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**What's not to 'like' about the virtual agora? Social media and mechanisms of the digital divide in the context of urban planning and e-democracy in Poland**

*Draft version*

## Abstract

The rise of the social media has been hailed as a new opening for participatory and democratic processes. We would argue that socio-economic implications of the use of media in this context are of importance but cannot be overcome by information and communications technology (ICT) alone. Therefore we propose a reassessment of the issue of the digital divide. It should not be associated solely with the lack of access to the technology or limited digital literacy. As much as urban politics is concerned, the ability to use ICT effectively for achieving political objectives through social discourse becomes a more significant issue. If social network services (SNS) can be understood as an extension of real life social linkages, it can be assumed that the exclusionary mechanisms will be also at work. The use of technology, which gives a certain degree of anonymity can also be counterproductive in processes that require direct mediation. Conversely, web-based tools, when used properly, can support access to information or social interaction that is necessary for individuals to become effectively involved in urban debates. Our case study analysis of post-socialist Poland, where processes of democratization of decision-making in urban planning are still maturing and social exclusion is pronounced, is focused on the use of SNS by urban activists dealing with sustainable urban development and promoting participatory governance.

## Introduction

The steady development of ICT technologies, particularly those associated with Web 2.0 hailed by some scholars as a new opening for more participatory democracy and decision-making, has spurred a long academic debate on the topic (see Obar et al., 2012 on Advocacy 2.0). One of the major breakthroughs attributed to the ICT is the opening of new interactive channels of broadly defined communication[2] that has evolved beyond the limitations of traditional one-way distribution channels such as mass media (Castells 2007). Another important issue is a broader access to information, that in theory would allow more informed

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2 This includes both spreading of the information and influencing the opinions as well as more traditional electioneering.

decisionmaking by the citizens (Katz et al., 2001). Finally the ICT gave the potential of creating spaces for public debates, a virtual agora (Muhlberger, 2005). Not surprisingly the rise of the social media in the last decade, as a new technological step, was associated with extension of the real world debates and activities, namely the urban politics, into the virtual world. The perceived promise of new opportunities has been shadowed for almost two decades by the political debate on the unequal access to new resources[3] (Selvyn, 2004). In the world of policy, the search for equal access, transpired into programs of policy response aiming to overcome the "gap" - mostly through development of urban infrastructures, such as expanding broadband access or developing the digital literacy skills (Selvyn, 2004). Nonetheless, various scholars, examining the concept of the divide, criticized the simplicity of such approaches (see Burgelman, 2000) or lack of clarity or precision in using the term (Selvyn, 2004), calling for more sophisticated, contextualized approaches.

In our paper we are looking into  the concept of the divide in a contextualized case of contemporary urban politics in Poland and the use of new technologies. We examine the use of them to reconsider the issue of the "divide" in the context of "capacity to use" rather than the question of physical access to specific infrastructures or technologies. We also wish to extend the thinking of capacity beyond the basic digital literacy, even though it does play a role in overcoming the divide. In the paper we are focusing on the role of digital social networking (sites, applications). The question that we wish to answer is  how real-life politics permeate the world of virtual agora and to what extent the mechanisms of access and exclusion work in the virtual world. Polish case is also specific due to the recent rise of bottom-up urban activism, beyond the established party politics (Pobłocki 2010). For many of these movements internet became both the fighting ground and a promise of the better access to decision-making, through better access to the information or the use of ICT based applications (such as social networking) as the new medium. The issue however is not limited to the most active actors, but in general refers to the general practice of using the ICT for policy-making amongst those who are not the elected representatives (such as city councillors) or are not working within the city planning administration.

**Debate on the "social divide" - going beyond access to the technology, issue of "capacity to use" and the context of urban policy making**

The concept of the digital divide is problematic  from the academic point of view. The simple definition of separation between digital "haves" and "have nots" has multiple implications. Since its inception it was associated with enabling the connection  between the people and communication technology, which itself was a complex multi-variable issue (see Norris 2002, Mossberger et al. 2003). Neither was the concept of the divide as a general condition  reliable in terms of real efficacy of use of the ICT. Since then new conceptual approaches have emerged that focused on the support of better, more cost-efficient provision of other

