies therefore address the problem of social closure by investigating on the one hand the strategies of exclusion carried out by ruling groups and on the other the strategies of self-inclusion applied by the excluded groups. In other words, social stratification deals with the issues of class and status-group formation with the purpose to understand to what extent social integration is based on social cohesion or not. Just from these few sentences we begin to understand how social stratification studies constitute the appropriate framework to analyse social inclusion and exclusion. But let us continue the excursus.

Gallino (1993, 669-672) points out important elements of the notion of social stratification, which, as we will see, are relevant to our twin concept of inclusion/exclusion. First of all, the concept of social stratification is a concept expressed spatially, like that of inclusion/exclusion which activates the idea of inside and outside. More precisely social stratification is connected to individuals' and groups' collocation which goes from the top to the bottom. The classification of social positions includes always the idea of a hierarchy, since the different social strata situate themselves in a superior or inferior position. And also the notion of inclusion/exclusion is a spatial concept which activates the idea of inside and outside. This idea of a vertical collocation of society members refers to social inequalities of power, prestige, and wealth but also of education, lifestyle, intellectual and physical capabilities. The first exhaustive analysis of this notion is due to Sorokin (1927). But in general, American sociologists have used this notion to illustrate the same inequalities which have brought European sociologists to talk, especially for Marx's influence, of class and structure of class (Lenski, 1966). There is now an increasing tendency by sociologists at international level to integrate the notion of class with that of social or class stratification. However, essential for a correct use of the notion of social stratification is the specification of properties or dimensions on the basis of which the different units are distinct in superior, middle or inferior strata.

Today, the majority of sociologists use a multidimensional criterion to measure the status in a system of social stratification. Different social stratifications have different profiles: the pyramid, for example, is typical of traditional societies while the pear or top shape is typical of industrially advanced societies. However, in each system of social stratification it is at least necessary to distinguish the rank of positions (to which different social compensations are attributed and which on the whole define the status) and the mechanisms of individuals' recruitment. Furthermore, while in 1950s and 1960s Parsons elaborated the functionalist theory of social stratification, European sociology has focused more on the role of power inside social stratification, which allows to ruling strata to increase both their physical and ideological resources and control and oblige inferior strata to suffer severe limitations on the development of the intelligence, self-esteem, life expectancy, possibilities of medical, psychiatric, juridical assistance, educational and professional opportunities, economic and political behaviour and life-style opportunities.

It was in 1975 that Randall Collins investigated the inclusion/exclusion issue, by drawing on a notion of social stratification, which took into account also the European approach. For Collins, social stratification deals with two dimensions: power and status. But it is the second dimension—that of status—that involves the notion of social inclusion/exclusion, not that of power or other material indicators such as income. While rituals of power are interactions

which are structured on the basis of the division of roles between actors who give and receive orders, especially in high scale organizations, the rituals of status, which are in a certain sense independent from those of power, are interactions that implicate the inclusion or the exclusion of some actors from the group, their centrality or marginality inside the interaction sphere, the local or cosmopolitan nature of the network of partners with whom they interact. From Collin's analysis it seems that should be understood as a mechanism connected now with the rituals which found social iniquities, but to the rituals which formalize at social level the inequalities generated elsewhere.

In general, the notions of inclusion/exclusion, as Scott & Marshall (2005, 77) point out, usually go back to the concept of social closure advanced by Max Weber and developed by the British sociologist Frank Parkin in his book *Marxism and Class Theory* (1979). The concept of social closure has been proposed as an alternative to Marxian theories of inequality that try to interpret how social inequality is generated and maintained. The Weberian notion is described as one of the strategies through which ruling classes legitimate and reproduce their life-chances and access to resources. So, it is a notion which deals with the normative level.

