Recent Immigrants as an "Alternate Civic Core":

Providing Internet Services, Gaining "Canadian Experiences"

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A Thesis

In

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts in Media Studies at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

June 2006

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ABSTRACT

Recent Immigrants as an "Alternate Civic Core":
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How are Canada's most recent immigrants coping with our workforce's need for "Canadian experience?" And how do community networks and federal initiatives impact newcomers during their periods of settlement? Through an examination of volunteer interactions at Vancouver Community Network (VCN), this thesis responds to both of these questions. It demonstrates how this charitable internet service provider offers opportunities for individual newcomers to broaden their technical and communication skills as well as their social networks, while contributing to the enhancement of social inclusion at VCN. Recent immigrants are established as a technically savvy "alternate civic core," and indeed major contributors to VCN's volunteer program.

Based on research conducted in Vancouver during the Spring and Summer of 2005, this thesis incorporates both ethnographic and quantitative methodologies. Findings are analyzed and contextualized by theories from the fields of community informatics (e.g. Gurstein, 2004; Warschauer, 2003), and immigration studies (e.g. Kunz, 2003; Mwarigha, 2002). Further support is drawn from recent scholarship examining relationships between social capital, social inclusion and the use of ICTs (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Scott-Dixon, 2004). Studying the volunteer contributions of recent immigrants to VCN is valuable because it amplifies volunteers' reflections on gaining "Canadian experience" and broadens awareness of their contributions through civic participation.

This thesis concludes that in Canada, a country where immigration and the economy are functionally intertwined, placing the onus of becoming employable on individual immigrants is increasingly ineffective. Recommendations for further efforts to combine the needs of individuals and their communities with federal policies are proposed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

For their love and encouragement, I thank my parents, Denis and Vivian Dechief, and my dearest friends, Nancy Slukynski, and Jeremiah McDade.

For their fun-making and support, I truly appreciate my MA cohort. You are all excellent to spend time with, in seminars and elsewhere.

For her friendship and fine hosting during my fieldwork in Vancouver, I thank my cousin, Lynda Dechief.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Thesis Context

As information and services are becoming increasingly internet-based, the economic and social stability of recent immigrants to Canada diminishes. Concern about these trends—and the plausibility of a relationship between them—has prompted this thesis, which examines newcomers' interactions at an urban community network (CN). Vancouver Community Network (VCN) is the CN that is examined throughout the thesis. As one of Canada's leading community networks, it operates as a charitable internet service provider (ISP) and a locally-initiated organization promoting access to and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for meeting individual and community development goals. The composition of Vancouver Community Network's (VCN's) volunteer base—nearly two-thirds of the volunteers immigrated to Canada within the past five years—exemplifies one of the ways that a community network can meet some of the needs of its local community. In Vancouver, a city where more than one-third of the population is foreign-born[1], many recent immigrants are looking for employment commensurate with their skills. Through its volunteer program, VCN provides an opportunity for civic participation, which many recent immigrants have found beneficial during their period of settlement. Their perspectives are presented through the thesis.

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[1] Vancouver's immigrant population has "grown at a considerably faster pace than its Canadian-born population" and consequently, in 2001, "almost 739,000 persons born outside of Canada were living in Canada, representing 38% of Vancouver's population" (Justus, 2004, p. 43).

1.2 Sonia's Story (Part One)

Sonia is one of these volunteers. In 2004, she started volunteering at VCN as the Russian language portal developer. Her project is complete, and she is now too busy to volunteer regularly because she works nearly full-time in a small technology firm and takes programming courses at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). Her domestic responsibilities include raising two teenaged children. During her time as a VCN volunteer she helped at least three people find work, and she made several friends who she still keeps in touch with. Because Sonia's education and previous work experience is in mathematical programming, she found creating the Russian language portal to be fairly easy and she was also able to help other language portal volunteers with their own projects. Though Sonia is currently employed, she still volunteers when she has time, and she keeps in touch with VCN's coordinators. She knows that particularly in the IT industry, no employment situation is permanent. As I was being introduced to her, Sonia was talking with VCN's coordinators about the possibility of getting a contract from a Russian-language company. During our conversation, Sonia tells me about other contracts she has had and ones that she continues to take on.

More of Sonia's story is interspersed throughout this thesis. She is a composite character created from the situations and stories that I heard about through the volunteers I interviewed. The purpose of including her story is to continue to bring the common challenges and situations of recent immigrants to the forefront of the project. This allows the reader to get to know a bit more about the people I interviewed who you might otherwise never meet. This thesis includes a history of federal ICT policies, statistics, definitions, and a variety of theories and research related to the case of recent

immigrants' civic participation at VCN. At times, it might be easy to get caught up in some of these details and to forget about the variety of people who are impacted by these policies, but then a bit more of Sonia's story will emerge. My initial purpose in undertaking this project was to learn from the recent immigrant-volunteers that I spoke with, and to amplify their experiences for more people to hear. Sharing Sonia's story is one way of meeting this goal.

1.3 Thesis Rationale

Studying the volunteer contributions of recent immigrants to VCN is valuable because it amplifies volunteers' reflections on gaining "Canadian experience" and it broadens awareness of their contributions. Findings from this research suggest that urban CNs serve as sites of inclusion for newcomers. Further, the research illuminates one unanticipated, socially beneficial outcome of a community-based technology initiative, and demonstrates the potential existence of many others. This outcome is the potential for an urban CN to contribute beneficially to newcomers' social networks, and to broaden the range of information they have access to. Urban CNs offer recent immigrants with ICT skills opportunities to contribute to their new communities.

As newcomer-volunteers search for full-time employment relevant to their previous experience, they contribute to the network as Technical Help Desk Support, Internet Instructors, Local Area Network Support, or Language Portal Developers. Assisting in the network's mandate of providing opportunities for online participation creates

openings for volunteers to meet face-to-face, share information, and work with network members from diverse cultural backgrounds and varied socio-economic circumstances.

While it is the volunteers' own efforts and initiative that bring them to VCN, their collective contributions are important to the success of VCN's internet service provision and additional member services. Working toward these goals allows newcomers to experience civic participation and to enhance their skills and knowledge, particularly in relation to ICT work and related English language acquisition. This thesis will examine how VCN works as a site of inclusion for newcomers. It will also interrogate the requirement of "Canadian work experience", the responsibility of individuals to make themselves more employable, and the federal promotion of immigration as an economic imperative.

This thesis consists of qualitative and quantitative research completed in Vancouver during the Spring and Summer of 2005. Using qualitative research methodologies (including immersion and input-gathering from community-members at all levels) and quantitative research (including surveys and an analysis of organization-generated data and documents), I examine how, and to what extent, the social inclusion of newcomers is influenced by VCN's volunteer program. Nine volunteers share their experiences through interviews, and many others contribute to the study through a survey.

Findings are analyzed and contextualized by theories from the fields of community informatics (e.g. Gurstein, 2004), information science (e.g. Caidi & Allard, 2005), and

immigration studies (e.g. Kunz, 2003; Mwarigha, 2002). Support is drawn from recent scholarship theorizing relationships between social capital, social inclusion and the use of ICTs (Warschauer, 2003). According to this literature, social inclusion—access to the "good life"—is fostered as individuals gain social capital through increased social interactions leading to greater trust and exchanges of information (Putnam, 2000). By examining the case of highly skilled recent immigrants volunteering at an urban community network, this thesis argues that information exchanged tacitly through social interactions benefits even those with skills to access information online. Importantly, online capabilities alone do not remove the social barriers faced by recent immigrants to Canada.

This research was supported by the Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking (CRACIN) a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Initiative on the New Economy (INE). The alliance brings together a range of members including professors, community practitioners, federal government employees and research students, of which I am one. CRACIN's purpose is to "document and assess the achievements of community-based ICT initiatives in the context of, among other things, the main Canadian government programs promoting the development, public accessibility and use of internet services" (CRACIN, 2006). This research is crucial because "to date, there has been very little systematic research documenting or assessing the effectiveness of these initiatives, or of the government programs supporting them" (CRACIN, 2006). The outcomes of this research, conducted through largely qualitative means such as participatory action research (PAR), may be of

assistance in "guiding future programs nationally and globally" and in "shed[ding] light on how these valuable public services can be sustained into the future" (CRACIN, 2006). It is through CRACIN that I was able to build relationships with VCN's coordinators and to conduct research there.

Meeting and talking with VCN's recent immigrant volunteers has been the highlight of my thesis experience. Because of their openness, and the assistance of CRACIN's investigators and research students, I am able to work on my dual aims: to illuminate some social access barriers in Canada, and through CRACIN, to provide policymakers with recommendations for their amelioration.

1.4 Thesis Overview

The following sections outline the foci of each chapter in the thesis.

1.4.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter contextualizes VCN's location and functions. It describes Vancouver as a popular city for newcomers to settle in and explains the local challenges of finding work pertinent to newcomers' existing skills. As a means of making the thesis more newcomer-focused, I have illustrated the situation of one past-volunteer (Sonia): how she feels about her interactions at VCN, and her insecure employment situation. An overview of the remainder of the thesis rounds out this chapter.

1.4.2 Chapter Two - Theories

The second chapter serves as a literature review and an introduction to the key theories that ground the thesis. As all of these fields are to some degree concerned with issues of access and marginalization, I will describe the particularities of each as they pertain to

this project. In several instances, I see applications of these theories aligned to developments in federal ICT and immigration policies, and when pertinent, I provide an overview of policy evolution. For example, the discussion of community informatics includes some background on the "digital divide" and Industry Canada's focus on technical connectivity, as well as how Gurstein's (2004) alternative frame of "effective use" provides a more comprehensive perspective.

1.4.3 Chapter Three - Methodologies

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodologies used to record and amplify perspectives of recent immigrants who are skilled ICT workers, but challenged to find appropriate work. Thus this chapter begins with an explanation of how early field work (Spring 2005) focused on qualitative research which was accomplished through immersion and observation at VCN, using participatory action research (PAR) methodologies. While initiating the work of writing and making recommendations, the importance of providing a statistical context became clear. A return visit (Summer 2005) to undertake quantitative analysis was organized and as a result, the combined data sets enhance and support one another. This twinned approach is particularly beneficial because one intended audience for this thesis is federal policy-makers concerned with ICT program development.

Qualitative outcomes include 9 in-depth conversations with recent immigrant-volunteers of varied cultural origins. Each participant voiced positive opinions about volunteering at VCN, yet many expressed some frustration about the employment situation in Canada. The experiences shared by a majority of participants are discussed, and excerpts from the

interviews are interspersed throughout the chapters as support, as well as to evoke the

study's participants, whose experiences are being analyzed. Three quantitative data sets

were used while doing fieldwork at VCN. While conveying the most notable findings, I

describe each data set in some detail and note the benefits and limitations of each: a

survey, an examination of current and past volunteers' resumes, and an analysis of

VCN's online volunteer application database.

1.4.4 Chapter Four - VCN as a Site of Social Inclusion
Chapter Four establishes VCN as a site of social inclusion. I describe VCN's volunteers

and establish them as an "alternate civic core" who, in terms of civic participation, differ

substantially from Canada's "civic core", a term used in a report from Statistics Canada

(Reed & Selbee, 2000). Through an analysis of interviews and a description of the day-

to-day functions at VCN, I describe how civic participation has augmented human capital

for individual volunteers while it has simultaneously increased social capital within the

network. VCN's training programs, shift sign-up, and volunteer interactions with

network members all rely on individual volunteers' initiative and desire to contribute to

the network. In turn volunteers do gain "local experience", practice their English

language skills, and over time, receive work references from VCN's coordinators.

Bringing together excerpts from interviews, and theories of 'third place', social capital

and social inclusion, I describe how interactions at VCN foster newcomer-volunteers'

social capital and enhance the network's social inclusion. These combined interactions

result in VCN being considered a site of inclusion.

1.4.5 Chapter Five - Critical Analysis of VCN's Integrative Role

While the fourth chapter establishes VCN's volunteer program as a site of inclusion,

Chapter Five begins by interrogating VCN's integrative role within Canada's

immigration landscape. This is accomplished by examining "Canadian experience" and

human and social capital building as components of the settlement process. The

chapter's second half will make both broad and specific recommendations for shifts in

ICT access and social inclusion policies to support programs such as VCN's, which

fosters inclusion at a community level.

Our current immigration policies are culminating in a situation where many recent

immigrants selected to enter Canada as "Skilled Immigrants" must volunteer in some

capacity before attaining full-time work. While this thesis details some of the positive

impacts of this period of civic participation, the question of why recent immigrants go

through an unpaid period of gaining "local experience" must be posed. Based on

conversations with participants, I describe how newcomers define "Canadian experience"

and convey the few related accounts of exploitation under the guise of civic participation.

Further questions are put forward: Do recent immigrants' investments in human capital

pay off? Does volunteerism prepare newcomers for the Canadian workforce? Why is

civic participation encouraged by settlement agencies, and how is it being exploited? In a

country where immigration and the economy are functionally intertwined, efforts to

better team federal and regional needs should be made. Placing the onus of becoming

employable on individual immigrants is increasingly ineffective. Recommendations that

implement this stance, and make it practical, are presented in the latter half of Chapter

Five.

1.4.6 Chapter Six - Conclusion

The sixth and final chapter summarizes the most significant points discussed in the thesis. It reiterates key findings, conclusions and recommendations. An update on Sonia's situation is shared. The remaining sections of the thesis include References, Appendices (Contextual Interview Guide, Description of Interview Participants, Overview of Quantitative Data, and Survey distributed at VCN), and Ethics Clearances.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND THEORIES

This chapter provides a literature review and an introduction to the key theories of the thesis. To demonstrate their relevance, the theories are interspersed through brief synopses of applicable developments in Canadian ICT, culture, and immigration policies. This combination of recent history and applicable theories provides an integrated context for the thesis' analysis of civic participation amongst recent immigrants at Community Networks (CNs). Theories from the fields of community informatics (CI), information science, and immigration studies are included. All of these fields are—to some degree— concerned with issues of access and marginalization; I will describe the particularities of each as they pertain to this project. Following this contextualization, the chapter closes with a description of VCN as the tangible location where the outcomes of these policies meet.

