

Digitally empowered? Portuguese children and the national policies for internet inclusion

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Abstract

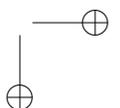
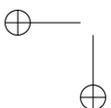
Accessing the internet more than their parents, two out of three Portuguese children and youths (9-16 years) have laptops and go online in their bedrooms while one in four use public libraries to access the internet, both values being above the European average. Summing up the national ICT policies that led to the wide availability of laptops together with the development of a public network of centers, this paper is based on two research presents profiles of Portuguese children and youth attending those centers. The analysis demonstrates their enthusiasm as internet users as well as the constraints and challenges in being empowered with informational and communicational skills.

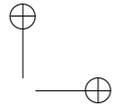
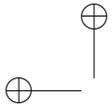
Keywords: children and the internet, public internet access, digital competencies

Children and the digital world

A framework of technology for social inclusion allows us to re-orient the focus from the gaps to be overcome by provision of equipment to that of social development to be enhanced the effective integration of ICT into communities and institutions. This kind of integration can only be achieved by attention to the wide range of physical, digital, human and social resources that meaningful access to ICT entails. (Warschauer, 2004: 14)

THE perspective of children and young people as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), exploring with ease the potential of ICT at their fingertips, is embedded in common-sense discourse and seems to have guided policies on digital access. However, considering young people as a homogeneous generation ignores the real differences between children in terms of socio-economic

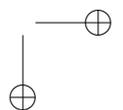
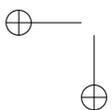


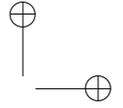
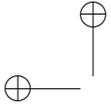


status (SES), circumstances and access to resources. This idea might even have exacerbated rather than helped to reduce inequalities resulting from increasing internet penetration.

As reflected in empirical data, while the proportion of young people who use the internet and other new technologies is higher than the older population, there are significant differences in how and why young people use these new technologies and how effectively they use them (Helsper and Eynon, 2009). Approaching the digital divide beyond mere access, DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) suggest five dimensions along which divides may exist: *technical means* (software, hardware, connectivity); *autonomy of use* (location of the access, freedom to use the medium for one's preferred activities); *use patterns* (types of use); *social support networks* (availability of others one can turn to for assistance with use, size of the networks to encourage use); and *skills* (one's ability to use the medium effectively). For Livingstone and Helsper (2007), benefits of the internet can be examined by mapping the *number* and *types* of online opportunities taken up, noting there is a significant positive correlation between the *amount* (measured in time) and the *breadth of use* (measured in range of possibilities taken up). They note that children and young people who have been online over a longer period of time and use the internet more often, take up more online opportunities than those who have gained access more recently and who lack opportunities. Middle class children take up more online opportunities than do working class children due to their greater home access and parental support (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007).

Deepening the concept of digital divide, Hargittai (2002) distinguishes a *first level*, which considers the access to digital technologies taking both ownership and use into account, and a *second level*, focused on user profiles. In fact, one cannot assume just because young people do much of something that it has positive outcomes. As Livingstone (2008) notes, while young people are more likely to use the internet as a first port of call for information this does not mean they are skilled in dealing with and critically assessing information. Immersion in technology (i.e. breadth of online activities) is an important factor, though not the only one, in understanding whether people are confident in their ICT skills and whether they use the internet for learning activities such as fact checking, training, studying for an academic degree, getting information and exploring their interests (Helsper and Eynon, 2009).



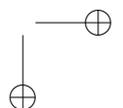
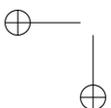


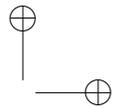
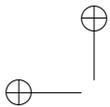
Looking at the relationship between communication skills development, critical thinking and social action and how these shape young children's evolving capacities, Hobbs et al. (2011) present an empowerment model of informal learning aggregating seven competencies. These are: *engaging* (connecting lived experience, stimulating curiosity and motivation); *locating* (finding and selecting information); *comprehending* (constructing meaning through active interpretation); *analyzing* (identifying the author, audience, purpose and point of view and examining the relationship between form and content); *evaluating* (making judgments about the value and worth of a particular image); *communicating* (composing or creating a message using the processes of brainstorming, composition and revision); and *taking action* (disseminating a message to an authentic audience for the purpose of making a difference in the world outside the classroom).