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3    One of the first examples included oft quoted report by the US Department of Commerce and NTIA (NTIA 1999), In Poland the topic appeared in the context of national development policies in the EU 2007-2014 structural funding period. The Ministry of Digitalization and Administration commissioned reports to examine the issue of the digital divide (EFICOM, 2008) .

services for the development through ICT (Galperin 2010). Nevertheless, such approaches tend to focus on the issues that address infrastructural issues such as penetration of telephone and internet services or quality of connection. In turn, such paradigm informed a governmental policy response including various programs supporting the roll out of necessary infrastructures - broadband, phone services etc. The term "divide" understood as lack of access, informed a number of policies, aimed at the communities, which were identified as subject to marginalization. For instance, in Poland government policies targeted the disadvantaged rural communities or traditionally less developed Eastern regions with infrastructural projects (see the next section). Even within this technical approach the concept was evolving as the term ICT encompasses multiplicity of technologies (Selvyn, 2004). In that context, miniaturization and reduced prices of commonly used communication devices - laptop computers, tablets, smartphones, as well as their proliferation, necessitated the redefinition of the meaning of "digital divide". This is valid, at least in the Western context, including Poland, where deployment of the ICT was supported both by governmental policies and processes of the private market - mainly the service providers. The problems of connecting people to the net is part of the solution pointing to other questions such as real ability to use the data for the users advantage, or as Gurstein noted the difference between opportunity to access the data and the ability to put them into "effective use" (Gurnstein, 2003).

The idea of user capacities was conceptualized early in academic research (see diMaggio Hargitai 2001, Hargitai, 2002). Researchers started to consider the issues such as skills required to access and use ICT resources, pointing to both technical access and other issues such as internet use patterns, location of access and freedom to use of the medium, technical skills or existence of social support networks - that would support and encourage the use of technology (Hargitai, 2002). The increase of competences[4] amongst the citizens, through various educational projects, have became subject of EU policies[5] since 2006. Such approaches aimed at various social groups of users that due to their skills may be considered as vulnerable in terms of exclusion. The younger generations[6] would be one of the first targets of such policies as they are growing up in the societies that had easy access to ICT resources and their use is considered one of the basic skills. In Poland, similarly to other EU countries, the programmes also aimed at adults, particularly persons that were actively excluded from the use of internet resources such as older citizens (Batorski et al.) or the poor (Batorski, 2011).

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4    the term here has more general meaning. EU reports defined them as "Digital competence is the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, strategies, values and awareness that are required when using ICT and digital media to perform tasks; solve problems; communicate; manage information; collaborate; create and share content; and build knowledge effectively, efficiently, appropriately, critically, autonomously, flexibly, ethically, efficiently, appropriately, critically, creatively, autonomously, flexibly, ethically, reflectively for work, leisure, participation , learning and socialising" (Ferrari 2012:35) which really reflects the multifaceted and all-encompassing definition which in reality encompasses all aspects of "virtual" life.

5    See Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC) or recommendations of EU Digital Agenda.

6    See (Livingstone et al 2007, Livingstone et al. 2009) and in Poland (Siuda et al. 2012).

All of the policy approached, assume that the digital skills are considered to be vital in successful participation in a future civic life. From the policy standpoint both the "technical" access and the skill based approach draw from the similar premise, that the bridging the "divide" is limiting the distance to means of production of broadly defined digital economy (see Gurnstein 2003). In the urban planning and policy-making, this principle may be similar, although the specific context of the application of the ICT may reveal other patterns of exclusion from the access to information or decision-making that are specific to the planning processes. In that sense the processes of virtual participation in decision-making in order to become effective, must not only overcome the "first level" - i.e. technical and skill based divide. The participants also have to be ready to address more context-specific, non-ICT limitations that limited the participatory engagement into planning before that debate on "digital divide" existed. Primary one is associated with ability to successfully engage in the planning processes, which demands a degree of knowledge on how the system actually works. The other challenge is to overcome the political or organizational barriers that increase the distance between the citizens and decision-makers.