2.0.1 Introduction to Theoretical Realms

The project's theoretical approach combines theories from community informatics (Gurstein, 2004; McIver, 2003; Warschauer, 2003; Bieber et al., 2002; Leigh & Loader, 2001), information studies (Caidi & Allard, 2005), sociology (Putnam, 2000; Oldenburg, 1989) and immigration studies (Kunz, 2003; Mwarigha, 2002). Theories and research from the fields of immigration studies and information science support and create opportunities for original interpretations, while the research most similar to my own is being tackled in the burgeoning field of community informatics (CI). As an "emerging interdisciplinary field concerned with the development, deployment and management of information systems designed with and by communities to solve their own problems" (McIver, 2003, p. 33), community informatics (CI) is developing as an academic focus

for scholars in the realms of communications and information science (Bieber et al., 2002; Leigh & Loader, 2001). An example of a CI theory is Gurstein's (2004) argument that discourse must go beyond mere descriptions and discussions of the "digital divide", and toward the frame of "effective use" which measures the impacts of ICT use by considering how communities' locally determined goals are met. This concept is discussed in more detail following an overview of Canadian ICT policy development.[2]

2.1 Canada's First Community Networks

Community networks have been operating in Canada since the early 1990s. Here I provide a brief review of events taking place in—or impacting—community networking. What we now refer to as Community Networks (CNs)—some of which are currently supported to varying degrees by combinations of municipal, provincial and federal funding—were initiated by grassroots organizations in a few Canadian cities. At that time they were called "FreeNets" and generally had mandates to provide free or affordable internet services to citizens who did not have ready access to the internet. Freenets functioned on volunteer efforts and financial donations, and for the most part had difficulty raising capital to make investments in newer technologies. In Ottawa in 1993, the National Capital FreeNet's bid to gain charitable status—and the more reliable source of funding gained through this standing—was declined by Revenue Canada's Charities Division. However, FreeNets increased in number across Canada, and in 1996 after a lengthy legal battle, Vancouver Community Network (previously known as the

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[2] Much of the information accessed to describe these events in Canada's recent ICT policy history is available through the efforts of CRACIN investigators Moll and Shade, as well as CRACIN researcher, Bodnar (2005).

Vancouver Regional FreeNet Association) won the right to attain charitable status.[3] As a

registered charity, donations to the CN are tax deductible, and the organization itself is

tax-exempt (Canada Revenue Agency, 2004). Other shifts in federal policy have

impacted the financial stability of CNs. One such program implementation, the

Community Access Program (CAP), which will be discussed in the following section, is

a federal program developed partly in response to the growing number of urban CNs.

2.2 Federal Restructuring after the Demise of The Department of Communications

In 1993, Brian Mulroney's final year as Prime Minister, the Department of

Communications was dismantled and reformed as two bodies, the Department of

Canadian Heritage and Industry Canada, effectively separating content (Heritage) from

its delivery infrastructure (Industry); since that time, policy development in the area of

ICTs and the creation of an "e-society" has been "dominated by Industry Canada almost

to the exclusion of any other department" (Moll, Shade and Bodnar, 2005). At the same

time the Department of Multiculturalism, which had been created in 1989, was

"amalgamated and hidden" in the Department of Canadian Heritage (Abu-Laban, 1998, p.

4). Today, the Department of Canadian Heritage's mandate is to create and implement

national programs and policies to enhance culture and citizenship in Canada. To this end,

its current portfolio includes Library and Archives Canada, the National Film Board of

Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, Status of Women Canada, and Telefilm Canada

(The Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005). One of the Department of Canadian

Heritage's bodies is the Strategic Policy and Research Branch, which examines social

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[3] Currently, VCN's charitable status application and information about the court proceedings are
maintained on its website to share this potential funding avenue with other CNs: <http://www2.vcn.bc.ca/>
(VCN, 2003).

issues related to the increased ICT use as encouraged through federal policies. Outcomes of this commissioned and in-house research—and their relevance to this thesis—will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.3 Industry Canada's Early 1990s Initiatives

In comparison to Heritage Canada, Industry Canada's interests are broader; they include domestic and international trade and investment, and the economic growth of all sizes of enterprises and communities in order to meet the government's goal of a knowledge-based economy. Currently, the department's portfolio includes the Canadian Space Agency, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, National Research Council Canada, Copyright Board Canada, Statistics Canada, Canada Research Chairs and Genome Canada (Industry Canada, 2005). One year after the demise of the Department of Communications, and as the government changed to Jean Chrétien's Liberals, Industry Canada put forward a broad-based programming strategy *Building a More Innovative Economy*, "to keep Canadians among the leaders in connecting its citizens to the Internet" (SchoolNet Home, 2003). In the mid and late 1990s, establishing ways for Canadians to get connected was critical as widespread use of technology was equated with current and future economic success. The development of internet connectivity in Canada and other developed nations was often compared as an international race for connectivity took place. At the global level, a "digital divide"—a gap between those with access to the internet and those without—was evolving. Developed nations, including the United States of America, England, France, Sweden, Norway, and Japan, allocated national resources toward infrastructure and hardware, with the goal to provide widespread internet access to their citizens.

The "digital divide" became a preoccupation[4], and in the early 1990s, it was the goal of many of Canada's federal policies and programs to ensure that internet access was available to all Canadians, regardless of their geographic or social location. Included in this initiative to *Build a More Innovative Economy*, which later became known as "Connecting Canadians", were the Community Access Program (CAP) and SchoolNet. Both programs were created with the objective of increasing internet use across Canada. One of SchoolNet's most lauded goals was to connect each of Canada's 20,000 public schools to the Internet. By March 31, 1999, this goal was accomplished, leading to Industry Canada's claim that Canada was the first country in the world to connect its public schools and public libraries to the Information Highway (SchoolNet Home, 2003). Recent cuts to funding for these programs remind us that the programs were meant to initiate peoples' use and reliance on the internet, and they were not intended to be federally-sustained means of access.

2.3.1 Community Access Program (CAP) Overview

An overview of the Community Access Program (CAP) program is particularly relevant to this investigation as VCN is partially funded through its CAP activities. In 1994, CAP was established in order to meet the needs of Canadians living in cities and towns with populations under 50,000. The rationale was that without federal support, these smaller communities were not forming CNs as was transpiring in urban centers. CAP sites were commonly located in public libraries and schools and consisted of one to a few computers.

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[4] Academic literature focused on the "digital divide" is exhaustive. Major works include Benjamin Compaigne's (2001) edited collection entitled *Digital Divide: Facing a Crisis or Creating a Myth?*, Pippa Norris' (2001) *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*, and Mark Warschauer's (2003) *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide*.

In 1999, the support that smaller communities were receiving was extended to urban centers, bringing networked computers not only into already existing CNs, but also into public spaces such as community centers, women's shelters and seniors' organizations. In 2004, CAP underwent an internal evaluation whose recommendations were to ensure the continuing relevance of the program and to see how its goals were being met. In 2005, it was announced that CAP would be "sunset", though some funding—determined through a competitive process—is still provided to those sites serving people facing the "digital divide" (Industry Canada Management Response, 2004, p. 1). Specified "digital divide" targets include "Canadians who do not have access to the internet because of economic, geographic or social barriers," namely, "low income Canadians, Aboriginal Canadians, residents of rural areas, older Canadians, francophones, Canadians with limited education…recent immigrants and people with disabilities" (Industry Canada CAP Application, 2005, p.2). These restrictions will inevitably lead to the diminishment or demise of many CAP sites, which will result in the loss of access for many Canadians who were using CAP services in their communities.

Fortunately for VCN's members, even though VCN meets the needs of targeted "digital divide" groups, CAP is only one of VCN's funding sources. Further reductions in CAP funding will necessitate that VCN's coordinators and board of directors innovate alternative modes of delivering internet services to the communities it serves. However, changes in technology and municipal projects are taking place. At this time it is uncertain as to whether VCN's provision of dial-up access will continue to meets its network's needs. A further challenge is the future role of municipally-supported wireless

access (WiFi) for VCN's network members and volunteers (Vancouver City Council, 2005).

2.3.2 Digital Divide vs. Effective Use

With these questions in mind, I now present theories useful for considering the policies of developed governments (including Canada) in their race to provide ICT services for their countries. Criticisms of a "digital-divide" perspective are numerous. One concern is that internet usage statistics are collected with vague inquiries such as "Do you have access to, or do you use the Internet or World Wide Web?" Questions like this "systematically conflate very different levels of access and use" by "lumping together experienced home users and people who have tried a terminal in a public location once or twice" (Murdock and Golding, 2004). Findings from these surveys are used to demonstrate how internet use—at whatever capacity—is on the rise, thus providing an opportunity for the most developed nations to promote themselves as contenders in the race to be "the most connected nation in the world", as Canada claimed to be in 2000 (Industry Canada, 2003). This announcement may be a straightforward way of demonstrating Canada's effectiveness at establishing an internet infrastructure, but it says nothing about how these connections are being used or by whom. During Industry Canada's 2000 proclamation of successful internet connectivity, internet-ready computers were in public spaces across Canada, but how the technologies are used, by whom, and for what purposes, are the questions that need to be asked about the real impacts of ICT use for the people of this nation. Here, the measures must be scrutinized; counting the number of connected computers in public spaces demonstrates very little. Visiting the public spaces to talk with people about why and how they are using ICTs and CNs—as CRACIN does—

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generates far more input, and from broader perspectives. Indeed, it contextualizes and brings meaning to quantitative measures. As discussed later in this section, an alternative conceptualization of "effective use" (Gurstein, 2004) provides a gauge of effectiveness based on local needs, rather than physical access.

Although Industry Canada, and corporations including Microsoft, employ the term "digital divide" in their reports and press statements, it is no longer used as frequently by academics (Microsoft, 2006). Graham Murdock and Peter Golding describe the "couplet" as a "handy encapsulation of a complex problem" and note that the term generally refers to the ways that the "digital revolution" adds to "the advantages of the privileged while systematically excluding the poor and marginalized" (2004, p. 246). Other terms like "digital inequalities" (Hargittai, 2002) are used to avoid speaking of a divide as if it exists only in binary or physical terms. Michael Gurstein (2004) further suggests that the "on-going processes of seeing the digital divide only in terms of 'access' further aggravates and perpetuates the trend towards an ICT platform" (p. 229).

Gurstein presents an alternate perspective of "effective use" which recognizes the importance of the "lived physical community" and conceptualizes a desirable level of use as "the capacity and opportunity to successfully integrate ICTs into the accomplishment of self or collaboratively identified goals" (2004, p. 229). The goal of some of the individuals who become volunteers at VCN is to overcome the social barriers limiting them from employment reflective of their skills. Through the lens of "effective use" it is possible to see these recent immigrants as more than potential ICT *users*. Further, their

work and interactions at VCN can be recognized as contributions to VCN's broader goals of providing "free, accessible electronic creation and exchange of the broadest range of information, experience, ideas and wisdom" (VCN, 2003). "Effective use" is a beneficial alternative conceptualization to the "digital divide" because it measures the effectiveness of ICT use in terms of how tools are used to meet individual and group goals, as determined by these individuals and communities. It creates an ideal target beyond physical access and promotes a locally-driven or "bottom-up" approach, not a set of goals prescribed at a federal level.

As will be discussed in more detail later, this more comprehensive perspective is the sort embraced by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Strategic Policy and Research Branch, which creates research publications on a range of topics. Those relevant to our current discussion are reviewed in a following section. First, the thesis examines the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and its place in the topic of volunteerism at urban CNs. This is accomplished in part by considering information gleaned from Statistics Canada.

2.4 Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Canada is often described as "a nation of immigrants" because—other than indigenous people (including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis)—the majority of Canada's current population has settled here from other countries. Over the past century the number of people immigrating to Canada has changed yearly depending on political and economic circumstances; over the past fifteen years immigration levels have increased. Indeed, Statistics Canada estimates that, "between 1991 and 2000, 2.2 million immigrants were

admitted to Canada—the highest intake in any decade over the past 100 years"
(Schellenberg and Hou, 2005, p. 49).

Recent events in Canada's immigration history demonstrate efforts to enhance the
settlement of this inflow of people. For example, Jean Chrétien's (1994) government
created the department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to "link
immigration services with citizenship registration," and "to promote the unique ideals all
Canadians share" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006).

In her analysis of recent immigration policies, Yasmeen Abu-Laban (1998) describes the
immigration consultation process carried out between February and November of 1994 as
professing to be "a product of Canadians' renewed interest in participatory democracy"
(p. 9). The results were never weighted and to Abu-Laban, its outcomes demonstrated
the then-Liberal government's focus on immigration as an economic function (p. 9). As
is seen in more recent publications, this focus has continued: ideal immigrants remain
those people who are economically self-sufficient and able to integrate quickly because
of their significant knowledge of official languages (Abu-Laban, p. 10).

In a 1994 Citizenship and Immigration Canada publication, 'integration' was
characterized "as a 'Canadian approach' that was contrasted with assimilation and
segregation" (CIC, 1994, p. 18). Each of these settlement approaches—assimilation and
segregation—were described as having negative and extreme outcomes for newcomers'
participation in a society (Abu-Laban, 1998, p. 11). In the document, assimilation was

defined as newcomers being forced to use their own resources to adapt and fit in to their

new society, with the possibility of abandoning their home country dress and customs.