Later exponents of this approach have conceptualized closure as the basis of all social inequalities (including income, status, ethnicity, caste, and so on). Closure, which functions through the double mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, is deeply rooted on the power of one social group to deny access to resources to another group on the basis of principles that the ruling group tries to justify. The elaboration and imposition of criteria of inclusion and exclusion contribute, inside this approach, to explaining the reasons for inequality and the attempts at re-appropriation of resources on the part of the excluded as well strategies of legitimizing inequalities. It is evident that this closure theory is very questionable, as Raymond Murphy shows in his book *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion* (1988), since it confounds the formal level with the structured level. The construction of a social relationship based on inequality is explained only as a function of a strategy of power management, without paying any attention to the material mechanisms of the inequality generation, such as the exploitation of the labour-force. So, in the light of these approaches, It should be observed that the debate on social inclusion and exclusion during the 1980s developed alongside the deliberate removal of Marxian categories and theories from studies and research.

In particular, social exclusion has focused only on the consequences of the capitalist system as social relationship, by depicting a situation in which people suffer deprivation of resources or social links to the community or society. Then the use of the twin notions social inclusion/exclusion then spread especially in discussions of social policy in Europe. This shift of terminology from Marxian categories, such as class, capital, exploitation, to the inclusion/exclusion categories did not bring new clarity inside the debate and research about the cluster of "social problems associated with unemployment, low income, poor housing, deficient health, or social isolation" (Scott & Marshall, 2005, 204) or the social indicators of inclusion singled out by Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier and Nolan (2003) such as poverty, including its intensity and persistence, income inequality, non-monetary deprivation, low educational attainment, unemployment, joblessness, poor health, poor housing and homelessness, functional illiteracy and innumeracy, and restricted social participation. The only effect of this shift is that it has produced the ideological purification from this debate from any political and economic implications, by eliminating categories such as class struggle, social conflicts, wealth appropriation, and so on, and by eliminating any attempt to investigate the structural reasons and mechanisms at the basis of social deprivation.

Despite these consequences, the depoliticised twin concept of inclusion/exclusion was taken up by public bodies and institutions in with the veneer of humanitarian mission. Instead of feeling guilty about the real facts of exploitation and inequality, the powers-that-be became a sort of charitable missionary, engaged in the enterprise of helping weak social subjects. Ideologically, the deprived, and exploited are considered as a weak subject, depoliticized and not-organized, incapable of strategies of appropriation of the produced wealth, and responsible for their social exclusion. So, inclusion strategies conceal actually the application

to welfare of the charity logics. Instead, at the formal level the debate then developed around three strands. The first was related to the issue of human and civil rights and all the obstacles that impede people to exercise them. Inclusion/exclusion issues were treated inside the debate of civil society and the notion of citizenship. The second strand was connected with a framework of reference using Durkheimian categories and so describing social exclusion as a state of normative isolation, characterized by anomie. The third strand was related to depicting situations of marginalization, particularly in the setting of multicultural and multiethnic societies (Scott & Marshall, 2005, 639-40). It is thus not surprising that in this debate is not at all clear what social inclusion is. Is it a process? And if yes, by which powerful subjects is leaded? Or is it a social or political movement put in motion by the deprived, marginalized, poor, excluded, exploited? And in this case, which are the objectives of this movement: the appropriation of ICTs as part of the produced social wealth or the appropriation of ICTs as political instruments? Or is social inclusion a strategy? If yes, by whom is it carried out: by institutional bodies or by Public administration or by business? In these different cases what are the objectives? If social inclusion means a strategy of wealth redistribution, the approach of Scottish government is an example. Another understanding would be social inclusion understood as a final instrument of social policy with which states try to govern an increasingly unequal society.