The EU Kids Online survey published in 2011¹ revealed that the most common place for children to use the computer was their home (87%), followed by school (67%), friend's home (53%) and relative's (42%). However, youth centres and public libraries not only matter as "important arenas for non-restricted, or less restricted, use than is the case in many schools and often also in private homes" (Wold, 2010: 67) but also as providing opportunities for learning digital and informational competencies, this being particularly important for those whose parents are digitally excluded and lack educational capital.

Research is scarce on children and young people's internet use in informal public spaces, possibly because these are not the main places to access the internet – however, they continue to be important, particularly in countries linked to a culture of public spaces of knowledge on which are living economic constraints. In fact, Portugal occupies the fourth position after Finland, Lithuania and Estonia). Thus, our results from the EU Kids Online survey suggest that it is worthwhile to look at these spaces due to their policies and

1. Coordinated by Sonia Livingstone and Leslie Haddon (LSE, London, UK), this survey was funded by the EC Program Safer Internet Plus and; it is focused on children's experiences of internet (access, uses, activities, risks and safety) and on parents' experiences, practices and concerns regarding their children's online risks and safety. In each of the 25 participant countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK) about 1,000 children and one of their parents were interviewed at home. More information at www.eukidsonline.net.





the ways in which they encourage children to use the internet. Portuguese children are within the European average regarding access to the internet at home and in school, but more than double in access to libraries and other public places (respectively, 25% and 12%). The aim of this paper is to explore *who* the children attending these spaces are, *why* they go, *what* they do, and *how* they do it, as well as discussing these practices by taking into account ICT policies and the empowerment these children might derive.

Paradoxes of the Portuguese digital landscape

We will start with an overview of the Portuguese context, the national ICT policies during the past few years and their subsequent social impact on families with children, based on national data and on comparative one from the EU Kids Online network.

Since the political democratization in the mid 1970s, Portugal was marked by intense social and economic changes, particularly after joining the EU in 1986 (Barreto, 1996; Viegas, 1998). However, the country presents high levels of social inequalities and low levels of educational achievements among adults, especially among the elderly. Hence, the digital technologies directed to entertainment, communication and information have affected particularly youth and young adults while for older generations' access and use remain low. The intensity of the generational digital gap, shown in Figure 1, illustrates the challenges of national policies on digital inclusion.

In 2004, the Operational Programme for the Knowledge Society and the launching of a permanent governmental agency were signs of a current national policy on internet penetration. In 2005 this strategy was enhanced by the Technological Plan, whose plan of action, *Ligar Portugal* [*Connecting Portugal*] focused on the need to draw citizens' attention to "the relevance of ICT, making it easier for them to use computers and the internet, using local mediators, wherever necessary, to combat info-exclusion"².

A key measure was to broaden access to computers and broadband in schools and at home through programs such as *E-Escolas* [*E-Schools*] and *E-Escolinhas*, the latter featuring *Magalhães*, a laptop similar to INTEL *Classmate* (minimum 1GB RAM, hard disk 160GB) targeted at children aged be-

2. See <http://www.ligarportugal.pt/> (Retrieved April 19, 2011)

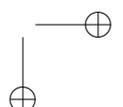
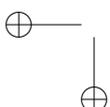
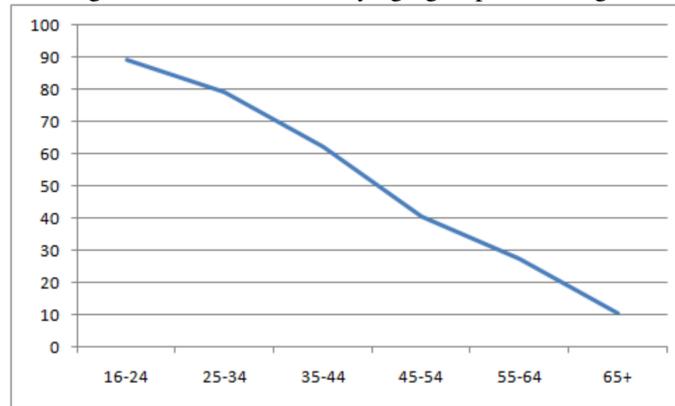


