



What do we mean by 'providing access'?

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Regulatory Perspective focus on Internet Access

- Primarily seen as a technical and economic issue:
ensuring the widespread availability of infrastructure and access devices at a manageable cost
- Other issues such as motivation, skills etc seen as being 'beyond access' part of broader social agenda of promotion and education



Research reveals Access to be a multifaceted *social* concept

- *Access to technology*: accessible places, access to devices, quality of access;
- *Usable Access*: access to help, access to skills, access to reassurance;
- *Forms & Levels of Access*: type and range of use of access, amount of use made of access;
- *Impact of Access*: motivation to use access, access transforming everyday activities.



Suggests the need to focus on social questions

- What type of places and practices are accessible and for whom?
- What makes people want to access the internet and what puts them off?
- What enables people to learn what they can do with access?
- What types of products, services, content, activities encourage different types of use and users?



Example: Gender differences in Access broadly conceived

- In terms of **access to technology** women internet users significantly less likely to use the internet at home than men (86% v 92%), 55% of those with home broadband access are male, and terms of access are likely to vary;
- In terms **usable access** women much more concerned about receiving unpleasant emails (69% v 55%) and less likely to rate their ability as internet users as excellent (10% v 18%);
- In terms of **forms and levels of access** women were less likely than men to spend an hour a week on almost all internet activities;
- In terms of **impact of access** men communicating via email as much as women but far less by other means.

Source: Analysis of the Oxford Internet Survey, 2003



Significance of Public Access for Low Income Consumers


- Less likely to have access in own homes or flexible access in the workplace
- Less likely to be part of social networks of experienced users who can provide access and support
- May not have same motivation to explore services available which often focus on more affluent consumers and their interests
- Likely to benefit from community initiatives which support community identity and regeneration initiatives

Examples of the Diversity in Design of Public Access Sites



Differences important in terms of who gets access and on what terms





What makes a successful public access site?

- **Practices which support inclusion:** welcoming environment, ways of engaging interest ...
- **Practices which support learning:** engaging interest, building confidence, addressing concerns ...
- **Practices which support participation:** engaging interest, relating to everyday activities ...

Practices that support inclusion:

“Even if you don’t want to play on the internet you can see it from anywhere in the café ... It’s to break down that barrier of opening the door and having a cup of coffee and then having a think about it and then maybe saying I’ll have a bash at that ...”



Different inclusionary practices:

Apparently uninviting entrance but socially excluded young people brought from schools, neighbouring housing estates, adults drawn by primary health provision etc.





Shared characteristics of socially inclusive locations and practices

- Computers in an unexpected social space
- Legitimate to participate or 'lurk'
- Space 'designed' to encourage relaxed social interaction
- Mix of levels of expertise / lack of strong boundaries between expert & novice

Different practices that support learning:
formal classes unpopular, supported self-
paced learning enjoyed and most learn
through using in a social context



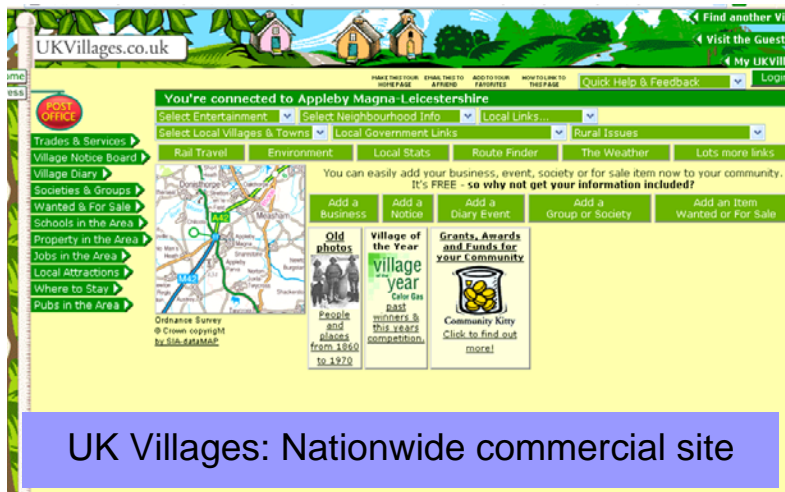
Place-based practices which support participation:

Pigeon fanciers celebrate rural broadband and community groups 'web raise'!



Virtual practices which might support participation:

A role for place-based websites?



UK Villages: Nationwide commercial site



Leicester-shire Villages: County wide Rural Partnership initiative




Community website



Achievement of different virtual practices:

Extent of community content creation

- Study of virtual participation in 65 'communities' in Leicestershire
- No developed 'community use' of UK Village sites, some advertising by micro-businesses and individuals
- Slightly more use of Leicestershire Villages but only one developed use as a community site
- 'Independent' community sites for around ¼ of places varying levels of participation, clear problems with updating
- No straightforward relationship between 'real' community activity and forms of virtual participation.



'Market' Pressures on Successful Community Providers of Access for Low Income Consumers

- Squeeze on community ventures under UK online scheme:
Problems of Project funding
Stress on accredited training
- Multiple website providers from the public and private spheres have competitive resource advantages:
Pressures on funding and other support for community sites affecting establishment & sustainability



Expanding the Scope of Regulation?

- Working with a broader view of access suggests the need to consider not just access to technology but also where and how that access is realised in practice
- Need to identify innovative places and practices which support all aspects of access - and measures of impact which reflect the value they add
- Provide revenue funding for effective community ventures based on cross-subsidies or levies
- Establish networks that can provide support and expertise between community providers, spread good practice and transfer it, where appropriate & possible, to other sectors