These limits in defining what social inclusion is jeopardize the quality of many analyses and discourses about the inclusion/exclusion itself. The debate on social inclusion and exclusion has been concurrent over the last 20 years with the more recent, and growing debate about digital divide (Norris, 2001; Vehovar et al., 2005) which addresses mainly the issue of digital inclusion in the information society. The notion of 'digital divide' is defined by differences between those who have access to digital technologies, namely the internet, and those who do not (Haddon, 2004). Unfortunately, the digital divide debate is characterised by inconsistencies in the use of the concept itself of digital divide and by the lack of a widely shared definition. As Dolnicar (forthcoming) points out, "reasons for this may be attributed to the fact that the digital divide involves various technologies, different units of monitoring and is dealt with at various levels of development of a certain information and communication technology (ICT)". In addition, the development of a uniform conceptual approach is hindered by the swift changes seen in the field of ICT." This debate is moreover characterized by a heavy technological determinism and an inadequacy of the instruments of measure (Dolnicar, forthcoming).

As a consequence of the merger of the debates on social inclusion and the digital divide has emerged the debate on e-inclusion. This latter debate has inherited all the flaws and limits of the debate about social inclusion/exclusion and those related to the digital divide framework. The first immediate problem is that it is impossible to discuss inclusion/exclusion solely in terms of the digital divide, because this idea becomes an aporia, which is a problem without solution. Isolating access to ICTs from access to other fundamental resources, and isolating the picture of exclusion framework without understanding the reasons and the mechanisms producing this exclusion impedes a full picture of this phenomenon.

Another, second source of theoretical challenge in the debate about e-inclusion comes from the fact that a large majority of studies and empirical research on e-inclusion concern what are called "local communities". These two terms, community and local, also present significant conceptual problems. However, a good starting point is Gurvitch's contribution (1950), according to which community is a form of sociality which represents a medium degree of fusion, if compared with society at large. The less numerous the mass of people, the more intense is the sense of communion. From this idea derives the sense of a deeper sharing of common interests and a more relevant availability to be in agreement towards the other members of the community.

According to Putnam (2000) in the last decades, people's amount of social capital, that is the frequency and the intensity of relationships with family members, neighbours and democratic/participative structure have plummeted with the consequence that people's and community's life is impoverished. In post-modern societies the sense of social cohesion of

communities and society has been loosened. Civil society has registered a deep crisis of political movements and political parties, participation in association, social solidarity, and so on. People do not have energy for participating in civil society because of the increasing intensity and lengthening of the working day, the increase mobility which makes people loosening the relationship with the place in which they live, and several other factors. This new social order has downsized people's social capital with people who form part of the environment where they live. However, the advent of the internet did not worsen this situation, as many believe, but has perhaps represented a way to make up for this crisis of the community (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, Hampton, 2001). Local and national identity are more and more fleeting and in some cases reorienting themselves (Goggin, 2008). While until a few decades ago social cohesion was based on the sharing of a religion, of the belonging to a common story, culture, and homeland, today all this has loosened in a globalization framework. There has been a strong secularization, the value of the homeland has been weakened by the increasing feeling of being citizens of the world (mobility, tourism, media) and the sharing of the same culture has been downsized by a strong fragmentation of lifestyles, trajectories of consumption and so on.

The question is: is it to react against all this that one attempts through the ICTs to re-create a sense of community? But around which values? Is the sense of participation sufficient? For what do we associate? With which purpose and in the interest of whom?

Another issue which is very important to clarify is the question of the relationship between the design of ICTs for local communities and social inclusion. Usually local communities are still conceived of as villages or physically bounded urban neighbourhoods. So, most self-defined communities studies continue to examine patterns of social interaction in relatively geographically confined locations. This situation is what has pushed Tracey (1969) to propose to frame community studies as studies on local and social systems. Another theory to study the locale and related social practices is the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1979, 1984). The issue of e-inclusion studies and research on local communities brings to bear the question of the relationships between local communities and national communities and globalization. How many degrees of difference has a local community if compared to society? If we think that at micro level the macro level is represented, the local should not be seen as the opposite to the national, but as something which conveys the national in a minor scale. Other open issues include: what are the social indicators of community economic and social development? Who are the stakeholders? Local lobbies, ruling classes, politicians, citizens, actors, members of the community? Of course the direction of the answers designates a completely different sociological analysis. In the following section, I will analyse the problems posed by the cultural differences of social inclusion and at the end I will address the issue of the relationship between social inclusion and administrative burden.