Segregation, in contrast, would marginalize newcomers from society and deny them

access to its institutions and entitlements. These extremes made integration, "a process

of mutual adjustment by both newcomers and society," seem a rather positive alternative

(p. 12). However, this use of "integration" still creates a binary relationship between the

newcomer and society, and suggests that "Canadian society" is monolithic and discrete

from newcomers, who are presumed to be much the same as one another (p. 12). A more

recent multiculturalism policy—created in 1996—is criticized for continuing to provide a

monolithic presentation of Canadian society. Also under scrutiny is the continuing policy

on immigration, which according to Abu-Laban, emphasizes "the 'economic worth' and

'self-sufficiency' of immigrants, who must be able to pay the cost of their [own]

'integration'" (p. 15).

A more recent example again establishes the tie between immigration and the economy:

In 2000, Eleanor Caplan, then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, announced that,

"Immigration made the last century a success for Canada" (Anderson, 2001). At the

same time, she announced the federal government's intention to increase the number of

immigrants admitted to Canada in 2000 and 2001 to between 200,000 and 250,000.

Presently, these numbers have been maintained or surpassed, and September 2005 saw

then Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin announce the need for more immigrants:

"Canada needs more immigrants, plain and simple, and we need them to succeed"

("Office of the Prime Minister," 2005). A few days later, an immigration plan to raise

levels 40% in five years was released (Canadian Press, 2005). But by November, these target numbers were amended and reduced to an increase of 10,000 new permanent residents from 2005 to 2006 (Weeks, 2005). Along with the release of this more achievable target was an announcement that immigration ministers at both the federal and provincial levels had agreed on a plan to improve the immigration system through even more settlement across the country and by making better use of the skills and experience offered by newcomers (*Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, 2005). This announcement was made just as 2006's federal election campaigning was beginning. It was followed by a promise to dedicate $700 million to clear the immigration backlog (Szklarski, 2005). At the present time, as Stephen Harper's minority Conservative government takes office, it is unknown whether Liberal election promises will be honoured.

2.4.1 The Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)

While these policies take place at the federal level, in larger cities across the country there is a growing backlash about the circumstances met by Canada's newest "Skilled Workers". In 2002, this term was created and defined in the *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA);* "Skilled Workers" are applicants "who may become permanent residents based on their ability to become economically established in Canada" (Tolley, 2003, p. 1). The Act's selection criteria emphasizes "human capital attributes and flexible skills, rather than the specific, intended occupations of applicants", and a point system assesses applicants on the basis of their education, work experience, language proficiency, age, and flexibility. Applicants with enough points (a minimum of 67-75 depending on the year of arrival) to successfully immigrate are granted permission to come to Canada. Principal applicants, or "Skilled Workers" are often accompanied by

spouses and children who comprise the "Family Class" of IRPA. Although each

immigration candidate's field of work is stated on their application, the point system does

not ensure that this is an opportune field of work in Canada. Many people arrive in

Canada assuming that because they were accepted as immigrants, they will also find

employment within their field of experience and education.

As it is often challenging for recent immigrants to find work equivalent to their skills and

experience, discontentment is expressed by some newcomers. A few people's stories of

disappointment have been aired in the popular media, such as CTV's *W-FIVE*

documentary television show. A recent episode, "Broken Dreams," recounted several

individuals' and families' stories (Trotter, 2005) and brought attention to a website called

"www.notcanada.com", which "provide[s] an accurate view of the problems and issues

that exist in Canada for immigrants" (Not Canada.com, 2006).

2.4.2 Deteriorating Economic Outcomes for Recent Immigrants
This is not the first time immigrants to Canada have had to struggle to achieve economic

stability. Evidence exists to support Caplan's previous statement which credits

immigration with Canada's economic success. According to Christopher Anderson

(2001), "for much of the country's history, immigration has been used as a means to

increase the labour pool in the pursuit of economic growth," but the issue is that, "most

immigrants did not share in the wealth that was thereby created" (p. 1). In the past,

immigrants have experienced "difficulties getting established in the workforce when they

first arrive in their host country, but [have] overcome these difficulties and obtain[ed]

earnings comparable to those of domestic-born workers as time passes" (Schellenberg

and Hou, 2005, p. 49). Unfortunately, the economic situation for more recent immigrants is not improving as it did in the past.

In Canada, as in many Western immigrant countries, the trend of recent immigrants needing to spend a period of time adjusting to ways of life here, and likely not succeeding economically for several years or perhaps even a generation, has become an expectation, but Harald Bauder (2003) challenges the notion "that this period of adjustment is a natural event" (p. 699). He analyses barriers to the labour market including the "devaluation of foreign education and credentials and the demand of Canadian experience" (p. 699, 713). Bauder describes the labour devaluations of recent immigrants in two forms: credentials earned outside of Canada are not recognized, and in applications for sought-after positions, stark differentiations are made between Canadian-born workers and recent immigrants who lack "Canadian experience" (pp. 707, 711).

According to Statistics Canada, four related factors underlie the recent deterioration of labour market outcomes for immigrants (Schellenberg & Hou, 2005, p. 49). First, there has been a shift in source countries away from "Western" cultures including Europe and the United States. Indeed, until the 1960s when emphasis moved to immigrants' occupational skills and education, Canada's immigration policy overtly used an ethnic organizing policy that "favoured the entry of white, particularly British-origin Protestants except in periods when there was insufficient labour in Canada" (Abu-Laban, 1998, p. 2). Currently China, India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka comprise the top five countries that newcomers emigrate from, with commensurate increased challenges

existing due to differences in language and culture, as well as discrimination (Schellenberg & Hou, p. 49-50). The second factor underlying the challenges for newcomers to find suitable work is, "declining returns to foreign experience and foreign education" which means that degrees and experience attained in these recent source countries are not recognized on the same basis as degrees and experience from Western countries (Ibid). Third, through the 1980s and 1990s "new entrants—including young people, people returning to work and recent immigrants—to the Canadian job market have experienced deteriorating employment outcomes" (Ibid). And last, the education levels of Canadian-born individuals have increased dramatically in the past 25 years. The Statistics Canada report suggests that "in such a competitive market, even marginal differences in educational quality, language or communication skills, or cultural norms could have an impact on employment outcomes" (Ibid).

The impacts of these and other factors are statistically evident. Three-quarters of recent immigrants settled in the urban centres of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. In 2001, in both Toronto and Vancouver, recent immigrants accounted for 17% of the total population, but comprised 32% of the low-income population (Schellenberg & Hou, 2005, p. 51). Between 1984 and 1999, the wealth of Canadian-born families increased by 37% but for immigrant families who had been in Canada for less than a decade, wealth decreased by 16% (p. 51). Results of a survey of immigrants in Vancouver who had been in Canada since 1991, demonstrate that nearly 40% experienced problems entering the labour market, and half "believed that their difficulties were the result of discrimination" (Hiebert, 2003, p. 29).

2.4.3 Civic Participation by Newcomers

Given these circumstances, what is a newcomer's best strategy for successful settlement? Acknowledging that most newcomers' key goal is to support oneself and one's family, the findings described later in this thesis suggest that time and effort exerted in civic participation and community formation can be vital for achieving economic success. For many newcomers with ICT expertise, VCN has provided opportunities to expand social networks and a means of accessing information and skills in a culturally-diverse Canadian setting.

The significance of a period of civic participation for newcomers to Canada may be far reaching. M. S. Mwarigha (2002) describes the information needs of recent immigrants in three stages: immediate, intermediate and integrative. This articulation is vital to understanding that immigrants' needs vary not only individually, but also over the course of their settlement. While information can be found online and through print resources, as well as from settlement counselors, recent immigrants at later stages of settlement may be in need of more tacit types of information, gained only by interacting socially with other members of their local community.

2.4.4 Life-Course Lens

The theory of life-course lens—"likely the second most popular sociological concept after social capital, exported to the policy and research community"—is also beneficial to the context of immigrant integration (Kunz, 2003, p. 41). It describes immigration as "a significant and often disruptive transition in life, affecting major life-course trajectories"

(Kunz, 2003, p. 41). It also describes immigrants as "a diverse group in terms of age, gender, family status, category of admission, and socio-economic status... [each of these] attributes hav[ing] implications for how well individuals fare in society" (Kunz, p. 41). Application of the life-course lens to the context of immigrant settlement is beneficial in at least two ways. First, it recognizes that the act of immigrating to another country is a major event that may create new trajectories for the directions of immigrants' lives (Kunz, p. 41). As well, it acknowledges immigrants as "a diverse group in terms of age, gender, family status, category of admission, and socio-economic status. These attributes have implications for how well individuals fare in society" (Kunz, p. 41). Effective use of the life-course lens requires longitudinal data, which was not collected for this study, but national longitudinal data is available through Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Immigration Data Base (IMDB), which is managed by Statistics Canada. The IMDB incorporates data since 1980 about "immigration, employment, and taxation activities [and turns it] into a comprehensive source of data on the labour market behaviour of the landed immigrant population in Canada labour market" (Langlois and Dougherty, 1997). The life-course lens offers an alternate perspective to that of social capital and allows us to see immigration as a process beginning prior to migration and continuing beyond the initial settlement stage (Kunz, 2003, p. 41). This thesis benefits from this theory because it highlights that immigration consists of a series of actions in the lives of individuals, and establishes recent immigrants as far more varied and vivified than common statistical "snapshots" would indicate.

To aid in the settlement process, it is important to recognize that the needs of new immigrants vary broadly, and that only a few requirements are met by the provision of standardized information. During a newcomer's settlement period, a voluntary period of civic participation may have many beneficial impacts on the individual's life-course trajectories, even though they may not be obvious at the time.

2.5 The Department of Canadian Heritage

Recognizing the challenges faced by recent immigrants to Canada, federal research about ethnocultural ICT use and civic participation has been conducted by Heritage Canada's Strategic Policy and Research Branch which—through in-house and commissioned research—provides "leadership and direction" to the Department's strategic policy (The Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005). Publications and conferences have focused on a range of topics including analyzing policy issues related to social and cultural dimensions of a knowledge-based society (Mosco, 1999), discussing internet access and communication rights in terms of human rights (Loucheur and De Santis, 1998), and examining ethnocultural uses of ICTs (Aizlewood and Doody, 2002).

2.5.1 Social Cohesion

One of the key theories in this thesis is social cohesion, which is "based on the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals" (The Department of Canadian Heritage, 2004). Since 1996, social cohesion has been one of the federal government's policy research priorities; The Department of Canadian Heritage, more particularly Jeannotte, has produced and co-authored several publications on this topic (2002, 2003). Both Jane Jenson (1998) and Sharon Jeannotte (2003) provide comprehensive overviews of Canada's social cohesion

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research. These views of social cohesion are summarized here to explain the relationship between social cohesion and social inclusion.

Working from Jenson's overview, Jeannotte describes social cohesion as simultaneously a cause, a process and a result. Depending on the quality of social and economic policies, the process of social cohesion can play out in either a vicious or a virtuous cycle: "[I]nequitable or insensitive policies" will result in "negative social outcomes or inequitable distribution of social benefits, both of which can erode social cohesion"(Jeannotte, 2003, p. 10). According to Jeannotte, one of the findings of the federal Social Cohesion Network—of which she was a member—is that economic exclusion is the "main exclusionary factor" and frequently serves as a "marker for other forms of exclusion—social, cultural or political—which also serve to marginalize individuals" (2003, p. 4). These indications of an economic basis for exclusion indicate that focused action needs to be taken in ways that promote financial equity. Recent immigrants being challenged to find work matching their credentials is an example of economic exclusion that is potentially combined with other forms of exclusion.

Trying to create social cohesion, particularly at the federal level, "displaces other possible ways of defining the problem such as ones stressing social injustice, lack of equitable outcomes or systemic discrimination" (Jenson, 1998, p. 37). The social cohesion perspective does not promote a nuanced study of the excluded. Pointing to gaps in the social cohesion literature, Jenson notes that research on the political participation of immigrants in Canada is "thin indeed" (p. 21). Other groups such as young people and

poor people, "whose attachment—or lack thereof—to the institutions of liberal democracy might be considered to be important" are also underrepresented. As well, the "concept of systemic discrimination" is nearly absent from social cohesion literature (Jenson, 1998, p. 21-22).

2.5.2 Social Inclusion

As an alternative to social cohesion research, Nadia Caidi and Danielle Allard (2005) describe "social inclusion" and its facilitation in the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988). The Act states that the official policy of the Canadian government is to "promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation" (The Department of Canadian Heritage, 2004). Using evidence from within the field of immigration and settlement, Caidi and Allard suggest that social cohesion's notion of a collectively held goal may be at odds with multiculturalism's encouragement of equitable participation. While social cohesion discourse may argue for conformity or homogeneity, "a social inclusion strategy that is meaningful to Canada's new immigrants does not focus on social cohesion, [but] instead it makes visible and seeks to break down barriers that prevent full participation into their new country" (Caidi and Allard, 2005, p. 19). They describe the recent social research agendas of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) as well as the Atlantic Women's Centre and the Laidlaw Foundation that have been at least "exploring the term social inclusion and its potential usefulness"; they find that at most it has been used as "the impetus and foundation" for a new direction in Canada's social policy (Caidi and Allard,

p. 20). According to Caidi and Allard social inclusion "values the perspectives and

differences of those on the margins and seeks to transform cultural practices and

institutions to accommodate differences" (p. 21). By encouraging "involvement and

engagement," social inclusion supports individuals to make "meaningful decisions about

themselves and their community" (p. 22). Rather than social cohesion as the catalyst for

social inclusion, outcomes such as "well-being, self-esteem and access to social power"

are the focus (Caidi and Allard, p. 22).