Figure 1: Internet access by age-groups in Portugal



Source: Statistics Portugal (INE), 2010

tween 6 and 11. This policy was supported by discourses on the potential of ICT for the present and future younger generations and its usefulness for education and scholarly achievement. Although some of these measures have been criticized for their economic costs, the message was very well received by parents, also confirming that the internet, unlike TV and other mass media, tends to be perceived as an inherently educational medium (Nakamura, 2004, in Clark et al., 2005).

In fact, a large proportion of parents with low levels of income and education showed their desire to provide their children with these modern resources, contrasting this opportunity with the poor conditions that these parents had experienced during their childhood. In a large number of families, *Magalhães*³ was the first computer entering the household, and it was even considered as an opportunity for all family members⁴. This globally positive parental reaction led to a democratization of the ownership of laptops among children: by

3. See <http://www.pte.gov.pt/pte/PT/index.htm> (Retrieved April 20, 2011)

4. Two examples collected from children attending libraries: while a 11 year old boy living with his mother and older sister (16) said that *Magalhães* was placed in the living room to be shared among them according to a pre-established timetable, parents of a 10 year old boy faced ergonomic difficulties when they tried to access it: "they want to learn but they aren't to use

the end of 2010, more than 1.6 million laptops had already been distributed among students, including 400,000 *Magalhães*. The impact is visible in the Portuguese data from the EU Kids Online survey: about two in three children aged between nine and 16 have a personal laptop, this distribution being led by children from low income households: 68% declare that they access the internet through their personal laptop, while among the 62% of children from high income households report accessing the internet through shared PCs and laptops.

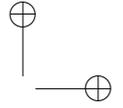
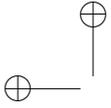
However, owning a laptop does not mean frequent usage of the internet, since online access at home implies at least a minimum cost of 15€ per month for a 2GB traffic, increasing the burden on family budgets. A consequence is that families are often terminating their contracts with the Internet Service Providers before the end of their first compulsory year and thereby their internet access at home.

Despite the public investment, there is a gap between the digital infrastructure and economic and educational conditions in which the internet can be fully enjoyed. Considering 25 European countries, in the *Networked Readiness Index* Portugal is not far from Denmark, the leader (4.4 and 5.5, respectively) in 2010. However, in the *Computer Skills Index* Portugal has a result half the value presented by leaders (0.36 to 0.64 in Denmark and Ireland), and values from *Internet Skills Index* are even lower (0.26 to 0.62 for Denmark).

These digital gaps might be related to another measure, the network of free internet access (*Espaços Internet*) in public libraries, community centres, youth centres, charities and NGOs, and presented as a way of “promoting good practices and coordinating the use of ICT through social inclusion activities among the general population”⁵. The most recent data, from 2008, indicate 1170 *Espaços Internet*, open to the general public including children, have between six and 16 computers, wireless internet is free of charge. One person per computer, a time limit for one hour’s use (on average) and keeping silent are the main rules. Contents such as pornography, racism and violence are forbidden (some places also prohibit instant messaging). While places such as community and youth centres have digital monitors/mediators, pub-

it... the keys on the keyboard are too small.” Since their expectations failed, his parents decided to stop the internet subscription (“they didn’t pay anymore”).

5. See http://www.rededeespacosinternet.pt/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1 (Retrieved April 19, 2011)



lic libraries usually lack staff trained in digital media. Children and young people are mentioned as the main attendants, their presence being related to homework activities, games and entertainment.

Children's access to the internet: an overview

Indicators on Portuguese children's access, frequency of use and parental mediation clearly evidence the recent changes of the digital landscape pointed out above, and the gaps between access and use also among generations. Socio-economic and cultural differences illustrate a distinct distribution in the European setting: based on the occupation and education level of the household, 52% of the respondents were characterized as living in low SES households, 33% middle and 15% high (European average 19%, 42% and 34%, respectively).