## **Social inclusion and digital divide**

A large part of the studies on digital divide have mainly focused on physical access to computers, neglecting to consider also knowledge and skill. To start I would like to challenge the first assumption of many current studies on digital divide, that is the issue of the access. A large part of the discussion and research on the digital divide is focused on the access to the computer and the internet. This is understandable because the computer/internet is the technology which has registered more resistance at social level around the world. But this attitude is not justifiable on a scientific level where it is necessary to develop a broad scope when the issue of social inclusion/exclusion is undertaken.

Why for instance only computers and not also mobile phones, ask Fortunati & Manganelli (2002), looking at the Italian situation where a very large access and use of the mobile phone (there is in Italy more than one mobile per inhabitants) coexist with a limited access and use of the internet (around 40% of the whole population)? Mobile phones have a higher diffusion and, at the same time, an increasing connection to the internet and are also computers. Or why not other electronic media such as digital television and radio, which is very useful in society

with a low literacy level? Or why not converging technologies, trans-medial platforms, made possible by the broadband technology? This last question should absolutely become the object of a series of research at international level because the problem of the digital divide is always reconstructed at the rapid succession of innovation.

Secondly, we may ask: why should we be allowed to consider only the technical and cultural sides of the e-inclusion and not also the economic side of it, which only guarantees access to and maintenance of the technological infrastructure? For example now in Italy it is also the non-diffusion of the broadband in many places that makes for the difference in the internet access. And why we do not consider also social inclusion, understood as social capital, that is the sphere of the social relationships and contacts that one has and the capacity to socialize and maintain in time these relationships? It is in fact the development of this sphere that guarantees that the technological inclusion in the information society doesn't mean an underdevelopment of sociability.

Thirdly, inclusion in the information society is automatically seen as positive, as the *longa manus* of democracy and therefore suitable and desired. And the opposite term, technological exclusion, is automatically seen as negative, as a form of imposed de-privatization in respect to a theoretical right to be included. But these two notions are both questionable. The assumed well-being of e-inclusion should be problematized. ICTs are socio-technical systems through which strong mechanisms of labor rationalization and intensity, social discipline and control are enhanced (Callon, 1992; Latour, 1992). If we see socio-technical systems not only as instruments of social emancipation but also, as Foucault (1976) suggests, as instrument of a new social order, we would arrive to a more dynamic notion of inclusion/exclusion. A notion which takes in account the new technology as a terrain of social conflict and even struggle, mass negotiation, and so on. There are people who are not interested to the computer, because they are not convinced that it is not worth for them to invest in term of stress, fatigue and money to learn to use it and to maintain its infrastructure. There are also people who were interested but drop-out (Oudshoorn, Pinch, 2003; Katz, Rice, 2003). In all these cases, the situation might appear as exclusion, but might be also a choice, a kind of self-exclusion. So we risk seeing as victims people who are instead social antagonists or reluctant subjects. Still today in many European countries computer and internet users are still a minority (Italy, Spain, France and so on). Should we think that the majority of these populations suffer for a kind of exclusion or instead should we acknowledge that they express a choice or indifference or probably not awareness of this problem/possibility?

## **E-inclusion between technology and society**

A more dynamic vision of inclusion and exclusion was already in nuce in the analysis that Sombart (1902/27) proposed on the relation between society and technology at the beginning of the last century. It is sufficient to read again what he argued about technology, to understand that e-inclusion might not be seen as a universal aspiration that all the societies tend automatically to reach in the same measure and in the same way. The 'social thinking' and practices of each single country, argued Sombart, assimilate and elaborate technology in specific ways. In Europe, for example, where the society space presents a certain cultural homogeneity (in the sense that styles of cultural consumption go in the same direction, even if they are expressed with different intensities in the different countries), the difference and specificity are evident in the way information and communication technologies are assimilated and elaborated socially (Fortunati & Contarello, 2006; Fortunati & Manganelli, 2007). Different social and economic formations in fact put specific processes of negotiation into practice as to the quantity and quality of technology that they have decided to activate (Perterra, 2008). This negotiation begins at the moment of buying and continues throughout the whole process of adoption and use. The technology is re-invented according to the social uses that are compatible with it, and are strengthened or also limited by it, depending on the culture expressed by the single organization which put it in motion (Law, Fortunati, Yang, 2006). It is however quite difficult to understand from a sociological point of view the