Further to the examination of social inclusion, in a recent paper Amanda Aizlewood,

Maureen Doody and Bruce Jamieson (2005) of Social Development Canada review

several definitions of social inclusion and are most compelled by the Laidlaw

Foundation's more detailed definition which they paraphrase as follows:

> In essence, social inclusion is seen as a pre-requisite to
> well-being and contributes to the achievement of well-being,
> including: economic growth and investment, good
> governance, improved health, increased educational
> attainment, improved real and perceived physical and
> financial security, and improved childhood outcomes. It
> describes a means by which everyone, regardless of their
> experiences and circumstances, may gain access to the
> opportunities, services and facilities they need to achieve
> their potential. It suggests a transformative agenda that
> creates expectations for fundamental change at multiple
> levels of society, from public attitudes to public policies to
> institutional practices and service delivery. (p. 16)

Following this comprehensive definition is Pedro Barata's (2000) description of

measuring social inclusion models as ranging from weak to strong. Weak inclusion

models situate "the excluded at the centre of analysis and looks for ways to integrate

them, a strong version looks at those doing the excluding and looks for ways to reduce

their powers of exclusion" (Aizlewood et al., 2005, p. 20). In Chapter 5, VCN's

volunteer program is examined in terms of social inclusion to determine its strengths and

areas for potential development.

In the Canadian discourse on social inclusion, the notion of citizenship is a recurrent

theme (Aizlewood et al., 2005, p. 19). According to Andver Saloojee (2001), democratic

citizenship is "at risk when a society fails to develop the talents and capabilities of all of

its members" (p. 4). The following section defines civic participation and describes its

significance in terms of VCN's volunteer program.

2.5.3 Civic Participation

To investigate means through which social inclusion is fostered, the Department of

Canadian Heritage recently began looking at civic participation and its relationship to

Community Networking. Graham Longford (2005), a member of CRACIN's executive

team, was commissioned to provide a paper on this topic. Longford defines civic

participation as "individuals' active engagement with and involvement in their

communities" (2005, p. 5). The most common forms of civic participation are "donating

time and/or money to charitable organizations; belonging to and/or participating in

community groups; attending public meetings; voting in elections; attending religious

services; and maintaining social networks with friends, neighbours and co-workers" (p.

6). Longford describes civic participation in three distinct categories:

- community service (volunteering and charitable work);
- political participation (voting, attending public meetings, etc.); and
- cultural participation (participating in arts and crafts guilds or cultural groups, communal storytelling, etc.). (p. 6)

Both social inclusion and civic participation are linked to social capital, a concept used to describe trust in others, confidence in public institutions, and a sense of belonging as a community member (Longford, 2005, p. 6). Social capital is more fully described in this chapter's next section. In the following chapters, the significance of VCN as a site of civic participation—resulting in engagement and information sharing—is discussed with input from the volunteers themselves.

Though it is neither exhaustive nor complete, the previous information about past events and policy creation in the departments of Industry Canada, Citizenship and Immigration, and Heritage Canada has been provided in order to bring some history and context to VCN as a research site, to the recent immigrants and volunteers who I spoke with there, and to my own research choices pertaining to theories and methodologies. Before moving to the next chapter where I describe these research methodologies, I will provide background about a few theories that are applicable to the research project but do not rise directly out of any of the government departments discussed here.

2.6 At the Community Network

A brief history of Community Networks (CNs), "locally-based, locally-driven communication and information system[s] designed to enhance community and enrich lives" (Shade, 2002, p. 6) was presented earlier in this chapter. CN's precursors, FreeNets, were initiated because of recognition that, "[i]nformation and the ability to communicate it—to receive and impart it—are necessary (but not sufficient conditions) for communities to develop and for inhabitants to thrive within them" (McIver, 2003, p. 35). VCN is one of these CNs which was initiated from a desire to provide access to

ICTs. Currently, VCN's vision statement is to "strive to be an inclusive, multicultural, community-based organization which ensures the free, accessible electronic creation and exchange of the broadest range of information, experience, ideas and wisdom" (VCN, 2006). The following paragraphs describe theories—third place, social capital, and human capital—used later in the thesis to describe the volunteer interactions that take place at the community network.

2.6.1 Third Place

Ray Oldenburg's (1989) concept of "third place" is useful in conceptualizing VCN as a physical location and site of interaction. He theorizes *home* as the first place and *work* as the second place. "Third places" tend to be casual hang-outs such as coffee shops or pubs that "exist on natural ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality" (p. 42). Because a recent immigrant's home or "first place" is a relatively new one, and his or her workplace, or "second place" is absent, as a "third place" VCN may be a key provider of much-needed social interaction and information exchanges.

2.6.2 Social Capital

Robert Putnam's (2000) work on social capital—in particular his differentiation between bridging and bonding social capital and their relationships to social inclusion—is also incorporated. He suggests that broad social networks (bridges) are beneficial for "getting ahead", while close relationships within more homogenous communities (bonds) are necessary for "getting by" (Putnam, p. 22). Mark Warschauer (2003) offers further examples of social capital theory applied to CN initiatives. Drawing on his work with ICTs in developing countries, Warschauer describes the ways that CNs promote loose

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networks that are ideal for sharing information and simultaneously diffusing the norms and values of a community.

2.6.3 Human Capital Theory and the Discourse of Individualism

Krista Scott-Dixon's (2004) Toronto-based study of women working in the information technology industry describes the mix of structural and individual factors constituting employment opportunities, and demonstrates the inclination of the free-market to focus on "human capital" or skills development as a means of placing the onus of employability on the individual. In Chapter Five, Scott-Dixon's critique of "human capital theory" is paired with a study by Lynn Schofield Clark, Christof Demont-Heinrich, and Scott Webber (2004) which focuses on the "discourse of individualism" (p. 542). Clark et al. interview families with and without computers to discuss the amelioration of the "digital divide." They find that each conversation has elements of the "discourse of individualism," which is comparable to "human capital theory" in the way that each perspective places the onus of responsibility on individuals to become connected to the internet and/or to improve their—generally ICT-related—skills. These theoretical lenses focus on purchases (of a computer or a course) as remedies, which benefits corporations but ignore social barriers that challenge digital connectivity and adequate employability. Critiques of these perspectives are applicable to this thesis, as I draw from them to make similar comments concerning the expectation that recent immigrants improve their own employability, even in current circumstances where their credentials are being systematically devalued.

The theories introduced and described in this section form the basis of this thesis. Their applicability to this analysis of the civic participation of newcomer volunteers at a community network is demonstrated in later chapters.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGIES

3.0.1 Introduction to Methodologies

This chapter describes the methods of research used in the thesis and provides details

about how the original data was obtained, including the fieldwork's challenges and

outcomes. The thesis' methodological approach incorporates both qualitative and

quantitative fieldwork. The theories described in Chapter Two, the data collected while

visiting VCN, and learning about the network's activities from both recent immigrant

volunteers and coordinators, provide numerous examples of how and where social capital

and social inclusion are fostered. These interpretations of the data are described in

Chapters Four and Five. Interviews with 9 VCN volunteers conducted in March 2005

provide the qualitative research component of this project and three sets of quantitative

data contribute statistical context.[5]

3.1. Explanation of Methodologies

The thesis' qualitative research was accomplished through immersion, observation and

interviews at VCN. Conversations were held with individuals who had immigrated to

Canada in the past five years and who were at the time current or past contributors to

VCN in the volunteer roles named earlier.[6] During our one-on-one meetings, we

discussed the newcomers' reasons for volunteering and what they see as benefits of their

experiences. I chose to focus on newcomers' experiences at VCN because I understood

from the coordinators that there were many volunteers who were recent immigrants, and I

thought that the information needs of people who had recently arrived in Vancouver

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[5] Appendix A is the Contextual Interview Guide employed at VCN.
[6] For descriptions of the volunteers who took part in interviews at VCN in March 2005, see Appendix B.

might differ from—and could be more urgent than—those of volunteers who were longer established.

In part because it is one of CRACIN's preferred methodologies, I had initially planned to use participatory action research (PAR) to become an "embedded" researcher at the CN. The PAR perspective views research as a goal and process and seeks the involvement and input of all stakeholders at regular stages, creating a research cycle of planning, doing, observing, and reflecting (Tacchi, Slater, and Hearn, 2003, p.4). It "seeks to include and involve a diversity of community members, to incorporate local knowledge and ideas, and to enhance democracy and individual, group, and community empowerment" (Lennie and Hearn, 2003). Given the limited scope and brief duration of the fieldwork, my practices were limited to those of an "outside", but friendly, interviewer. There was shared participation in the research aims, but I felt "a simple division between academic researchers and community partners" (Tacchi et al., 2003, p. 4). Because the questions I asked were my own and I did not feel like a regular, contributing member of the network, I hesitate to term this PAR. However, I am satisfied that my research process and outcomes did and will continue to "assist in planning new initiatives, and help community partners reflect on past initiatives" (Tacchi et al., 2003, p. 4). While I hold PAR as an ideal research methodology in some cases, the period of time I spent in-person at VCN, as well as the fact that my research questions were generated independently of VCN's coordinators and volunteers cause me to classify my research methods as ethnographic, but not essentially PAR.

For me, exposure to the network's operations was a great learning experience; it grounded my belief in, and understanding of, universal access to communication technologies. While I did feel like a researcher in a community unified by a common mandate, I cannot consider myself an impartial researcher partly because I share VCN's mandate for inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and ensuring free universal access to digital communication (VCN, 2006). As well, at different moments during fieldwork I felt close to several different members of the network, coordinators and volunteers alike. I now feel invested in supporting VCN and the efforts of its volunteers and coordinators. I feel that my attachment benefits this study; because I am invested, it is important that my analysis is relevant. I want the time invested by the volunteers and coordinators alike to be rewarded by clear communication of the insights I am gaining through this research. Because I have met and have an idea of the efforts invested by the volunteers, the coordinators, and the public servants who are involved with establishing funding for the programs that support VCN and who contribute to policy decisions at the federal level, it is even more important to me that my critique be fair and incisive. The complexity of interactions that support and maintain VCN are described in more detail as the thesis continues.

3.2 Description of Qualitative Research

The qualitative research includes 9 in-depth conversations with recent immigrant-volunteers of varied cultural origins. Each participant voiced positive opinions about volunteering at VCN, yet most expressed some frustration about the employment situation in Vancouver. In this chapter I describe the methodological processes and procedures of the qualitative data collection. The following chapters combine selections

from the interviews with further findings and interpretations. This is intended to position the volunteers' perspectives at the forefront of the thesis.

3.2.1 Establishing a Research Site

Besides completing the literature review, an initial goal of the thesis was to establish an urban CN as a research site. At the CRACIN workshops held in May and November 2004, my interest in undertaking qualitative research at a CN was expressed, and after the second workshop, a plan to undertake research at VCN was established. I prepared a Contextual Interview Guide and with the help of my advisor, Dr. Leslie Regan Shade, had it approved by Concordia University's Ethics Committee.[7] In February 2005, prior to my arrival in Vancouver, I drafted an email to invite VCN volunteers who were recent immigrants and who had been in Canada for five years or less to talk with me in the upcoming research period at VCN. The message was approved by VCN's coordinators, and sent out on the volunteers' listserv. I received three replies and scheduled appointments for interviews with these volunteers. Early in March 2005, I arrived at VCN and spent the first day meeting volunteers, talking with the coordinators, and booking space for conducting interviews. Recording devices were tested and pre-scheduled interviews were confirmed.

3.2.2 VCN's Physical Composition

On the first day of fieldwork I made many notes describing the physical space inhabited by the network. VCN's volunteers and coordinators are based in a large senior citizen's centre located at 411 Dunsmuir, one block from the Vancouver Public Library and

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[7] The initial Contextual Interview Guide is attached as Appendix A.

equidistant from Vancouver Community College. Chinatown is close by, as are the amenities of the downtown core. While the streets near the 411 Seniors' Centre are diverse and busy, they pale in comparison to what takes place within the building. VCN occupies one narrow side of the second floor and many neighbouring organizations fill the cubicles nearby. As the cafeteria and second-hand shop do business on the main floor, people—mostly senior citizens—are active throughout the building, taking dance lessons, playing ping pong, practicing English, and learning to use computers. Conducting research in such a busy space requires focus and flexibility.

3.2.3 Arranging Interviews

During my first days at VCN, the coordinators introduced me to many volunteers. Technical Help Desk Support Volunteers, Local Area Network Administrators, and Internet Instructors all volunteer at least one afternoon per week, so there were usually several volunteers interacting in the offices and lab at any time. During introductions, if the coordinators knew that a volunteer had been in Canada for a short time, they would mention this criteria match to both of us. In this case, I would then explain the purpose and procedures of my research and ask the volunteer if he or she was willing to take part in an interview. I met and explained my purpose to many people who did not match the criteria, but I was also introduced to several volunteers who were ideal for the study because they had immigrated to Canada within the past five years. Only one person who was suitable for an interview said no, stating a lack of time as her reason. As each of the other volunteers agreed to meet with me, interview times were booked, and the volunteers became contributors to this thesis. I was at VCN for two to four days a week over a period of three weeks. During this time I also attended a new volunteer training

session and took part in interviews with volunteer applicants. I became more familiar with the volunteers and their activities and came to realize that there was a small, core group of volunteers who were well-known to the coordinators and amongst one another. Except for the person who refused to be interviewed, I was able to talk with all of the then-current volunteers who matched the study's criteria. I also interviewed two past volunteers who saw my email on the listserv and agreed to take part.