## ICT and bottom-up activism - cutting through the planning system or hijacking the agenda?

As stated above, the advent of ICT opened a new promise in overcoming the traditional limitations and in many respects it has become a medium used by urban activists and active residents, interested in planning processes. This is relevant since city planning is becoming subject to increased digitalization, as a drive to increase the transparency and accessibility of the planning processes. In Poland such processes included state-led initiatives to develop various forms of e-administration[7] and to enable publication of planning related data (maps, land use analysis, land registry data, planning documents) on-line, as a consequence of the EU initiatives for the open data access (INSPIRE). Development of virtual administrative infrastructures is accompanied by a fragmented growth of various planning focused web-based media. They comprise a small variety of information vortals, web pages and forums associated with planning and urban issues, that are managed by non-governmental actors. In terms of quality of information and data these elements of represented a large degree of variety, ranging from professional legal web portals that provide information on planning issues (such as Polish versions of worldwide legal services like Lexis Nexis) through local specialized vortals[8] to small webpages of local initiatives. Such projects rarely serve as an "agora" to any non-planning related communities but are used as a guidance help in navigating the system. Nonetheless, such role is important in the realities of the transition countries, such as Poland, where the planning system has been unstable and subject to frequent changes[9].

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7    This would range from basic initatives such as the legal obligation to maintain and regularly update the digital Bulletins of the Public information (BIP), databases which contain necessary information on procedures, structure and organization of the public institutions to more advanced projects such as use of digital forms in administrative procedures, such as tax e-declarations etc..

8    It is a relatively recent development, for instance regioportal.pl - one of the major vortal for regional and local planning was created in 2008, while its sister project – urbanistyka.info which was focused on local planning, urban design was launched in 2009.

9    In post-1989 planning system was subject to a number of changes, following a 1990 reform of local government the

The inefficiencies of the planning system, as well as issues connected with low access to decision-making amongst other decisions, have given rise to a number of bottom-up initiatives that mobilized around urban issues. Whilst in theory the planning system enabled participation in planning processes[10], One of the better known Polish citizen movements - MyPoznaniacy, based in Poznan started as a loose coalition of residents, urban activists and specialists that organized in response to proposed changes to city's development plan in 2007. Popular forums and the consequent the rise of social networking sites (SNS) (Schwartz 2011) also played a role in mobilizing a number of initiatives. A few years ago a number of informal groups which focused on urban aesthetics and planning issues in major cities rallied around these elements of the "virtual agora" and subsequently moved into the real world[11]. Whilst, in the reality many of such groups reminded relatively small, their remained active in making more or less successful claims in terms of planning policy. The high visibility, partially through successful media exposure as well as the deliberate digital presence became one of the tactics of choice. One of such tactics included use of Google maps apps to launch a "name and shame" campaign of mapping the places that were in a state of neglect by the residents. Other approaches included a simple documentation of the performed actions - from interpellations in planning cases to various actions - such as bottom-up projects. Mobilization and utilization of the ICT by these groups became vital in amplifying their message leading to the questions of the role of such tools in the context of divisive practices. On one hand, the new media allowed for overcoming the disproportionate access to the resources and media through ICT, thus reducing the disadvantage between the local government and the activists. On the other, this also raises the question on to which degree the ICT are generating some of the "second tier" divisions by favouring the groups that do have better skills and fluency in generating web content or are better able in maintaining an initiative in catching the attention of the virtual agora. Given the fact that the ICT became a sort of extension of the real life, issues of efficacy of such activism "on the ground", in the real world are an important limiting factor. To highlight such questions it is useful to summarize how the first and second divide was shaped in Poland and to look in detail and try to identify the divisive practices that may be characteristic to the use of the ICT by urban activists.

**The specifics of the Polish "virtual agora"**

The use of ICT in Poland has improved greatly within the last 5 years. In 2012 the share of households owning a computer reached 73.4 percent, while in 2008 it accounted for only 58.9 percent. During the same

Planning Acts changed in 1994 and 2004, with a number of additional changes. The system is currently being reviewed. The reform of 2004 resulted in decommissioning and replacement of the previous planning documents as well as introduction of new fast-track planning mechanisms, which were largely blamed for destabilization and inefficiency of the current system (see OECD 2011).