"strong" variables that create differences between countries, especially since the scenario often appears not only complex but even contradictory. But a good point of start to understand the relationship between a specific society and the technology is to observe what people do and to understand what e-actors are telling us with their behaviour. There is evidence that large sections of populations express a very strong resistance to the internet penetration in the everyday life. This resistance is dictated by the recognition, rightly or wrongly, that the internet is perceived not as a thing that answers their interests or purposes.

## Social inclusion and cultural differences

The debate on inclusion/exclusion risks being weak because it not only lacks a robust sociological and political vision, but it also lacks a familiarity with anthropology, which result in a wide gap in our reading of cultural differences.

Let us continue with the discussion of access to ICTs. In the digital divide literature, the problem of ICT assess is generally approached with political naïveté, since interpretation of international statistics about ICT spread corresponds more to the economic viewpoint of the telecommunications companies than an authentic scientific point of view. In fact, with respect to digital inclusion, statistics are interpreted as indicating a kind of objective index of the advanced nature of the various countries (the higher up they are on the list) or of their backwardness (the lower down they are found). The 100% spread of a means of communication indicates in this case the most advanced situation (total e-inclusion), towards which all countries are supposed automatically to tend. The lower the percentage in a given country, the more backward that country is considered (high e-exclusion). The ideal country, the model to imitate, is that which has the highest penetration rate of each ICT. This vision is then re-articulated inside each single country. Those geographical and social areas that are better equipped with ICTs become the more advanced ones, the more inclusive, whereas the areas that are less so are considered the more backward. This approach, which has nothing usually to do with any concrete reference to the uses and benefits of such technologies, has at least three important drawbacks: 1) a strong 'technological determinism', in the sense that it is the various societies that have to adapt to the pattern of a 100% spread of ICTs; 2) the drawing up of a list based on value judgments between different cultures, rather than developing an approach that is really inter-cultural; 3) a correlation that is still a long way from having been scientifically demonstrated between the degree of ICT use and the increase in social productivity.

With the perspective of the *first point* we come to think that it is not technology that does not fully respond to the needs of a given society or social group, but rather this or that country or social group that has not adapted or is behind, if they appear to be disinterested in a technology. This approach risks widening the gap between rich and poor countries: even if for rich countries investing in the use of ICTs may be relatively easy, forcing developing countries to emulate rich countries and invest in technologies that may turn out to be not so urgent may as a consequence to subtract precious resources which could have been used for more urgent or strategic purposes.

As for the *second point* - the fixation of a merit list between countries--if we accept this vision (which actually conceals the reality of things and impoverishes the debate), we run the risk of being dissatisfied with the delay of our own country or the social class or group to which we belong (gender, generation, etc.) in respect to technological development. We feel like misfits or inferior, when we should instead consider that each country, each community and each social group will always find its own path towards technology. Models that are valid for everyone do not exist, for the very reason that each culture, each society, negotiates the quantity of technology that it needs, in the same way as it decides which technology it needs most, starting from the specific environmental, social and productive conditions in which it lives (Horst & Miller, 2006; Donner, 2008; Barendregt, 2008). There is also reason to believe that this negotiation is only very partially controllable, predictable and manageable at a political level.

