Twenty-six powerful ideas from community informatics at Illinois

A summary from the fall 2010 course Community Informatics (LIS 518), taught at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science by Kate Williams. Sources and full syllabus at https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/17413.

1 Community informatics
The study of when transformation (digital revolution) meets continuity (local, historical communities). [Source: Williams and Durrance]

2 Root shock
The physical destruction of their local historical community causes people emotional shock, which can be overcome by acknowledging it collectively, commemorating it, repairing it, or avoiding it in the first place. [Fullilove]

3 Community lost, found, liberated
Relative to rural period, meaningful/intimate social ties are lost in industrial metropolis, or maintained in one’s immediate neighborhood, or are distributed across the metropolis according to personal interests etc. [Wellman and Leighton]

4 Closure
Social capital (see #25) amassing within a closed group. [Coleman]

5 Virtual community
Emotions, help and other social support shared time and again via computer communications. Can be as powerful as actual community. [Rheingold]

6 Wikipedia
An undervalued, ingenious experiment in virtual community and collective intelligence across entire human language groups. Dependent on code, culture, hardly any legal or market forces. [Lih]

7 Memex (1945)
Desktop access (=mainframes 1950s-60s, PCs 1970s) to world’s scientific information (=Internet 1980s), with shared data trails (=WWW 1990s, Social tagging et al 2000s). [Bush]

8 Systems rationalism / segmented institutionalism
Theories or settings where organizations adopt technology as planned, for stated uses, versus theories or settings where differences and conflicts in organizations lead to unexpected or contentious technology use or non-use. [Kling]

9 City of bits
As compared to city of atoms. Via the digital revolution, buildings and spaces become smart (internet enabled, computer-embedded), life moves online, meaning of spaces change. [Mitchell]

10 Metaverse
Online games (persistent virtual worlds) are privately owned, communally operated, rich cultural spaces that merit new thinking on governance. [Ludlow]

11 Hacker ethic
The spirit of the information age. Involves passion, hard work, creativity and joy. And it’s pro-community. [Himanen]

12 Collective intelligence
Listening to everyone’s ideas, combining contributions from all social forces, on a species level using new digital technologies. [Lévy]
13 Dual/informational/network city
City or society where power flows through networks enabled by digital infrastructure; arising in context of capitalist restructuring, it bypasses and devalues some people while elevating others. Can be overcome! [Castells]

14 Grassrooting the space of flows
Elites design/use the space of flows (exclusive electronic and other networks/processes serving government, military, research, corporations) to control the space of place (local, historical communities), but everyday people join the space of flows so that as in space of place, social control is challenged and contested, sometime intentionally, sometimes not. [Castells]

15 Performative, functional, informational, powerful literacy
Sounding out words without good understanding; reading and writing to carry out basic work/life tasks; reading and writing to success in school; reading and writing to control and change what happens. Taught to different classes. [Finn]

16 Liberating/domesticating literacy
Reading/writing to discover your rights, achieve freedom, or to conform to status quo. [Finn]

17 Counterpublic sphere
Subordinated groups maintain their own discourse to sustain themselves: African American example relies on Black church, Black music, Black media. [Alkalimat and Williams]

18 Cyberpower
Being able to use cyberspace for change in actual space: individually, in groups, and teaching/mobilizing others. [Alkalimat and Williams]

19 Cultural reproduction
Computer education of low income populations can pretend to liberate but instead reproduces social hierarchy when it ignores students’ actual goals, interests, networks, or community. [Kvasny]

20 Online sociability
Strengthens offline sociability, esp locally. [Kavanaugh]

21 Personal/private/public computing
At home, at work, and in other (shared) spaces. Gov, com, org, and edu public computing is available differently to rich/poor/middle, thus impacting democratic access to computers/internet. [Williams and Alkalimat]

22 Deep outreach
Digital literacy outreach to people without computer skills or financial/material resources who would otherwise be left out of information age; compares to “meso outreach” to groups that can connect with those people, or “shallow outreach” to people who would do fine on their own. [Virnoche]

23 Community informatics ethics
1) Don’t worship technology, debate it! 2) Remember technology’s social, political, cultural contexts. 3) Preserve public access to information. 4) Acknowledge your bias as a technology expert; avoid silencing community members by speaking for them; facilitate direct democracy. [Pitman, Eglash]

24 Code [as in software]
One of four influences on human behavior in cyberspace. The other four are law, norms (culture), and market. [Lessig]

25 Social capital, especially bonding and bridging
Social capital means resources accessed through social networks. [Lin] Bonding social capital is the resources shared within a dense subnetwork of society, typically a homogenous set of people, versus resources shared between two dense subnetworks, via someone whose ties form a bridge. [Putnam]. Bonding social capital is a critical ingredient in sustaining public computing or any project in a community; bridging social capital comes second. [Alkalimat and Williams]

26 A → V → A´
Actual face-to-face life enters into virtuality (goes online) and then in turn changes actual life, thus A-prime. Examples include SHWASHLOCK on Santa Monica’s Public Electronic Network [Rogers], Amsterdam’s traveling trunk for immigrant community memories [Vos]. [Alkalimat and Williams]

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