10 The 2004 Planning and Development Act included provisions for the participation in creation of planning documents.

11 Most notable examples included cases such as Forum of Development of Gdansk Agglomeration (Forum Rozwoju Aglomeracji Gdańskiej) constituted in 2009, SENS (Society of Modern and Aesthetic Szczecin) or Society of Beautification of City of Wroclaw (Towarzystwo Upiększania Miasta Wroclawia) that evolved from virtual groups of interest.

period the share of households having access to the internet increased from 47.6 percent to 70.5 (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, 2012). One of the reasons for this improvement lies in the prioritisation of ICT development by the current liberal-conservative government. This was possible mostly through the financial support of EU structural funds that were channelled into development of the access infrastructure   To accentuate this new priority,  a dedicated Ministry of Administration and Digitization of Poland was established in November 2011. The list of its main tasks included 'ICT-driven economic development' but it is also underlined that 'the effects of digitization go beyond the GDP growth; it is also about equal opportunities' (*Ministerstwo Administracji,* , 2013). Most of the government policies towards this aim were designed to target especially the disadvantaged rural communities or traditionally less developed Eastern regions with infrastructural projects. The introduced programmes focused on fostering creation of e-services, providing access to the internet for the less wealthy or disabled (identified as the groups most likely threatened by digital exclusion) and e-administration building. Furthermore, between 2007 and 2012 individual taxpayers could deduct internet-related expenses from their tax.

Evidently those increased efforts have focused almost entirely on eliminating the digital divide in the traditional sense. What the national policies do not take account of is that a part of the society has already moved on to a more advanced level in the use of the ICT, while another – most likely a vast majority – still lacks the capacity to use it. This was clearly visible when the Polish government signed the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) in 2012. A wave of civic protests showed that the younger generations of Poles are far more nested in the virtual sphere than it had appeared to the policy-makers. The most explicit manifesto uncovering this generational gap was published by Piotr Czerski in February 2012 in a local Polish newspaper and quickly spread throughout the Web (We, the Web Kids, 2013):

> 'We grew up with the Internet and on the Internet. This is what makes us different; this is what makes the crucial, although surprising from your point of view, difference: we do not 'surf' and the internet, to us is not a 'place' or 'virtual space'. The Internet to us is not something external to reality but a part of it (...). We do not use the Internet, we live on the Internet and along it. (…) The Web to us is not a technology which we had to learn and which we managed to get a grip of. The Web is a process, happening continuously and continuously transforming before our eyes; with us and through us. Technologies appear and then dissolve in the peripheries, websites are built, they bloom and then pass away, but the Web continues, because we are the Web; we, communicating with one another in a way that comes naturally to us, more intense and more efficient than ever before in the history of mankind.'

Even if the manifesto is representative only to a selected group of young, educated and socially competent citizens and even if  there are still digital divisions in the traditional sense, excluding the less priviledged members of the society (Batorski, 2011), the digital revolution in Poland is a fact. Furthermore, it has coincided with the global economic crisis and the more local crisis of representative democracy, which have

been pushing the disenchanted voters to dispense with the 'help' of the state. The recent rise of civic protests and self-organization may be thus seen as a reply to the low efficiency (or deficiency) of provision of needs by public institutions and lack of public consultation, but, at the same time, as an illustration of the discrepancy between the increasingly liberalised economic sphere and the government's withdrawal from the role of the caretaker of the common good (see Pancewicz, 2013).

The consequences are twofold. On the one hand this leads to the growing popularity of e-services and ICT applications to deal with the cumbresome bureaucracy. For instance, the number of electronic personal income tax declarations reached 12.3 millions in 2013, i.e. more than twice as many as two years before (Ministerstwo Finansów, 2013). Other data indicate a dynamic increase in the use of public e-services – while in 2009 almost half of Polish citizens aged 16-74 claimed to have never accessed public administration via internet, a year later this proportion diminished to 31 percent (*Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, 2012)[12]. On the other hand, the emerging virtual agora allows for creating networks and spreading of information beyond the mass media. A particular place in this agora is reserved for urban issues. According to Kosiewski and Przybylski (2013), debate and political action increasingly focuses on cities because of the unrestrained processes of (sub)urbanization, and emancipation of cities in terms of self-governance and independence from the nation states, as well as due to the overall socio-cultural trend towards urbanity. However, much of the debate is depoliticised, in terms of escaping symbolic politics or ideological conflicts and turning towards 'concrete narrative' based on 'concrete and real problems of urban dwellers' (Pobłocki, 2011).