Policy can, it is true, act towards citizen, promoting for example information literacy or propelling the purchase of computers, but only up to a certain point, as no one individual can be forced to use a technology, or use one rather than another. It is rather like the situation of the language: the language, like the technology, is the result of continuous negotiation, collective and free at a social level, in this case, between speakers. It is true, we can advise people not to use Anglicisms, as has been done in France, we can suggest that sexist and racist terms should not be used, as has been done more or less throughout all advanced capitalistic countries. But these recommendations have not always had any great success, because political awareness can act and express itself only if it is a conquest. Like everything that lives, and a language is a living organism in the way it is exchanged, freedom is the only dimension in which it can reflect its real image, but also modify itself and change.

Furthermore, it is very difficult, as has been said, to understand the multiplicity of concrete variables (and the relationships between them) that make one technology be used rather than another, or make any one means be used a lot or little. Probably the production and social system of Italy would draw few benefits and suffer many disadvantages if it made the same sort of intensive use of computers and the Internet as for example in Scandinavian countries. To say therefore that Italy has a strong mobile phone market or that Scandinavian countries are leaders in the spread and use of computers and the Internet may be seen in a positive light by their respective citizens but does not resolve any of the problems that have been set out above.

Regarding the *third* point - that is the relation between adoption of a technology and raising the level of social productivity, results from research provide little clarity, as we already said. For example it has been seen in public administration that technological advance has, it is true, increased productivity but only when it has been accompanied by important organizational reforms. However, in this case, we cannot help wondering what was really responsible for the increase in productivity: the use of new technologies or the new organizational design?

## **Social Inclusion and administrative burden**

Policy, however, can promote many initiatives at an institutional level. Public administration, political bodies and local authorities can become a fly wheel for the informatization of society. They can provide citizen of a broad range of information and services through the internet and the mobile phone. Various initiatives have been taken: from informing citizens about traffic jams in a city to provide certificates directly online. At this time, we would like to raise a final point on the notion of "administrative burden", which measures time and costs required to citizen in order to use governments services. The informatization of public administration is often justified as a strategy both to reduce troubles for citizens in using services and to cut the costs for running public administration itself. But both of these explanations risk being false. With respect to citizens, perhaps some operations, some procedures have been simplified and speed up by means of this informatization. But are we sure that on the whole the current, electronic administrative burden is diminished? Probably the answer to this question comes from the discussion of the second aspect: even if we grant for the sake of argument that informatization has cut some costs of public administration, saving on labour-force expenses, this has happened simply moving the burden onto on citizen shoulders (Fortunati and Manganelli, 2004). In this situation, citizens are increasingly obliged to be "active in using e-services, taking part in communities, participating in public debates" and so on. How can we conceptualize this activity? We might talk of social action in Weberian sense, but maybe it would be more correct beginning to talk about "immaterial labor" in order to depict what is really going on in the sphere of the everyday life. What is at stake is not a simply question of access and capability to get self-service public administration, but the fact that people are obliged to work more and in a more isolated way from home. The further paradox is that with the taxes paid by all the citizens

public administrators are developing e-social services and information: this means that citizens without access to computers and internet are paying for their e-exclusion. This point is generating a considerable debate in digital cities networks in Italy.

## Conclusion

From the discussion developed in the rationale it has emerged that it would be extremely beneficial for the debate on e-inclusion/exclusion to be linked to theoretical analyses on social stratification and class. Second, it would be also beneficial to revise its relationship with the debate on digital divide, by expanding the research to all range of technologies, as well as to the use and the skills, and especially by including in the design of the research all the range of social indicators. Third, it would be as much beneficial to investigate the reasons and the mechanisms of social inequality, included technological inequality.

I addressed four points which seemed to me right for an urgent collective discussion and clarification: the question of the relationship between social inclusion and digital divide, the e-inclusion issue inside the dynamics between technology and society, the problems posed by the cultural differences of social inclusion and the issue of the relationship between social inclusion and administrative burden. I hope that the provocative style I used here will serve to solicit a large debate on social inclusion/exclusion. To conclude, I would like to mention another research question on this topic that would need further discussion and research: do electronic communications have a potential role in helping alleviate exclusion? And if yes, in which way they could do so?

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