

World Wide Webs: Crossing the Digital Divide through promotion of Public Access

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Abstract

The Information Age of the early 21st Century is in the process of undergoing dramatic processes of social transformation, which may be thought of as 'e-revolutionary' in nature and extent, brought about by the proliferation of Internet and Communications Technologies (ICTs). This involves transformation at individual, community, as well as broader society levels, as webs of connections stretch across the globe in the fast evolving Network Society.

The rapid revolution of computer mediated communications (CMCs) has significant implications for those without access, creating new divides between 'information have's and have not's'. The severe extent to which access to new communication technologies is skewed across what has become known as the Digital Divide means that the disconnected face ever greater exclusion from global information flows.

Bridging the divide to effectively extend inclusion to a greater portion of the world's citizens requires a comprehensive approach promoting 'real access' and social inclusion, which involves more than just physical access to technology. An example of a bridging initiative providing free public access to disadvantaged communities in the City of Cape Town is examined with respect to such real access criteria, to note the degree to which social transformation through ICTs can be extended across the economic and class divides underpinning the digital.