

# DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION<sup>1</sup>

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*"It is a precondition for better economic performance that we create a society with greater social cohesion and less exclusion. [...] The emergence of new information and communication technologies constitutes an exceptional opportunity, provided that the risk of creating an ever-widening gap between those who have access to the new knowledge and those who do not is avoided."*<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

This paper shall present several aspects regarding a new type of exclusion and inequality that we might now identify. It refers to these phenomenon as they are the effect of new communication and information technologies. Several issues shall be tackled in this essay. The theoretical approaches coming from sociological background in what regards technical devices and their uses shall be presented as well as some approaches regarding the use of Internet as a means to enhance or diminish inequality.

The focus of our present paper is on the European dimension of this phenomenon, and especially on my home country, Romania. The issue of social inequality and the very well known term "digital divide" are key concepts in our endeavour at distinguishing between the old concept on inequality and the new one which now is treated by authorities with utmost interest and care.

We will also tackle some other aspects regarding "technological inequality", such as the sources of such inequality, which to a given extent are the same as the ones which should be resolved by national states.

Although several theoretical approaches will undoubtedly consider the use of internet and new technologies as the "holly graal" in what regards inequality, this idealistic perspective will not be presented in this paper. We will try to distance ourselves from the extremist points of view and to present an approach which is closest to the current social realities.

## The Internet - an egalitarian space?

This section of the present essay focuses on the issues of the influence of technology and its effects on its users. A special chapter is dedicated to the sources of inequality which are present in the world of the www. Although our presentation begins with some theoretical aspects regarding the Internet, they are by no means complete, and they should be considered as guidelines to the future discussion which we will continue in the future sections.

### *Theoretical approaches of the Internet*

We will present three main approaches of the Internet, which are considered to be the most significant. They are perspectives as to the use of this technical device and on its effects.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the ECSR/ICS Summer School Solidarity and Inequality: markets, states and communities, *Jonkerbosch Nijmegen*, The Netherlands, August 21-28, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Note to the Issues in the fight against poverty and social exclusion European Council*, 17 October 2000, [www.einclusion-eu.org](http://www.einclusion-eu.org)