Introduction to Social and Policy Implications of Communication Technologies

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This chapter delves into the far reaching socio-economic drivers and constraints of telecommunications and communications media, and hinges on a diversity of policies not just about technical access to them and pricing, but more importantly about the social and freedom-of-expression rights. After all, communications systems and services are there to serve people's interactions. Therefore this chapter presents four different aspects of telecommunications, dealing with topics largely ignored in the past and in telecommunications and media, i.e. social implications and policy aspects of broadcast media.

Section 1 on "Mobile Communications of the Needy and Poor: Affordability Indicators, European Data, and Social Tariffs" by L.-F. Pau, P. Puga, H. Chen, and Z. Kirtava, is driven by the concerns of the poor and needy, who cannot always afford to be networked, although their hunger for such technology is huge, as inclusion means survival, health, and family linkages. The section is the result of a 4 year data and information collection effort to gather data on the poor and needy in 6 European countries, their mobile communications behaviors, in relation to their socio-economic living contexts. It also provides a new indicator, with case data from 7 countries in 2006 and 2010, allowing to compare the affordability of mobile communications for the poor and needy, by determining the "poor's purchasing power parity (PPP) in wireless minutes per month". Thus, this section provides data showing the social limits of inclusion imposed by the public wireless communications providers, while mobile communications are used today by the vast majority of the world's population.

The work on "Implications of mHealth Service Deployments: A Comparison between Dissimilar European Countries" in Section 2 by F. Vannieuwenborg, Z. Kirtava, L. Lambrinos, J. Van Ooteghem, and S. Verbrugge, discusses the deployment of eHealth and in particular mHealth services for three European countries. Each country uses the same kind of services with a different emphasis. By comparing results of a reference case, tele-monitoring heart patients, the authors identify major implications for a general rollout of the service and formulate recommendations for it.

The work on "Social Communication Behaviors of Virtual Leaders" in Section 3 by D. Shwarts-Asher examines how leadership operates and structures itself inside distant teams linked by communication means. A model, with supporting results from controlled experiments, suggests that communication behaviors and styles of a leader mediate the extent of the virtuality of shared tasks in a team, and thus the team's outputs. A comparison is made with teams working face-to-face. Therefore, this section represents the effect of communications on the way social interaction and organization shape themselves.

Finally, Section 4 on "Policy Implications of Digital Television" by B. Sapio is about those factors affecting the usage of digital television-based e-Government services (especially payment services). The focus is on policies driving an adoption by a specific methodology. That set of services is coined under the term "T-government" and pilot study efforts are reported. Comparative data are supplied across several European countries. Thus, this section deals with services enabling social cohesion and citizen's rights, as being possibly distributed by the world's second mostly accessible communications media, which is television as it turns digital.