VCN's coordinators played a key role in helping me connect with volunteers who were recent immigrants. Through their introductions, the coordinators acted as 'gatekeepers' to the people who were sources of information for this thesis. The make-up of volunteer participants may have varied, and there may have been fewer, if I had been left to my own devices. Many of VCN's neighbouring community organization coordinators joked with me about the volunteers being mostly men of Asian origins, but the actual gender and national origin of the volunteers I interviewed defy this stereotype. Just 4 of the 9 participants were from Asian countries (China and Korea) and 5 of the 9 interview participants were women. Because I chose to focus on the early settlement periods of volunteers rather than their cultural origins or differences, the coordinators may have considered it beneficial to the study to have me speak with volunteers from a variety of national origins creating "maximum variation sampling" (Lindlof, 1995) in which each participant is selected to complement the study "by adding a contrasting element to the overall sample" (Clark et al., 2004, p. 533). Regardless, based on the size of the volunteer team, there were not many more current volunteers who matched the criteria to participate.

3.2.4 Conducting Interviews and Initial Analysis (Grounded Theory)

The volunteer interviews took place in the 411 Seniors Centre, on either the second or

third floors. The location was not constant as scheduled events around the facility made

it necessary to move to different spaces regularly, sometimes in the middle of an

interview. The interviews were recorded digitally, after I asked each volunteer's

permission. None of the interviews were shorter than 48 minutes, and most lasted just

over 60 minutes. We used the questions in the Contextual Interview Guide as starting

points, talking first about initial impressions and becoming a volunteer at VCN. Next,

participants described the work involved in their volunteer roles, and what the highlights

were as well what kind of information they exchanged with other volunteers and

community members at the site. The remainder of the interview asked about more

general issues of information seeking and access to information, including defining the

'digital divide.' At the beginning of each interview, I spent a few minutes explaining the

ethics forms and in most cases, the volunteer and I spoke more socially after the

interview was complete, and our conversation was no longer being recorded. Once the

first two interviews were complete and I realized that it was very common for VCN's

volunteers to be highly skilled in the ICT field but challenged to find work reflective of

their skills, I amended the Contextual Interview Guide by streamlining existing questions

and adding two new ones. According to Creswell (1998), analyzing data while still

planning to collect more is an attribute of 'grounded theory', a research method also used

in the later stages of data analysis (p. 56-7).

The initial interviews—and discussions with the coordinators—gave me a better

understanding of the volunteer selection process and how it contributed to some of the

shared traits and experiences found amongst the volunteers. The majority of the volunteers I spoke with (all but Volunteer 3) found out about VCN online from volunteer websites after counselors at settlement agencies recommended volunteering as a means of gaining Canadian experience or settling into Vancouver.[8] In the other case, the opportunity to volunteer was discovered via word of mouth from a friend who was already a VCN volunteer. A section describing how applicants become volunteers follows in Chapter Four.

The realization that many of the volunteers who were recent immigrants were highly skilled, and were volunteering while they looked for work was unanticipated. I had not expected that *all* of the recent immigrant volunteers' education and work experience in their home countries would be so closely tied to the ICT industry. I had thought that some of the recent immigrant volunteers would not have attained internet skills in their home countries, and instead would have learned these skills at VCN, through the internet instruction offered at the site, or by regular use of the CAP site computers. It is important to note that the homogeneity of skills found amongst VCN's volunteers is due in part to VCN's application process and the coordinators' ability to select for particular skills, however, the case remains that many people are immigrating to Canada with very strong ICT skills, but are struggling to find work in their fields.

At the point that I made the realization that the volunteers were indeed *all* highly skilled in fields related to ICTs, the focus of my research became to record and amplify the

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[8] Examples of volunteer websites are "Go Volunteer": <http://www.govolunteer.ca/>, "Volunteer BC": <http://www.volunteerbc.bc.ca/>, and Volunteer Vancouver: <http://www.volunteervancouver.ca/>.

perspectives of recent immigrants who are skilled ICT workers, but challenged to find appropriate work. The number of volunteers who, regardless of their gender or cultural origins, were experiencing difficulty in finding suitable work struck me as a serious issue. With this focus established, I added two questions to the Contextual Interview Guide. One question asked participants how and what they thought of "Canadian experience," and another asked if they knew anyone who did not use the internet. I wanted to know how the volunteers viewed the process they were going through, and I wanted to verify that there are communities of recent immigrants who are just as—or more—connected than communities of people who were born in Canada.

3.2.5 Analysis of Qualitative Fieldwork

After I had scheduled the ninth interview, I determined that I had sufficient data to work with, and the coordinators and I agreed that unless we looked up past volunteers, I had spoken with all of the available volunteers who met the research criteria. Once the interviews were complete, I began to transcribe them. To do this, I replayed digital recordings of the interviews on my computer while typing the dialogues into word processing software. I was able to re-familiarize myself with each interview in this way, and to see some trends in the responses. While at VCN, I had some ideas about what the most interesting aspects of the interviews were, and as I worked through the transcribing process, these became more apparent. Using grounded theory, I analyzed the initial data to "conceptualize and compare [it] in terms of commonalities" (Rennie and Brewer, 1987, p. 11). I looked for emergent theories "closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied" which resulted in grouping the responses into three categories using a

combination of open and selective coding (Creswell, 1998, p. 56-7). These categories grouped attributes of VCN as

1) an informal information-sharing network,
2) a social support system, and
3) a site for interaction amongst people from diverse cultures.

I also created a "general" category that included poignant responses of a more wide-ranging nature.

3.2.6 Adding Quantitative Research

Shortly after I transcribed the interviews, I gave one conference presentation based on the findings.[9] While the presentation stirred peoples' interest, I felt that adding quantitative, statistical findings to the existing research would strengthen the study. The interviews provided interesting insights to the characters and situations of the recent immigrant volunteers I spoke with, but without knowing how many people shared these situations, I felt that the study lacked context. With additional funds made available through CRACIN, a return visit to VCN in the Summer of 2005 was organized and it resulted in the examination of three quantitative data sets.

3.3 Introduction of Quantitative Research

Each of the three data sets—a survey, an examination of current and past volunteers' resumes, and an analysis of the online application database—has some benefits and limitations. Combined, they create several perspectives of VCN's volunteer make-up and provide further details about the volunteers. Conducting this fieldwork after analyzing the interviews also contributes to the "zigzag process" of grounded theory, where data gathering and analysis interplay in a back and forth pattern (Creswell, 1998, p.56).

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[9] "Research Findings: Narratives of Digital and Social Inclusion." Canadian Communications Association Annual Conference, London, Ontario, June 2-4, 2005

3.3.1 Survey

The survey[10] was completed by all of the current and past volunteers who came into VCN between July 7th and 14th, 2005. During this same period, the survey was also emailed to the volunteer listserv, and I received three responses via email. The survey gathered information from its 26 participants to gauge how many were recent immigrants, what their ages were, what their then-current employment status was, for how long they had volunteered at VCN, in what role, and for how many hours per week. The results provide some information about this particular group of volunteers, though VCN's coordinators suggested that the volunteer team consists of more students (from local high schools, colleges and universities) during the summer months. The survey provided some key findings:

- 86% of respondents were not born in Canada
- 65% had arrived within the past five years
- 62% of the volunteers had been volunteering at VCN for six months or fewer
- 45% were looking for work
- The average age of the recent immigrant volunteers is 33.4 years.

There were also findings about the duration and intensity of the volunteers' periods of civic participation at VCN. While 62% of the survey participants had volunteered for 6 months or less, the reported average duration of civic participation was 7.5 months. Apparently, some people volunteered for long periods of time to attain this average. VCN's volunteer guidelines request that volunteers commit at least 4 hours per week to the network, but the reported average number of hours volunteered was much higher, at 7.62 per week. The key limitation of the survey is its small sample size, yet it is thorough; every volunteer who came to VCN during its one week duration responded to it.

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[10] See Appendix D for the complete survey.

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3.3.2 VCN Volunteer's Resumes

Analyzing the second set of quantitative data, the collection of volunteer resumes, was challenging. Although the resumes do share characteristics, they could not be compared directly as they do not contain identical fields. Regardless, trends became apparent. I limited the data set to resumes that matched the volunteer roles of the people I had interviewed: Language Portal Developer, Technical Help Desk Support, and Local Area Network Administrator. One hundred and sixteen resumes belonging to people who had been or were still active volunteers were gathered over a period of one year ending July 7, 2005. Based on the information in the resumes, 63% of the volunteers had immigrated to Canada within the past five years, and 91% of this group had either a Bachelor's or Master's degree. All of the recent immigrant volunteers listed work experience in their home countries, but 70% had no work experience in Canada.

My analysis of the resumes led to some consideration of the information that was not present. This was only possible because I had already conducted interviews, and found that some of the experiences the volunteers had related to me such as working at service jobs were not reflected on the resumes that I examined. It is possible that some of the volunteers had work experience in Canada, but because it was of the "survival job" variety and not related to the ICT field, it was not included on their resumes. A more obvious form of absented information was the trend of listing corporations and universities without stating the country in which they were located. A small number of resumes listed non-Canadian corporations and institutions without any other national identifiers. These information absences could have been oversights, but it seemed to me that this was a purposeful attempt to ensure that the resume was not quickly dismissed for

being from a foreign country or even a particular national origin. Similarly, Scott-Dixon notes that one of her participants who works at a call center stated that many of her co-workers had down-graded their resumes to find work because they were overqualified for call center positions. In this case it was actual achievements—not the countries in which they were earned—that were removed (2004, p. 106).

3.3.3 Online Volunteer Application Database

The third quantitative data set that I analyzed at VCN was the online volunteer application database. Of the 793 people who applied online to volunteer between November 1, 2003 and June 30, 2005, only 17% actually became volunteers. The information in the database is representative of many people who were at some point interested in becoming volunteers, though at one of the stages in the application process, either lost interest or were not encouraged to continue because they were not considered a good fit with VCN's volunteer program.

Three groups of findings from this database are noteworthy. The first is the breakdown of the applicants' reported career status:

- 50% were looking for work
- 27% were students
- 11.3% were employed
- 1.5% were retired
- 10.2% were 'other'

These statistics demonstrate that very few volunteer applicants are employed; indeed, half were looking for work at that time. Students, composing 26% of the volunteer applications, were already taking measures to gain experience for their future employment seeking. Besides the consideration of VCN operating only during business

hours which makes volunteering unlikely for people with full-time day jobs, these

findings indicate that civic participation is likely considered beneficial to job-seekers.

Also of interest are the applicants' self-reports of their technical skill sets. These

demonstrate a high level of ICT skills and knowledge:

- 99% own a computer
- 95% rated themselves as advanced internet users
- 93% rated themselves as advanced email users
- 34% listed a website they own or have contributed to

With all of the volunteers applying online, listing an email address, and the above

itemisation of their internet experiences, access to ICTs does not seem to be a major issue

for VCN's volunteer program applicants. In contrast, applicants demonstrated a deficit in

knowledge of community organizations, as indicated by 66% of applicants stating that

they had basic or no knowledge of not-for-profit organizations.

There is also a less quantitative aspect of the database. Apart from the database's check

boxes and drop-down lists, its text fields provide more personal information. Many

people stated that they had recently moved to Vancouver and were looking to volunteer.

In the text field asking for the reason for applying, the phrases "work experience", "gain

experience", "Canadian experience", and "improve English" were commonly found.

3.3.4 Quantitative Conclusions

Together, these three quantitative data sets provide a statistical context of VCN's

volunteer program. The array of sources provides checks to ensure that interpretations

yield similar notions of what is taking place. In several cases two data sets' findings

complement one another. For example, both the survey and the resumes indicate that

more than 60% of the volunteers are recent immigrants who have been in Canada for five years or less. Similarly, while the survey indicates that 45% of the volunteers are looking for work, 50% of the application database users stated that they were looking for work. Finally, the high level of ICT skills held by volunteers and volunteer applicants alike is noted in both the application database and the volunteers' resumes.

3.4 Methodological Conclusions

The data sets described in this chapter provide evidence of how many people have been involved with VCN in a volunteer capacity, how many of these people were recent immigrants, and how generally skilled with ICTs they are. While none of the data presented can be considered longitudinal, this combination does provide more than one snapshot of VCN's diverse volunteer demographic. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry has produced findings that enhance and support each another. This twinned approach seems particularly beneficial given my concern—in part because of my affiliation with CRACIN—to provide comprehensive studies of community networks and the programs that support them.

With the methodological and theoretical components of the project described, the next step is to interpret this data using the previously described theories. Chapter Four will demonstrate that these volunteers are atypical of those who are described as average participants in civic activities across Canada and it will establish VCN's volunteers as an "alternate civic core", looking to meet their economic goals through the route of civic participation.

CHAPTER 4: VCN AS A SITE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

4.0.1 Sonia's Story (Part Two)

Sonia applied to volunteer at VCN when she first arrived in Vancouver. She even visited the physical site and spoke with a volunteer coordinator. She was expecting to receive a phone call asking her to come in for a volunteer shift, but the call never came. Whether there was a miscommunication or no need for her to volunteer at that time remains unclear to her. However, some months later Sonia was still interested in volunteering at VCN, so she reapplied and soon afterward began her work on the Russian Language Portal, a translation of VCN's site providing links to culturally relevant organizations and events. She spent time working on the project at home but she also came to VCN every week to work with other Language Portal volunteers. Because of her work experience as a mathematical programmer, the web design interface was simple for Sonia to use and she further "tweaked" the site. Described by another volunteer as "the brain-head of us all," Sonia's help benefited many other Language Portal volunteers and she enjoyed feeling useful. Since her Language Portal is now complete and she has found work, she says that getting to meet new people and seeing the volunteers she has become friends with are the main reasons she continues her involvement with VCN.