Nonetheless, the participation in the Polish e-agora is to a high degree institutionalized in the form of NGOs and rarely includes individual citizens/local inhabitants. The virtual sphere is flourishing with bottom-up initiatives for e-democracy and participatory planning. Especially urban movements have quickly grasped the opportunity to dynamically develop virtual networking, which has even expanded beyond the Web. In June 2011 the 1st Congress of Urban Movements (*Kongres Ruchów Miejskich*) was organised in Poznań in order to bring together urban activists from different cities and backgrounds who, until then, had cooperated mostly through the social media. Among the main outcomes are consolidation of the activist milieu and elaboration of a common stance to the most urban burning issues, such as the need for participatory urban regeneration or promoting sustainable development. The first edition was followed by another one in Łódź a year later, which in turn resulted in a list of comments to the Framework of National Urban Policy (*Założenia Krajowej Polityki Miejskiej*), which was then sent to the Ministry of Regional Development. In between the two meetings, and after the second one, the Congress has continued as a virtual network, the number of members of a closed Facebook group reaching 325 in May 2013.

A similar real-world event, the conference Cities 2.0 (*Miasta 2.0*), took place in 2012. Its telling title is explained by the organisers as 'cities which, following the example of the internet and through the internet, are co-created by their inhabitants' (Miasta 2.0, 2013). Yet, apart from activist liveliness, such co-creation

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12  Yet, 65 percent of public e-services users were highly educated, compared to only 8 percent with primary education.

happens very slowly. The reason for this lies, *inter alia*, in insufficient social competences and the consecutive 'involuntary' exclusion. Even if the ICT tools are more and more widespread, the increasing access to them, in the conventional sense, does not necessarily mean their functional and cognitive accessibility. It is why Czepkiewicz's (2013) appeal for systemic introduction of ICT tools by local governments in order to foster civic engagement appears to be lacking the reservation that it should be accompanied by initiatives fostering actual inclusion. According to the findings presented in a report on statistics concerning digitalisation of the Polish society (*Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, 2012), where the capacity of using ICT was defined as ability to perform certain tasks[13], Poland situates itself below the EU average. For instance, in 2010 only 24 percent of people aged 16-74 represented an average level of competence, while in the whole EU this share reached 30 percent and in Slovakia 41 percent. Detailed statistics show that even though the use of public e-services has increased steadily, the vast majority of performed activities concerns such simple skills as seeking information on websites (90 percent of users) or downloading document forms (around 65 percent of users). All of these indications are far below the EU average and the differences increase with the level of advancement required for using the service. ((*Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, 2012: 71).

Furthermore, Polish ICT users face more obstacles than access to hardware and ability to use of software. A catalogue of potential weaknesses of the social media in terms of excluding practices and mechanisms contains such concerns as  age/gender/class/etc. partiality or hidden hierarchy and excessive structuralism A brief enumeration provided below should be treated not as a complete list, but rather a review of hypothetical issues that would need to undergo a further research.  It is has been elaborated through authors' participant observation of Facebook groups and pages content, complemented by excerpts of individual interviews with key actors active in the Polish urban movement scene conducted in 2012.

A considerable amount of social-media content is aimed at specific socio-demographic groups. The divisions may concern age, sex, gender or class, with the first and the last seemingly the most common. For instance, a rebellious discourse may attract younger users and at the same time discourage older ones. Likewise, the targeted social groups may be exclusively selected according to class. The founder of one of the most recognised urban movements in Poland admits that his organisation was created 'by and for members of a lower middle-class, or the "working intelligentsia", who felt their interests were at risk due to the policy-making of the local authorities' (*Individual interview with Andrzej Andrzejewski*, 2012). Even though this particular NGO's goal later developed to address a wide array of urban issues, the inclination remained quite evident.

Potential for exclusionary practices also lies in antagonistic approaches. The 'us' versus 'them' division diminishes chances for a pluralistic debate. For instance, forum discussions typically deepen the differences

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13  These included: using an internet browser, sending emails with attachments, adding poststs in chatrooms or discussion forums, using software serving for p2p exchange of files, using telephone through the internet and creating websites. Ability to perform 1 or 2 tasks was identified as low level of competence, while ability to perform 5 to 6 tasks as high.

in opinion rather than bridging them. Possible consequences are unconstructive criticism and escalating conflict between opposing standpoints. Marginalisation of pro-neoliberal NGOs during the 1ˢᵗ Congress of Urban Movements may serve as an example. NGOs opting for development of private transport infrastructure and commercialisation of city centres were ostracised by the leftist majority opting for sustainable transport systems and 'green' urban solutions. Nevertheless, some radical groups choose to be left out by themselves, as in the case of anarchists movements who refuse to engage in networking through communication via Google freeware or Facebook tools (*Individual interview with Barbara Barbórska*, 2012). When it comes to Facebook pages dedicated to social issues which are presented from a single, politicised perspective, there is a high risk of the 'agora' becoming a ping-pong table for unreflective exchange of conflicting opinions.