As shown in Table 1, Portugal leads in children's ownership of personal laptops and is placed third in children accessing the internet in their bedrooms (after Denmark and Sweden), but these means of technical advance and the relative autonomy of its use faces the costs of broadband and internet access, as well as parents' digital constraints: four out of ten parents do not use the internet (the highest proportion of non-users, after Turkey and Romania) and among those who use it, the daily frequency is quite low (30%). Portugal leads on parents' *restrictive mediation* (setting rules that restrict the child's use of some applications or activities, according to children), while *active mediation* (being present, staying nearby, encouraging, sharing or discussing the child's online activities) declared by Portuguese parents coincides with the European average.

Probably related to these constraints, children occupy a low position as frequent internet users (55%), far from the top (84% in Sweden). Furthermore, they have been online for a shorter time period: ten years is the average age at which children claim to have first used the internet, while in the Nordic countries is seven years.

Therefore, while children's digital divide has decreased (in 2006, only 38% accessed the internet⁶) and a democratization of the ownership of tech-

6. http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/eurobarometer/eurobarometer_2005_25_ms.pdf

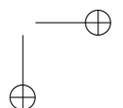
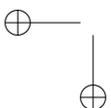


Table 1: Portuguese children and parents' digital access and use in the EU
Kids Online survey

Indicator	Portugal	Highest European value	Position
Estimated children online, according to Eurostat	78%	98% (Finland, Norway, Sweden, UK)	19th
Average age (years) when child first used the internet	10 years	7 years (Denmark, Sweden)	19th
Children with their own laptops	65%	65% (Portugal)	1st
Children's use of the internet in the bedroom	67%	74% (Denmark)	3rd
Children's using the internet in libraries or other public spaces	25%	37% (Finland)	4rd
Daily frequency of internet use by children	55%	84% (Sweden)	21st
Daily frequency of the internet use by parents	30%	98% (Norway)	22nd
Parents that don't use the internet	39,8%	73,2% (Turkey)	3rd
Parents' active mediation of the child's internet use, according to the child	90%	98% (Netherlands)	7th
Parents' active mediation of the child's internet use, according to the parent	92%	99% (Norway)	13th
Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to the child	93%	93% (Portugal and Ireland)	1st
Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to the parent	92%	95% (Ireland)	7th

Source: Livingstone et al. (2011).

nological devices has occurred, technical means are not equivalent (for instance, as pointed above, *Magalhães* has reduced digital capacities). In addition, there seem to be paradoxes of autonomy and freedom of use, looking at the high proportion of these technologies that can be located in the children's bedroom, and the declared restrictive mediation pattern. Finally, this paradox becomes clearer with the recent entrance of Portuguese children in the internet world, developing an enthusiasm for exploring its opportunities that contrasts with low daily use.

Children accessing the internet in public places

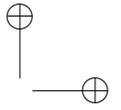
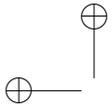
Presented as places “to promote good practices and coordinate ICT use with social inclusion activities”, public internet spots might contribute to enlarge “social support networks” (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001), and to affect positively children’s “breadth of use” (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007); thus, contributing to their digital, informational and communicational competencies and empowerment as digital citizens (Hobbs et al, 2011).

Let us now look at the relatively high number of Portuguese children and young people that use to access internet in public places through free wireless, being even the main users of those places. For this purpose we combine results from the EU Kids Online survey and fieldwork that includes observation in public libraries and youth centres and talks with children and young people accessing the internet in those libraries⁷.

As Table 1 showed, Portuguese children occupy the fourth position as internet users in libraries and other public spaces, after Finland, Lithuania and Estonia. All Northern countries have much higher levels of internet penetration and frequency of internet use by children and parents. Another contrast is related to the profile of attendants: only 9% of children and young people from high SES households declare they go to libraries and other public places for using the internet (below their sample weight), 33% of middle SES also go to those places (which corresponds to their proportional weight in the sample) but 58% of low SES (above their sample weight) go there, suggesting that parents with higher SES are more likely to restrain their children’s moves outside the home. It should be stressed that going to these places presupposes a certain level of autonomy and mobility, characteristics that have been reduced in children’s life contexts in contemporary societies, with streets and public places being associated with danger and risk (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Lee, 2002).