4.0.2 Chapter Introduction

This chapter focuses on VCN's volunteers. It describes the process of becoming a volunteer and establishes VCN's volunteers as an "alternate civic core" that differs significantly from Canada's typical "civic core". Based on interviews with VCN's volunteers who were recent immigrants, it describes some of the reasons for and benefits of volunteering in terms of employability, becoming involved with the local community,

and gaining social support. These benefits are described in terms of human capital, social capital, and social inclusion.

4.1 Becoming a VCN Volunteer

The process to become a volunteer at VCN has four steps:

1) completion of online application,
2) visiting VCN for an applicant interview,
3) shadowing an experienced volunteer for one shift, and
4) attending a volunteer training session.

Many would-be volunteers do not complete these four steps to become a VCN volunteer. Based on an analysis of the online applications collected in the 20-month period between November 1, 2003, and June 30, 2005, of the 793 people who had applied to become volunteers, only 135, or 17%, actually volunteered. Fifty-seven percent of volunteer applicants heard about VCN from a website; "Volunteer Vancouver" (25%) or VCN's own website (22%) were the two sites most commonly noted as the initial source for learning about VCN. Notably, 34% of volunteer applicants heard about VCN through a VCN volunteer or a network member or the website.

The process of becoming a volunteer begins online. Indeed, the first step of the application process establishes that those who cannot complete an online application are not suited to being a volunteer at VCN. To apply, internet-skilled volunteer candidates visit the volunteer pages of VCN's website and complete the online application. Besides contact and background information, applicants are required to describe their technical skills in detail: listing the computer languages that they know and rating their capabilities with software and hardware. Besides technical skills, the application asks about community development knowledge including the applicant's "open-mindedness and

ability to work with diverse groups" and "familiarity with the non-profit sector" (VCN, 2005).

Once the application has been submitted, VCN's coordinators examine the application and depending on the needs of the organization at the time, the coordinators may send an invitation to come to a volunteer interview. Selecting which applicants are likely to be suitable for VCN's volunteer program relies on the coordinators' past experiences, and their understandings of what makes the volunteer team function well. Applicants' skills are one aspect to consider. Many people with training in ICTs have vendor-specific skills related to Microsoft, Nortel, or Cisco systems that do not translate easily to VCN's Unix-based, open source software systems. Further, those employed in junior positions within large firms tend to have less experience with solving a broad range of problems, and tend to be skilled in specific tasks, which may not exist at VCN. The coordinators try to discern from the application if the volunteer experience that would be gained at VCN will help the applicant, and how well-matched the applicant's skills are to the volunteer roles at VCN. Other experiences that the applicant could bring to VCN are also relevant. For example, if the applicant expresses an interest in creating community content and speaks a language that does not yet exist as a web portal (a translated website), then that person is likely to receive an invitation to a volunteer interview. The coordinators also try to ensure that volunteers have diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds, and for that reason, may not select someone who is of the major language group of a current volunteer team, or who has the same skills set as several other volunteers.

The applicant interviews are held at standard times, two afternoons per week. As VCN is

only open during business hours on weekdays, volunteering is limited to people available

at these times. Of the people who are invited to VCN for an interview, some may not

come at all, finding the location difficult to access, or realizing that the scheduled shifts

conflict with family or work obligations. Those who do come, wait to see a coordinator

for an interview of up to 20 minutes. At this point, the coordinator asks questions to

gauge the applicant's initiative and knowledge of VCN's operations by checking how the

applicant heard about VCN, and how much of the information on the website has been

understood. In the case of volunteer applicants who have just arrived in Vancouver and

will still be taking part in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)

training or more specific work skills training programs, the coordinator will recommend

completing those programs before volunteering. If the applicant remains unsure about

volunteering once he or she has met a coordinator and seen the space that VCN operates

from, it is easy for him or her to terminate interactions with VCN at this point.

For applicants who remain interested in volunteering and who have received

encouragement to volunteer from the coordinators, the next step in the process is to

shadow an experienced volunteer who is working in the role that best suits the applicant.

Currently, the most common starting roles for volunteers are Technical Help Desk

Support and Internet Instructor. Volunteer shadowing is ongoing and expected by the

volunteers; at some point each of them has shadowed another volunteer. When

shadowing, the applicant spends a shift with an experienced volunteer, asking questions

and learning about what is expected and how best to deal with different situations as they

arise. There are a number of online materials that comprise a training manual that can be read in advance or at VCN if the shift is not too hectic.

Once the shadow shift is complete, and applicants have a better idea of what is expected of them in their volunteer roles, the next step is attendance at a semi-monthly volunteer orientation session. These sessions last for a couple of hours and the coordinators provide an overview of VCN's mandate, history, and overall functions. The volunteers introduce themselves and ask any questions they might have. They sign on to the volunteer listserv and they are shown how to sign up for shifts on the online schedule.

Volunteers are expected to contribute four hours a week for a minimum period of four months, which in comparison to many volunteer positions, is substantial. Some of the volunteers spend more time than this at VCN because they feel that they have a lot of free time while they look for work, or in the case of students, while they are on vacation from school.

4.2 Who are VCN's Volunteers?

As was established in Chapter 3, more than 60% of VCN's volunteers are recent immigrants who have been in Canada for five years or less. Between 45% and 50% of the volunteers are looking for work and consider civic participation a means to becoming more employable. They have been selected to become volunteers at VCN because of their strong ICT skills gained through education and work experiences, in home (or other) countries. The number of hours and level of skills offered by newcomers is not broadly recognized, though VCN's coordinators do acknowledge that as a charitable Internet

Service Provider (ISP) with a public presence, the capabilities of the network are

somewhat reliant on having such skilled volunteers. In contrast with the findings at VCN,

a 2003 survey completed by Statistics Canada finds low levels of civic participation

amongst a broader immigrant demographic:

> ...immigrants who had arrived in Canada since 1980 were less likely
> than earlier arrivals and Canadian-born persons to have been involved in
> at least one organization. (Schellenberg, 2004, p. 11)

> More specifically, immigrants (aged 25 to 54) who had arrived in
> Canada since 1990 were less likely than Canadian-born persons to have
> signed a petition, boycotted or chosen a product for ethical reasons or
> attended a public meeting.... (Schellenberg, 2004, p. 13)

In contrast to the minimal engagements reported in these general, pan-Canadian findings,

at VCN the civic contributions of recent immigrants are vital. Compared to both longer-

settled immigrants and Canadian-born individuals, recent immigrants constitute more

than 60% of the network's volunteers. This is not a situation that exists only at VCN. At

St. Christopher House in urban Toronto, the CN reports high numbers of recent

immigrant volunteers. The online availability of a number of resources developed to aid

volunteer coordinators who are working with recent immigrants also indicates that civic

participation amongst newcomers is a growing trend.[11]

4.3 Establishing the "Alternate Civic Core"

Paul Reed and Kevin Selbee (2000) created the term Canada's "civic core" to describe

the "middle-aged, well-educated and affluent" people who the Statistics Canada report

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[11] Examples of resources addressing recent immigrants as a growing volunteer population include
Volunteer Canada's (2004) *Career Information for New Immigrants and Refugees: Needs Assessment
Research*, Calgary Immigrant Aid Society's (2004) *Culturally Diverse Youth and Volunteerism: How to
Recruit, Train and Retain Culturally Diverse Youth Volunteers*, and the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's
(2004) *Understanding Canadian Volunteers: Using the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and
Participating to Build Your Volunteer Program*.

(Schellenberg, 2004) suggests take on the majority of the volunteer work accomplished in Canada (Longford, 2005, p. 11).

In some respects, VCN's volunteers are atypical of this "civic core". VCN's "alternate civic core" *is* well-educated: across the volunteer base 83% hold Master's or Bachelor's degrees, and within the recent immigrant demographic, 91% have these same levels of education while the remaining 9% have computer-related technical diplomas (See Table 1). Pertaining to age, VCN's volunteers tend to be younger than "middle-aged". The average age of volunteers determined by the July 2005 survey is 31, although the average age in the recent-immigrant volunteer demographic is slightly higher at 33.4. While there was no measure of wealth, or personal or family savings in this study, at the time of application 50% of VCN volunteers described their career status as "looking for work" and another 27% of volunteers are students. Most VCN volunteers, therefore, share an employment situation that is not in concordance with that of Canada's "civic core".

Table 1: Contrasting Canada's "Civic Core" with VCN's "Alternate Civic Core"

	Canada's "Civic Core"	VCN's "Alternate Civic Core"
Socio-economic status	Affluent	Economically insecure
Education	Well-educated	Over 90% hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree related to ICT
Age	35-40 and older	Youth to early forties
Work experience (in Canada)	Established in a professional occupation	Over 70% have no Canadian work experience but 100% have work experience in other countries
Dwelling place	Non-metropolitan community	Vancouver or a neighbouring suburb

("Civic Core" descriptions from Longford, 2005, p.5 and Reed & Selbee, 2000, p.17)

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Besides having lived in Canada for a relatively short period of time, VCN's recent-

immigrant volunteers share other attributes in terms of their education and work

experience.

- 91% have a Bachelor's or Master's degree earned in a country other than Canada in the fields of computer science, engineering, informatics, or a field related to communication technologies
- 100% have computer-related work experience from countries other than Canada
- 70.5% do not have work experience in Canada[12]

These findings are significant. They demonstrate that a considerable number of recent

immigrants to Canada are in similar circumstances of looking for work appropriate to

their abilities and experience. It is noteworthy that these newcomers are choosing civic

participation at an ICT-related community network as an interim activity. Their reasons

for volunteering at VCN are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

4.4 Digital Connectivity vs. Social Connectivity

Further evidence of the volunteers' skills is demonstrated by the types of responsibilities

they hold at VCN; they create language portals, work at the help desk, administer the

network and teach internet skills to other network members. During interviews, I learned

that several language portal volunteers had backgrounds in programming; they describe

the Graphical Use Interface (GUI) tool they used to build VCN's language portals as

"straightforward". Language portal volunteers depict activities such as networking

within language communities and choosing suitable web content as the most challenging

tasks of portal creation. While the work of the language portal volunteers is largely

independent and behind-the-scenes, help desk volunteers are VCN's "front-line" workers.

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[12] It is possible that a higher percentage of volunteers have Canadian work experience, but not in their professional field, so it is not listed on their resumes, which is the source of this finding.

Help desk volunteers must have strong technical skills to coach network members

through establishing and troubleshooting dial-up connections, but strong social and

language skills are also important as these volunteers represent VCN to network members

and to the public both over the phone and in-person. Volunteers in the role of network

administrators are experienced with hardware and servers and have the capabilities to

maintain VCN's office networks. While liaising with help desk volunteers and VCN's

coordinators, these volunteers also maintain and repair in-house and donated equipment

that is then passed along to community groups. The final set of volunteers described here

are internet instructors who also combine their social skills with technical skills; they

provide one-on-one internet and software instruction to the network members who visit

VCN's computer lab.

Based on the strength of the volunteers' knowledge and technical skills, they can be

described as "digitally included." They are on the upper-half of the so-called "digital

divide" in terms of their access to, habitual use of, and expertise with the internet. As an

example, all of the people I interviewed responded with just one word when in interviews

I asked how they look for information. It was "Google." As well, none of the people I

spoke with knew anyone in Canada who was not an internet user. Findings from one

Statistics Canada report support the suggestion that many recent immigrants have—and

make regular use of—strong technical skills:

> ...immigrants who arrived in Canada since 1990 [are] more likely than
> others to use the internet to communicate with their relatives. This is
> probably because the internet [is] a cost-effective way for immigrants to
> communicate with family members in other countries, as well as because
> recent immigrants have, on average, higher levels of educational
> attainment than Canadian-born persons. (Schellenberg, 2004, p. 16)

Although the volunteers are "digitally included"—perhaps even more so than is common amongst longer-term residents of Canada—recent international relocation has resulted in these volunteers being less "socially connected" than they were prior to emigration. This thesis' focus on a group of people who have strong technical skills, and are able to connect to information available online, demonstrates that technical connectivity alone is not enough to ensure social well-being, use of available information, and in the case of newcomers, economic stability. This resonates with the critique of the "digital divide" perspective as well as the introduction to social inclusion theory. Digital connections do not ensure social ones, and economic exclusion is often linked to social barriers.

4.5 Why Do Newcomers Volunteer at VCN?

During the research period at VCN, people shared many different reasons for why the site is a popular place to volunteer. The majority related their choice to volunteer at VCN with a desire to increase their employability (by practicing English, gaining local experience, or getting a work reference). Others mentioned VCN's central location and the ease of going there via public transportation. Contributing to the community and getting to know people was another common reason.

> [I volunteered to] do something for the community and also to
> practice computer skills...[I want] to help others and ... to better my
> communication skills because you know I am a new immigrant and
> my English is not good. (Volunteer 1)

> I came to VCN to improve my technical skills and to involve myself with
> more people. (Volunteer 7)

> I liked that it is in Vancouver, not Surrey or Langley, so it is easy to come
> [here]. (Volunteer 2)

I think volunteers are serious because they can also benefit from this experience. After three months they can get a [work] reference, and they can practice their language skills and technical skills and communicate and learn things from others. Volunteers do get benefits from this. (Volunteer 3)

Each volunteer who I spoke with mentioned job seeking or gaining work experience as significant factors in his or her decision to volunteer at VCN. These volunteers are not unusual; according to the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), 62% of unemployed volunteers "believed that volunteering would improve their job prospects" (McClintock, 2004, p. 7). Also in concordance with the NSGVP, volunteers usually gave more than one reason for their civic participation, indicating that the reasons for and benefits of volunteerism amongst VCN's newcomer volunteers are multiple and overlapping (Ibid). This makes discrete analysis of factors influencing the need and desire to volunteer impractical. As is discussed in the final chapter, there may be equally complex relationships involved in the barriers limiting newcomers from work appropriate to their education levels and previous work experiences.