Direct exclusion in the social media domain takes the form of limited access to closed circuits, made up of activists who know each other in the real world and may not (easily) allow 'intruders' to join in. Especially at the initial stages of organisation formation, exclusion may be quite common. Cezary Cezarski admits that both of organisations he is a member of recruited from a social group of 'friends of friends' who have remained at the top of hierarchy (see the next section). This kind of exclusionary practices also involves self-sufficient discussion groups or networking through restricted mailing lists, even within larger activist organisations. According to Barbórska, a confinement is inevitable when an open-access mailing list becomes too long and hence 'uncontrollable' (*Individual interview*, 2012).

Many proponents of the virtual agora accentuate the horizontal quality of social media structures. Yet, hierarchies from the real world are often transferred into the digital sphere. Some leaders of urban movements struggle to keep their dominant position and in effect the vertical structures are more or less re-created. This may be justified if the increasing organisational chaos affects overall effectiveness. However, attachment to the 'real world' rules in the virtual environment, flexible by definition, is likely to provoke clashes. For example, during the 1ˢᵗ Congress of Urban Movements Barbórska did not want to agree on the formula which required all participants to be affiliated. In her opinion 'the Congress should reach out to the free electrons' since quite a big number of activists are not members of specific institutions, but are linked to several (*Individual interview*, 2012). Eventually, instead of participating on her own behalf, she officially represented one of the two NGOs she had been the most active in.

Another hindrance in using the social media as virtual agora lies in the quantity/quality of content. TLDR, an acronym quite often employed by Facebook users, standing for 'too long; didn't read', explains the problem of posts which are too long to attract or keep reader's attention. Sometimes the additional issue is formal language which may intimidate the less educated. As Andrzejewski points out, to avoid information overload and simplify communication, it is advisable to post brief texts with illustrative images and short videos. This however, in extreme may lead to shallowing of the content or excessive infotainment. 'Liking' too many pages by individual users may also result in dissipation of the information, not mentioning the reduction of

related activities to 'clicktivism' (White 2010).

Apart from the issues described above, the main question remains unresolved: Is the use of the social media by the non-governmental actors in planning as emancipatory as it is commonly thought? Emancipation in this context means overcoming the capacity divide. To rephrase the question would thus be to ask whether transposition of participatory democracy and urban planning into the virtual sphere actually leads to eliminating 'barriers to entry'  and inclusion of the 'common people'. It seems that in some cases, not only the old barriers remain, but new ones may emerge. This finding by no means should be treated as an argument for dissolution of urban initiatives in the Web. Rather, it should serve as a constructive critique and a departure for a thorough analysis of possible ways of  overcoming the barriers of the second divide.

## Conclusions

The growth of ICT has been considered as a prerequisite for the successful development. The bridging of the digital divide, a concept that transpired from the politics to practice, accompanied the debates on the effectiveness of the use of such technologies. The role of technology is not to be underestimated, yet it should be underlined  that the use of the tool is highly contextualized. In terms of planning, the ICT can act, at least in theory, as a "shortcut" through the limitations of the "real world" administration or the mechanisms of the municipal political apparatus. In terms of the political influence the open nature of the ICT gives the leverage for the marginalized voices. The other role of the systems is to act as a rallying point for activists, as theorized by Castells and tested by Polish alliances of urban movements like the KRM. Yet such attributes are ambiguous in nature. Effectiveness of such concepts will be tempered by internal workings of such groups, this issue will be embedded within the application of the ICT systems. The other limitations are built in the systems themselves, such as the issue of representativeness and validity of Web-based voices in the context of dealing with the planning system. In other words the question that should be addressed is the issue of to what extent a form of "divide"  is inescapable as the use of the ICT will be increasingly woven into the real life.

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