The Portuguese group of internet users in public places is composed mainly by 13-16 year olds. Among their parents, about two out of three report basic education (nine years or less of school) and only 7% have post secondary

7. Local observations and talks with children and monitors were made by university students as part of the research project Digital Inclusion and Participation, funded by the UTAustin|Portugal program (see http://digital_inclusion.up.pt). On the training process of graduate students as young researchers see Ponte and Simões (2012).



and tertiary levels, hence a large proportion of adolescents have already surpassed their parents' education. Half of the parents considered they digitally excluded, since 43% do not use the internet and 8% only use it once or twice a month.

Comparing this group of children with the one that does not go to libraries and other public places for accessing the internet clearly shows that the first ones contains more engaged internet users, as shown in Table 2.

Taking into account that we are comparing two different groups (one being composed mainly by adolescents 13-16), it is worth to note the consistency of higher positions of those who use the internet in public places compared with those who don't use the internet there, in all indicators related to internet practices and competencies:

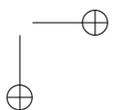
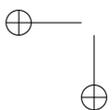


Table 2: Children that use and do not use the internet in libraries and other public places

Indicator	Use (%)	Do not use (%)
Use the internet everyday	64	52
Access the internet		
In his/her bedroom	75	65
At school	82	68
In an internet café	17	3
At friend's home	75	41
At a relative's home	71	40
Out and about	15	2
Devices for accessing the internet		
Own laptop	71	63
More than four devices	33	23
Length of time use per week (main differences)		
Less than three hours	15	27
Seven to 14 hours	40	32
Fourteen to 21 hours	16	9
Activities (in the past month)		
Used the internet for school homework	92	90
Used instant messaging (IM)	92	74
Sent/received emails	89	73
Watched video-clips	86	75
Visited a social networking profile	78	58
Played internet games	67	57
Downloaded music and films	62	45
Read/watched the news	54	33
Used a webcam	46	32
Visited a chatroom	34	22
Created a character, pet or avatar	30	15
Spent time in a virtual world	23	13
Put (or posted) a message on a website	24	11
Used file sharing sites	21	9
Written a blog or online diary	16	7
Made/receive phone calls	13	14
Competencies and evaluation of self-efficacy (11+)		
Bookmark a website	85	72
Block messages from someone	72	65
Block wanted adverts or junk mail/spam	72	65
Change privacy settings on a SNS profile	70	60
Delete the record of visited sites	69	63
Find information on internet safety	68	59
Change filter preferences	54	44
Compare different websites to decide if information is true	58	55
No declared internet competencies	6	14
"I know more about the internet than my parents"	62	48

Source: EU Kids Online Portugal, results; Respondents: All children at use the internet

Technical means: 70% access from their own laptop and through more than four devices;

Autonomy of use: besides using at school, where they lead, they also give priority to access in their own bedroom, and in particular in friends' and relatives' houses, suggesting they strongly appreciate to socialize face to face while being online.

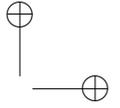
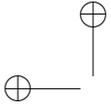
This picture suggests an active group of children and young people using the internet in public places, most of them from low SES households and living with parents that are unable to transmit educational and cultural capital, which may contribute to hinder informational and learning competencies. These users have a certain level of mobility in the place where they live, they want to explore the potential of the internet and are open to adult support, particularly coming from adults with whom they socialize such as teachers.

Breadth of use: they combine higher frequency of use (about two out of three access daily) and higher levels of involvement in all activities; they present a narrow gap between the leading activity (doing schoolwork) and the following three (IM, emails, videos), two of them related with peer-to-peer communication; more than a half declares doing eight activities, while in the other group only six activities are declared by more than half. Activities related to agency, personal initiative and desire of participation, such as creating an avatar, putting a message on a website or writing a blog receive also much more attention from this group (30-15%; 24-11%; and 16-7%, respectively);

Competencies: they lead in all categories and present a lower value on their total absence (6-14% respectively); most of the reported competencies are mainly technical and related to privacy (block messages or spam; change privacy settings, delete records) while informational competencies (change filter preferences and comparing websites) received the lowest values.