4.6 Volunteers' Interactions at VCN

Social interactions are key to VCN's functions. VCN welcomes new volunteers who can contribute to the network's functions and likewise, there is great demand for the opportunity to volunteer in such a practical, but specialized capacity. VCN's organizational strategies encourage personal initiative and rely on interactions between volunteers.

A description of VCN's volunteer-training practices illustrates how this is achieved. Because the turn-over of volunteers is high, besides being interviewed and orientated by VCN's two full-time coordinators, new volunteers are trained by other, more experienced volunteers.[13] Each role is challenging and volunteers are required to learn quickly. Because of the variety of questions asked of volunteers, a typical helpdesk shift necessitates working together to respond to requests appropriately. One volunteer describes this positive learning experience as particular to non-profit organizations:

> [At VCN] everybody shares information and that's interesting. In a company, everybody expects you to know everything. Here you feel free to say, "I don't know this part." (Volunteer 6)

In their official capacities at VCN, volunteers train one another, ask each other questions, and regularly come to other volunteers' aid. As an extension of these activities, volunteers also tend to feel comfortable sharing information that is more personally relevant. Conversation topics range from employment opportunities to educational programs, and even to the daily challenges of being a newcomer to Canada. Volunteers describe the exchange of information at VCN as free-flowing and non-hierarchical:

> I feel very comfortable with the volunteers at VCN. We are in the same position. We came from different countries to start work, to find something. (Volunteer 2)

> Basically it is an information exchange centre. You have so many people here [and] they all bring ideas and news to this place. (Volunteer 3)

> There are a lot of opportunities. When the volunteers come here, they exchange information about where there are jobs, and where there are interviews and which websites have a lot of postings. They tell each other about companies that are hiring people. That's the [kind of]

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[13] Eighty-percent of VCN's volunteers who began their volunteer experience during the 20-month period between November 1, 2003 and June 30, 2005, also completed their duration within this time frame.

information that is exchanged amongst volunteers. It's a cycle; it goes
on and on. (Volunteer 7)

The specificity, duration and frequency of information exchanges between VCN

volunteers and network members are greater than purely social interactions in a public

setting would be. It is notable that nearly all of the reasons volunteers provide for their

civic participation at VCN rely on face-to-face interactions in a shared space. The

importance of a common, shared space is discussed in the next section.

4.7 VCN as a "Third Place"

All of the volunteers have the digital skills required to keep in touch with friends

and family in their home countries and to find online information about living in

Canada, but they are looking to connect with people in-person. Although the

volunteers are technically enabled and aware of opportunities for online interaction,

they choose to make face-to-face contact with other volunteers and network

members on a regular basis. One volunteer describes the importance of regular

interaction this way:

> Every Thursday [when I came to volunteer] there were a lot of new
> people, but I might see one or two people who I had already met. When
> you don't have a job or know a lot of people and don't have a very large
> social life it is good to know that every Thursday afternoon you will see
> these same people. (Volunteer 9)

One way of thinking about the relevance of recent-immigrant volunteers' in-person

interactions at VCN is in terms of Oldenburg's (1989) concept of "third place". "Third

places" tend to be casual hang-outs such as coffee shops or pubs that "exist on natural

ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality" (p. 42). They are

"remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support" which

they extend (p. 42). In contrast to the casual interactions that take place at most third places, volunteers do come to VCN with the purpose of contributing to the organization's mandate, and once there, they follow an organized structure. However, the site suits many of the attributes of the "third place" including:

- nourishing relationships and a diversity of human contact
- helping to create a sense of place and community
- encouraging sociability instead of isolation, and
- being a highly accessible place where a number of people regularly go

Because a recent immigrant's home or "first place" is a relatively new one, and his or her workplace, or "second place" is absent, as a "third place" VCN may be a key provider of much-needed social interaction and information exchanges. While all of the people who use VCN as an internet service provider (ISP) gain information and opportunities for online interaction, contributing to the network *in-person* (as a volunteer) may have significantly greater impacts. The following sections analyze views of volunteering at VCN by examining interview excerpts in three realms: how recent immigrants describe their civic participation in terms of human capital, social capital and social inclusion.

4.8 The Interrelated Concepts of Human Capital, Social Capital and Social Inclusion

Definitions of the three interrelated concepts of "human capital," "social capital," and "social inclusion" were provided in Chapter 2. In the following sections pertaining to each overlapping and interrelated concept, the terms are re-introduced with a brief description of their interrelationship. Excerpts from the interviews demonstrate how the volunteers' views pertain to and illustrate the concepts of human and social capital, and social inclusion.

4.8.1 Human Capital at VCN

Human capital relates to the knowledge, education, skills and experience held by an

individual. For newcomers to Vancouver, conversational English language capability is a

significant aspect of human capital. Research demonstrates that "proficiency in one of

Canada's official languages is critical to effective integration" (Frith, 2003, p.35).

Because English is the language spoken at VCN, every conversation is an opportunity to

practice conversational English and in this small way, increase human capital. Indeed,

many volunteers say that improving their spoken English was a key reason for starting to

volunteer at VCN. One volunteer describes his experiences this way:

> In China, I had little practice speaking in English, so it has improved a
> lot here. And now I talk to all kinds of people: seniors, men, [and]
> women. I talk with people from different places, too. (Volunteer 5)

This same volunteer was just about to start a new job and explained how his interactions

at VCN contributed to his employment success:

> ...getting this job was benefited a lot by my work experience at VCN. [At
> VCN I learned] how to talk with people, and even in the interview, how to
> answer their questions. Working at VCN gave me a lot of practice.
> (Volunteer 5)

Besides communication and language skills, volunteers' technical skills are kept up-to-

date and broadened by their experiences at VCN.

> When I came here I learned to go through and troubleshoot by going
> through this series of steps. I had to upgrade these [troubleshooting] skills.
> (Volunteer 7)

> I have learned about free software, and what kinds of software are used in
> Canada. I get to meet with other technical guys and learn and talk with
> them. (Volunteer 1)

> ...when you go for a [work] position it is good to show that you are still
> staying active in your field. (Volunteer 9)

Some of the activities at VCN are directly related to job seeking. One volunteer

describes a seminar planned for this purpose:

> At the end of last year there [were] a couple of volunteers who got jobs
> and told us about how they did it- how they did the job search, how they
> did at the interviews. (Volunteer 3)

Earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter Three, the volunteers' educational achievements—

generally accomplished in other countries—were described. Even though the volunteers

are already skilled and knowledgeable, gaining some experience with these skills in

Canada seems to enhance their human capital and to benefit their job-seeking processes.

This situation is further discussed in Chapter 5. The next focus is to demonstrate how

volunteer contributions to the network—while resulting in enhanced technical skills and

practice with English language skills—also build social capital.

4.8.2 Social Capital at VCN

Jean Kunz (2003) states that, "unlike human capital that is observable through diplomas

and certificates, social capital is less tangible because it exists in the relations among

individuals" (p. 33). Social capital is a "public good" created through social interactions.

Robert Putnam (2000) defines it as "social networks and the associated norms of

reciprocity" (p. 21). Interactions between volunteers and with network members at VCN

are thought to build trust and social capital. According to Kunz, "[s]uccess in the labour

market depends as much on one's human capital as it does on the social capital one is

able to accumulate" (2003, p. 33). While one can often work on her human capital

independently—through study, practice, and information searches—social capital can

only be generated through social interactions and memberships. Understanding this provides new relevance to civic participation.

Many people who would not otherwise have an opportunity to meet are able to connect and exchange information at VCN. For some volunteers, VCN provides a source of community other than one based on shared first-language or home-country cultures. Informally, it facilitates interaction amongst people from diverse cultural backgrounds, which in turn provides a means of learning about local or Canadian culture and other volunteers' home countries. Two volunteers describe their interactions in VCN's heterogeneous setting:

> Every week I meet people from many different origins. It's the most interesting. (Volunteer 9)

> It is already a year since I started and I have found many friends here. I have friends from Yugoslavia, Germany, China, Austria, from France, from everywhere. Most of them have found jobs, but I keep in touch and sometimes we email. I like this place. (Volunteer 2)

To put this in context in terms of social capital theory, Putnam differentiates between "bridging" and "bonding" social capital by describing social networks that include or *bridge* people of different races, ages, genders, religions, education, ideologies, geographies and classes as useful for "getting ahead" (Putnam quoting de Souza Briggs, 1993, p. 21). According to Kunz, "Bridging capital is ... essential for immigrants to expand their networks beyond their own ethnic community and to acculturate into the receiving society" (2003, p. 34). Conversely, social networks that *bond* members of a group to the exclusion of others are useful for "getting by" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Kunz states, "in terms of employment, [an] ethnic network is useful mainly in finding jobs with

low human capital requirements" (2003, p. 34). For those immigrants who are highly skilled and educated, it is bridging capital that enables economic and social advancement (2003, p. 34).

The human and social capital-building that occurs within VCN's offices is not capricious; openness toward diversity prevails and anyone with skills that might benefit VCN is invited to a volunteer interview. In accordance with its vision statement, VCN endeavors to be inclusive and multicultural in its efforts to provide access to electronic creativity and broad exchanges of ideas and knowledge (2003). Raymond Breton (1997) suggests that, "participation beyond ethnic or racial boundaries is partially a function of the openness of the associations, networks and structures of the host society." He adds, "The structure of opportunities for participation is crucial" (p. 9).

4.8.3 Social Inclusion at VCN

How does social inclusion fit with human and social capital? Howard Duncan (2003) suggests, "a society that is socially inclusive is a society that grants access to everyone to the vehicles of the good life, as it is defined by that society" (p. 31). He adds that, "'the good life' is not a scarce resource, but one that grows as more people are involved" (p. 31). The quantity of "good life" available is "influenced by the extent to which people in a society, and this encompasses immigrants, are included in its workings and its decision-making" (Duncan, p. 31). Because social capital is generated through social interactions and trust built through them, a more inclusive society "generates increased social capital" while an exclusive society reduces social capital (p. 31).

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As an inclusive, diverse network, VCN fosters social inclusion and social capital. Valuing diversity, providing opportunities for participation and personal development, recognizing competence, creating access to public places and opportunities for interaction, and belonging are some of the ways that VCN is socially inclusive (Shookner, 2002, p.1). Volunteers describe VCN as a place where they feel socially supported. In the absence of full-time work, volunteering is one way of being engaged and feeling useful, which are elements of being socially included. Interacting with others in the shared circumstances of job-seeking and being a newcomer contributes to feelings of comfort and solidarity.

> You have to help each other. Because everyone is a foreigner here, it is easier if you help each other and get to know each other. That way you don't feel as depressed that you have left all of your friends behind. (Volunteer 8)

> When I came here, I met some other people who were volunteering, as well. It was nice because you could talk to them and discuss your problems and get some idea of their problems. I felt a little bit better after I had a chance to meet people here and know that I am not alone in my situation. They have the same problems so we got to see our similarities. That was really good for me. (Volunteer 8)

Over time, volunteers' comfort levels increase and through their enhanced capabilities, they are more able to contribute to VCN's projects, as well as to access information beneficial to their own employment searches and skills development. Charged with assisting in VCN's mandate, volunteers who in casual, social circumstances may be shy about their language skills—or simply inexperienced in interacting with people from other cultures—may be emboldened by their official roles.

These experiences are illustrations of Breton's (1997) suggestion that, "Social participation can … sensitize group members to the fact that they are subject to the same

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economic, political, cultural or social conditions–such as immigrant status" (p. 6). He

suggests that through "social involvement, people may realize that they share the same lot,

are 'in the same boat' as others in certain respects." Newcomers can then "identify with

a 'community of fate,' so that social expectations are based on the feeling of

interdependence, involving mutual obligations, and the idea that cooperation may be

generally advantageous" (Breton, p. 6). In this way, participation leads to increased

social capital and inclusion.

4.9 VCN as a Site of Information Exchange

Throughout these interview excerpts, information was often mentioned, as its exchange is

a necessary and regular part of VCN's volunteer program's functioning. In relation to the

prior section, Caidi and Allard (2005) explain the importance of information as an aspect

of social inclusion. Quoting Mwarigha (2002), they describe the information needs of

recent immigrants in three stages:

> • *Immediate* includes essential matters such as where to find food and
> shelter, how to get around geographically, and ways of dealing with
> language barriers.

> • *Intermediate* includes how to access and use various systems including
> municipal and legal services, long-term housing, employment, and
> health services.

> • *Integration* needs are more diverse and individualized; meeting them
> contributes to social inclusion through cultural, political and economic
> terms.

The current or past VCN volunteers who took part in interviews tend to be nearing the

end of the second stage or are currently in the third stage of settlement. The then-current

volunteers I spoke with were looking for work, completing contracts, or going to school:

situations with limited economic security. Interviewees who were no longer volunteering

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were working full-time in the ICT industry. All of the interview participants had been in Canada long enough to have found a reasonable place to live and have gained access to educational and health care services. They were volunteering at a stage of settlement when their information needs were not so general as to be easily located online, but required more personal interactions.

A social network provides important context for understanding culturally specific information. One newcomer describes the importance of a social network for making sense of information:

> Other than using the internet, I read Citizenship and Immigration Canada leaflets, and some information from other organizations. Because we get a lot of information like this, we don't know which is best, so a friend here helped me. (Volunteer 1)

Whether it is information provided about day-to-day events or knowledge gained over a series of interactions, VCN provides recent immigrants with opportunities to learn and exchange information in a broad social context.

