Decision Letter (RICS-2009-0085)

From: bl506@york.ac.uk
To: bg515@york.ac.uk
CC: 
Subject: Information, Communication and Society - Decision on Manuscript ID RICS-2009-0085

Body: 16-Jul-2009

Dear Dr Williams:

Ref: "Networked Neighbourhoods: the connected community in context" by Patrick Purcell

Our referees have now considered your paper and have recommended publication in Information, Communication and Society. We are pleased to accept your paper in its current form which will now be forwarded to the publisher for copy editing and typesetting. The reviewer comments are included at the bottom of this letter.

You will receive proofs for checking, and instructions for transfer of copyright in due course.

The publisher also requests that proofs are checked and returned within 48 hours of receipt.

Thank you for your contribution to Information, Communication and Society and we look forward to receiving further submissions from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Loader
Editor in Chief, Information, Communication and Society
bl506@york.ac.uk

Referee(s)' Comments to Author:

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Date Sent: 16-Jul-2009

File 1: * Copyright-RICS-final.pdf
"Networked Neighbourhoods: the connected community in context" by Patrick Purcell

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URL: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rics  Email: ics@tandf.co.uk

Kate Williams June 2009

To be published in *Information, Communication, Society*

Patrick Purcell (1929-2007) was an Irish academic who worked for more than 40 years on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1969 he was the first to bring a (mainframe) computer into London’s Royal College of Art; in the 1980s he helped build the MIT Media Lab and its European branch. Friends and colleagues memorialized him with great warmth in a blog,¹ appropriate for a man who got his first email account in 1973 and, it appears, never stopped wondering and experimenting and debating about how we might design and use computers. In this volume, he and others have focused on networked neighborhoods. This formulation means at the same time the social networks that shape our local communities and the computer networks put to use in local communities, and all the chapters emphasize either one or the other.

As he did in life, in this book Professor Purcell bridges several research communities. But rather than joining computing with art and design, this book joins what one author calls third generation or ubiquitous computer design with reports from social and community informatics, the latter defined as the study of technology implementations in, by, and/or for local communities.

*Networked Neighbourhoods* is the most recent edited volume to collect varied and valuable case studies on the subject of ICTs and local communities in the US, Europe, and elsewhere. It references the earlier volumes and includes several of the same writers (Day, Schuler, Rheingold, Wellman, Kavanaugh, Rosson, and Carroll), thus suggesting a consensus is taking shape across the field of community informatics as to key scholars and key ideas.

That the core texts are all edited volumes also suggests that community informatics continues to seek summations across the many valuable case studies that have been the basic methodology. One can start from the core of Purcell’s book: Chapters 10-16 report in some detail the outcome of case studies which were experiments where the technology is only temporary in use. These experiments were carried out more or less in collaboration with residents of local communities, and were mostly funded by the Information Societies and Technologies programme of the European Commission, which also initiated the book itself. Projects included, for instance, a shawl that holds audio recordings from family and friends; an everchanging screen built into park benches broadcasting quotes from local residents; a multiplayer online game where you hit a real ball against a smart wall; a café table that shares information between local people. Notably, where community collaborators became engaged in these experiments, they did not want them to end.

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¹ At [http://sunnybains.typepad.com/patrick_purcell/](http://sunnybains.typepad.com/patrick_purcell/)
Earlier chapters (2-7) summarize and theorize about the experience of local communities with some relatively more permanent technological projects that have been reported on elsewhere (among them telescentres, community networks, and the Internet itself). These chapters explore theoretical concepts—networked individualism, civic intelligence, social networks, social capital, the public sphere, connected memories, social construction among them—that the authors have found useful as they relate relatively conventional ICTs to the problem of community development. Purcell’s own chapter 1 provides a synopsis of the book with a nod to Pierre Levy (Collective Intelligence) and Manuel Castells (The Network Society).

Chapters 8 (Wellman et al) and 9 (Kavanaugh et al) shift the focus from computer technology projects introduced into local communities to computer technology as people in a given local community have adopted it into their lives. This emphasizes people in their everyday lives as active agents—the social acting on the technological rather than the other way around. These two chapters also point a way forward methodologically as scholars—and society—amass more and more experiments and experiences. They present in some detail the social science methods (samples of several hundred people, surveys, interviews) that facilitate more generalizable conclusions regarding the ideas debated across all the edited volumes mentioned above—how and where do ICTs impact our relationships and our communities, and how do our relationships and communities impact our ICT use?

It is an expensive book, but judging from worldcat.org, it can be found in libraries on several continents. Networked Neighbourhoods makes an excellent and up-to-date choice for a seminar on technology and communities and a great starting point for exploring the literature.

Kate Williams

Kate Williams is Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she co-directs the Community Informatics Research Lab. She uses social network and social capital theory to study how local communities are using ICTs, with a special focus on ethnic and/or low income urban communities, most recently in Toledo, Ohio, USA; Manchester, UK; and Chicago. She is also repurposing data from the federal Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) and the current stimulus funding, BTOP. Address: The Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 501 E. Daniel Street, Champaign, IL 61820-6211 USA. [email: katewill@illinois.edu]