Self-efficacy: Among the group of internet users aged 11 and plus, despite the reported high levels of digital skills, half are reluctant to totally agree with the idea that they know several things about the internet. In turn, the majority (62%) totally agree that they know more about the internet than their parents.

Mediation and social support networks: parents seem to use less active and restrictive mediation and help less than teachers and friends when something is difficult to do find (e.g. searching information for schoolwork). Comparing the support networks reveals the relevant role of teachers.



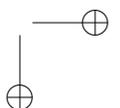
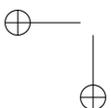
Let us now look at the less formal environments found in libraries and youth centres and see whether they can provide space for empowering informational and communicational competencies as part of their social inclusion, based on local observations and talks with children and monitors.

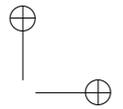
Open to the general public, spots in libraries and youth centres register low attendance, allowing those who go online to stay beyond the time allotted. Children arrive mostly after school, some coming with their laptops and saving internet traffic at home. For others, among the reasons to go is not having internet access at home due to economic costs or parental resistance. An 11 year old girl elaborating on her 'battle' for accessing the internet against the opinion of her parents reveals that there are still resistance among low educated parents, as well it shows her digital competencies and how public places give her the opportunity for being internet included:

In my house nobody uses the internet, not even myself, my parents don't want to, they say it's dangerous, but I don't think so. You have to be careful, but I know how to use it. You can't talk to anyone unless it's with friends from school and you only add people you know. I don't have my school or home address on my Facebook page, but my parents still don't like the internet. I only use it in school and libraries. (female, 11; interview in a library, middle town)

Reasons such as scarcity of resources at home (1) and local facilities (2) are not so frequent as the restrictions and constraints at school (3-5) and the pleasure of being there with friends and peers, avoiding isolation and experiencing a sense of hospitality as revealed by these comments (6-9) from a community center in the countryside.

1. *When my sister is using the internet, I come here. Here I can use the printer without paying* (male, 11)
2. *I'm not allowed to use the computer at school.* (male, 10)
3. *The computer is broken and now the teacher doesn't use it anymore.* (male, 10)
4. *I can only do research at school. When I leave I come here.* (female, 11)
5. *Sometimes I don't want to be alone at home.* (female, 11)
6. *This is like being at home.* (male, 10 and 11)





7. *I started to like the people who came here and I came more often.* (female, 13)
8. *I have internet but I come here to meet new people, it's close to home.* (male, 14)

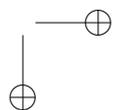
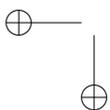
Observed activities conducted by children follow the given pattern: schoolwork (quickly done after a brief google search followed by *copy and paste*), simultaneous leisure activities practicing multi-tasking: instant messaging, looking at photos, listen to music and watching videos (with headphones), visiting SNS (mostly Facebook), playing online games (mostly boys), i.e. they do there the panoply of activities they do at home. Lack of informational skills is visible in the ways schoolwork is done or by the way research is carried out on the internet.

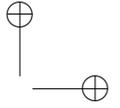
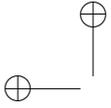
A boy of 15 years, who has been going to these spaces for four years about three times a week, discovered its existence through a friend. He uses the Internet for games, chats, social networks and school work. (estate neighborhood)

This picture suggests an active group of children and young people using the internet in public places, most of them from low SES households and living with parents that are unable to transmit educational and cultural capital, which may contribute to hinder informational and learning competencies. These users have a certain level of mobility in the place where they live, they want to explore the potential of the internet and are open to adult support, particularly coming from adults with whom they socialize such as teachers.)

A 13 year old boy faced an infinite number of pages, children's games and lots of chatting with their Facebook friends. An hour passed and its use was just that, social networking, YouTube and various gaming sites. Another young man talked to the boy at his side as he passed photographs from a pen drive to his Facebook page. When finished, he started a research on [the poet] Fernando Pessoa, he seemed to be collecting information for his school work, doing copy and paste to a Word document. With the time on the computer almost finishing, he completed his task with great satisfaction. (residential youth center)

In two distinct internet places (in middle class and estate neighborhoods), the same uses were observed:





The content is basically the same in both locations. The success of sites such as Youtube and Facebook. Hours, without the user noticing the time. Starting with constant videos arrive to Youtube and comments that follow. Thousands of pictures are uploaded by users everyday. These internet places have different lives but several data intersect: group age, male predominance, the content of the search is not very different. (observations from two centers: estate and middle- class neighborhood)

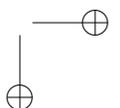
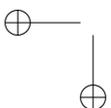
Just one exception to these hegemonic patterns of use (entertainment oriented; social networks and chatting; speedy search for schoolwork neither testing sources nor veracity) was captured:

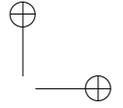
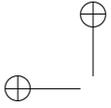
A 14 year old girl was on her blog for about 50 minutes, composed of photos and short text excerpts of his own doing, and looked extremely pleased in what he was doing. She asked for technical help from the center's monitor, who helped. (Residential neighborhood)

The fact that young people are frequent users allows monitors calling them by their name, showing great proximity. In youth centers, there is more flexibility in the rules regarding silence or the number of people per computer, creating an atmosphere of warmth and some excitement, rather than in libraries where staff place more importance on silence and ask young people to be quiet. In both spaces, however, the intervention of monitors is minimal: they help users when asked, but they do not leave their seats to check what the younger ones are doing, neither do they supervise any activity even if they are in notorious difficulties. Only in one observed place, the monitor intervened in the way homework was being done. We did not find local information on workshops or activities exploring the informational and communicational competencies pointed above by Hobbs et al. (2011), and targeted to young internet users. It appeared as if behind it was the idea that children and young people will know to take advantage by themselves of the technologies put at their disposal. However, this doesn't happen and they do there what they would do at home.

There is no interaction between the users and the monitor, except when he distributes the computers. Users can use computers as they want, they don't need any sort of complicated help; there is no program limitation. So the interaction is quite rare. (library in the old part of Lisbon)

Some coordinators of these spaces seemed only to have considered these issues when they were asked about the monitors and other staff passive and





reactive involvement, in the course of this local observation. *Now that you asked me, training staff regarding internet issues should be a reality and the development of workshops for users is also an obvious thing and must be applied*, reflected a coordinator.

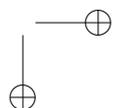
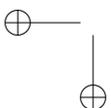
Final remarks

Some years after the implementation of policies to ease the access to ICT and digital inclusion as an element of social inclusion (laptops at low cost to students, public internet network), in Portugal we see the impact on infrastructures, but insufficient local and human responses, suggesting that a technological determinism did not take into account research findings focused on the digital divide and redirected to *digital integration* in social spaces, to social inclusion.

As the EU Kids online results on mediation suggest, Portuguese children and young people who attend these places, most of them from low income households in terms of educational and cultural capital, reveal their commitment to learn, even with older people who can open them the doors into the digital world. However, in these public places human resources able to provide an informal environment for empowering their digital skills (not only respecting privacy issues and their interests entertainment oriented but also stimulating children's acquisition of skills allowing them better school results, to critically analyze contents and communicate outside their inner circle taking into account the informal nature of the place) appear to have been left out.

Because of this lack of encouragement, those who do not have the educational capital at home like most young people remain socially disadvantaged despite having access to the internet. In fact, to narrow the *second digital divide* demands much more than to provide computers and spots of free access.

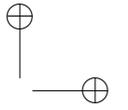
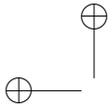
One might conclude that the results provided for this exploratory research should be taken into account in the definition of public policies that go behind the digital determinism of a "savvy digital generation", promoting informational and communicate skills on the internet; these spaces need also to be open and attractive for adults and those who are almost totally digitally excluded, such is the case of low educated mothers and grand-parents. The



infra-structure of a national network is there, but needs to be revitalized with imagination and implying news postures among the human resources.

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