Besides its mandate toward diversity and its training strategies that promote volunteers' social interactions, VCN offers opportunities for civic participation at a later stage of settlement, when it may be particularly valuable. For newcomers in earlier stages of settlement, one of VCN's projects—the Community Access Program (CAP) that provides free access to computers and the internet—also proves helpful. According to Mwarigha's (2002) description of the information needs of recent immigrants, some newcomers' immediate information needs for sustenance, housing and language, may be aided by making use of a CAP site, but the final stage, "integration"—which involves more

diverse and individualized needs—is more likely to be realized by becoming part of

Canada's "alternate civic core", as a volunteer at VCN or another community network.

The more information one has available, the easier it is to increase one's human

capacities, and having greater human capacities creates access to even more information.

For technically skilled recent immigrants, the civic participation that VCN offers

provides a tangible means of stepping into this virtuous cycle. As volunteers increase

their human and social capital—through improved English language skills, enlarged

social networks and increased employability due to having local experience and a local

employment reference—they also become more "socially included". According to

Rosaline Frith (2003), "A real sense of belonging is created when newcomers can fulfill

their potential—get and keep a job, transfer and apply previously acquired occupational

skills and participate fully in Canadian institutions and community life" (p. 36).

4.10 Lasting Impacts of Civic Participation

The impacts of volunteering at VCN—even though the actual stint of volunteerism may

begin shortly after an immigrant arrives in Canada and end with the attainment of full-

time employment—may continue for a lifetime. Lasting benefits of volunteerism include

building a social network, gaining exposure to the operations of a not-for-profit

organization, and attaining the technical or social skills required in each volunteer role.

In some cases, volunteering at VCN can shift how recent immigrants perceive Canada.

One recent immigrant was unable to continue volunteering because of family demands.

She sent an email to the volunteer "listserv" saying that she was sorry to leave and,

"Thanks a lot to all of the volunteers, they make me like Canada" (quote from email sent

to VCN volunteers list on September 30, 2005).

One obvious longer-term impact of volunteering at VCN is gaining local work-related

experience, which may impact future economic stability. As well, recent-immigrant

volunteers are provided with practical exposure to a charitable organization in Canada's

not-for profit infrastructure. At the time of their application, 66% of VCN's potential

volunteers stated that they had basic or no knowledge of not-for-profit organizations.

None of the volunteers who participated in interviews had ever volunteered in their home

countries and many described their surprise at learning how many opportunities to

volunteer in community-based and even national organizations exist. Notably, some

volunteers considered learning about Canada's charitable and not-for-profit organizations

to be part of their "Canadian experience":

> In China, I do not have experience with non-profit organizations, only
> businesses. Now in Canada I know a lot about non-profits and I know that
> it is part of Canadian culture. It is part of Canadian society. And people
> [volunteering] in non-profit organizations... [could] spend that time to
> earn money, but they don't. They spend their time to volunteer and help
> others. (Volunteer 1)

> In Iran, people often volunteer at a company and then get paid afterward,
> like an internship. There are some organizations that take care of seniors
> and orphans, as well. And people give donations to charities... Here,
> working as a volunteer is something everyone knows about. It is
> something on everyone's resume, so they are doing it and it became part of
> the culture. (Volunteer 6)

That VCN has provided recent immigrants with exposure to—and even knowledge of the

inner-workings of—a not-for-profit organization may influence individuals' decisions

about civic participation long after they leave the label of "newcomer" behind. One can

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only hope that—as is exemplified in the email above—recent immigrants' experiences at

VCN have provided a positive perspective of not-for-profit organizations, as well as

encouraging openings into their communities.

4.11 Chapter Conclusions

Over time, information exchanges created through face-to-face interactions

between volunteers and other community network members increase the human

and social capital as well as the social inclusion of newcomers. Meanwhile,

newcomers are sharing their skills and contributing to the overall mandate of VCN,

including the amelioration of digital and social divides.

VCN, communities within the Lower Mainland, and the volunteers themselves all benefit

as interactions at VCN contribute to newcomers' settlement processes. Besides

maintaining VCN's internet service provision to its 10,000 network members, these

contributions include involving recent immigrants in a not-for-profit organization,

supplying training for volunteer roles, offering a space to interact and share information

with others, and providing a means to gain "Canadian experience" including references

for potential employers. At an individual level, each volunteer's human capital increases.

Collectively, these interactions create social capital and enhance social inclusion at a

community level.

CHAPTER 5: INTERROGATING VCN's ROLE AS A SITE OF INCLUSION

5.0.1 Sonia's Story (Part Three)

Sonia has now been at her current job for nearly a year. She works almost full-time, but when the company is not busy and there is no work for her to do, she does not get paid. This means she is still able to volunteer at VCN most Thursday afternoons, which she enjoys. Sonia is comfortable with her employer and her work responsibilities, but she is somewhat wistful about having taken this job rather than holding out for one at a "big company", which to her symbolizes job security with benefits at a larger corporation, perhaps one with a recognizable name. She reflects on the circumstances that drew her to this position:

> When I started, I noticed that most people usually find a job. And they disappear because they find jobs. I spent so long. I felt so frustrated.
>
> Everyday I asked myself: Why couldn't I find anything? Why do I just volunteer? Of course I was doing some contracts...
>
> When I found my job, I told my husband, but he didn't believe me.

At the small corporation where Sonia works, her manager is reluctant to hire contract workers if his worker's don't possess the requisite skills to take on a project. Because of this, Sonia feels that retaining her position at this company is dependent on her maintaining and adding to her skill set, so she regularly takes courses, at her own expense, from a local college. When I spoke with her, she hadn't been able to volunteer at VCN for nearly a month because she was too busy with work and courses.

5.0.2 Chapter Introduction

While the previous chapter established VCN as a site of inclusion, this one begins by more closely examining VCN's role within Canada's immigration landscape. This is accomplished by analyzing "Canadian experience" as part of recent immigrants' settlement processes. Following that, the similarities between Scott-Dixon's (2004) critique of human capital theory and the discussion of the digital divide found in Chapter Two are made. Clark et al.'s work (2004) enhances this discussion as critiques of both the "digital-divide perspective" and "human capital theory" are made. Each theory argues that the onus of responsibility both to get online and to become employable rests with the individual. To support the perspective that other forces exist, an interrogation of some of the structural forces that contribute to the status quo of requisite "Canadian experience" is provided by Bauder (2003) and Abu-Laban (1998). The section closes with a discussion of measuring the strength of VCN's social inclusion. The remaining section of Chapter 5 makes recommendations for change to pertinent policies and programs.

5.1 What is "Canadian Experience?"

Although nearly everything I heard during the interviews at VCN suggests that the volunteers' experiences at VCN were positive and resulted in social inclusion, there are several aspects of this civic participation scenario that require further consideration. Our current immigration policies are culminating in a situation where many recent immigrants selected to enter Canada as "Skilled Immigrants" must volunteer in some capacity before attaining full-time work. While this thesis details some of the positive impacts of this period of civic participation, the question of why many recent immigrants go through an

unpaid period of gaining "local experience" must be posed. Based on conversations with volunteers, this chapter begins with newcomers' definitions of "Canadian experience." A lack of "Canadian experience" places immigrants in an unending cycle. The only way to become qualified for a job is to work at a similar one, but without an initial entry point, this experience is unattainable. The following sub-sections illustrate the variety of views on "Canadian experience" shared by VCN's newcomer volunteers.

5.1.1 "Canadian experience" means joining a physical, social network

For many volunteers who were gaining "Canadian experience" through civic participation at VCN, a work reference supplied by one of VCN's coordinators plays a key role. It demonstrates a link to a local community organization and it provides the volunteer with a contact for potential employers to call and link the newcomer-applicant to a known organization.

> The most important thing for the company is that you are a person they can trust. That is why they want to see some kind of experience [working with people in Canada] who they can call and talk to and say this is a person you can trust. (Volunteer 6)

> I heard that it's good to get some volunteer experience in Canada so you have a reference here and [employers] see that you have some interest in the community here. (Volunteer 8)

> I think it was good to have VCN on my list of references. I think it was more important to have a contact in Vancouver. They could easily call and ask if I am a horrible person. I mean, I don't know what they asked, but it was important that they could talk to someone who knew me here [in Canada]. (Volunteer 8)

In this way, "Canadian experience" is also tied to "third space." Gaining a reference from a local organization means that the volunteer has visited a shared space repeatedly

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and is known in this space. Having access to one space makes it easier to be admitted to another, perhaps less public, place such as a corporation.

5.1.2 "Canadian experience" means understanding cultural differences

The majority of volunteers described "Canadian experience" as a reasonable expectation for newcomers to learn about the cultural differences between Canada and their home countries. Several mentioned how civic participation at VCN benefited them by letting them learn about these differences before working in Canada.

> I think there is a lot of difference in working routines between China and Canada and I am not familiar with that. It takes a lot of local experience to understand that. [This includes] how they work on projects, how they report a meeting, and what the concerns are. (Volunteer 5)

> After working for VCN for the first couple of years, I feel a little more capable, but sometimes I still don't understand [things because] we don't have the same history or literary background, cultural or work experience.... (Volunteer 3)

> Back when I was working in a company [in Iran] I was in the Customer Service department, but everything was different from here. The expectation[s], the way you ... talk to people, everything was different from here. (Volunteer 6)

> I immigrated just 15 months ago. I need to know how the people are and what their personalities are like. In business, rather than making decisions with the facts, we need to make decisions with how [people] will react, and how they think... This [volunteer experience] allows me to learn more about Canadians. (Volunteer 7)

> Working in a Canadian company is a completely new experience... Before I came here, I had a fear of what it might be like to work in Canada. I know that VCN is quite different from a real company, but still I can get some idea [of what working at a Canadian business is like]. Like how people communicate with each other... I had no idea how friendly it would be. (Volunteer 6)

Volunteers' interpretations of the significance of "Canadian experience" are varied.

When I mentioned the phrase to one volunteer she sighed and paused before responding;

she explained that she had heard the term too many times from many sources: potential

employers, immigration counselors, other immigrants, and recently even in newspapers.

Another volunteer felt that it was no more significant than skills or personality.

> I had heard about Canadian local experience before I came. I think it's a
> combination. You need to have some experience, local or overseas,
> language skills or the personality. The Canadian experience does not
> count for anything by itself. It's better to have everything. (Volunteer 3)

This excerpt is similar to the reasons volunteers said that they chose to volunteer at VCN

(described in Chapter 4). Earlier excerpts demonstrated the multiplicity of factors

influencing people to volunteer, but this one indicates the many factors resulting in the

social barriers limiting newcomers from getting jobs equivalent to their education and

work experience.

5.1.3 "Canadian experience" shows that you have (been) adapted

As is discussed in more detail in a following section, the current need for newcomers to

get "Canadian experience" before finding employment in Canada may be considered a

form of requisite *integration*. The first excerpt below describes the difference between

immigrants who choose to move outside of their first language or national origin

community and gain involvement with a broader diversity of Canada's residents than

those who do not.

> If someone wants to join Canadian society, they should have experience.
> They [should be] involved in their community. I don't know exactly
> what that is, maybe through school or a job. Some people don't know
> how to speak English, but they are very involved in their own Korean [or]
> Chinese community, but that is not really Canadian experience. I

want[ed] to join this computer project for this Canadian experience.
(Volunteer 4)

Generally people like you to have Canadian work experience or
Canadian education so they know you have been adapted to this country.
(Volunteer 3)

The use of the words "been adapted to" in the second excerpt indicates a passive sort of

integration, rather than the immigrant choosing to be involved with a broader community

as in the first excerpt in this section. While workplaces and educational institutes can be

considered sites of "social reproduction", the degree to which they are integrative rather

than inclusive is discussed in more detail in a later section.

5.1.4 Exploitative "Canadian experiences"

The more frequently the expectation of "Canadian experience" is expressed, the more

substantiated this ad hoc credential becomes. Because "Canadian experience" is not a

formal criterion, it is up to individual organizations, corporations and human resource

personnel to determine what duration and types of experience qualify as sufficient.

Taken further, it increases the likelihood of recent immigrants who are looking for work

being taken advantage of under the guise of "Canadian experience". As was described in

both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, civic participation in the form of volunteerism is novel to

many of Canada's recent immigrants. Because of the current difficulty in finding

employment, and because volunteering is a new experience, recent immigrants are

sometimes asked to volunteer in circumstances that Canadian-born workers would likely

refuse. Here, one volunteer explains her initial thoughts about volunteering and shares a

story of one exploitative corporation:

[I had] no volunteer experience before [I came to Canada]. It's not
common in Austria. [When I arrived in Canada] I thought, "Why do
they have so many volunteer opportunities? They don't want to pay?"

They say, "This is a nice experience for people." But, it's not fair because you are doing the same work as in a job, but you don't get paid.

I thought VCN was better because you can help the community and not a company. That is the main reason that I took this position. It's nice to have the kind of volunteering opportunity where you get to learn a lot for yourself and about your community. It should be something related to your job so you gain something, as well.

It's one thing to contribute to such an organization as VCN, but I think it's different when it's a company where they do not pay people to do the same job that they would pay other people to do. It's scary. There are companies that do not hire professionals, only "volunteers". A huge amount of people want to volunteer. You apply and get chosen, you get selected to volunteer, and then you are easy to replace, as well.
(Volunteer 8)

A volunteer at another urban community network shared a similar story about one of her friends being paid minimum wage to manage a corporation's Local Area Network (LAN) as a volunteer "intern" even though he was the only technical worker on the company's staff and wasn't being supervised or coached. He had been working in this capacity for over a year, but he was too afraid of losing this "job" to ask for a wage increase.

These examples of some recent immigrants' willingness to work for little or no compensation demonstrate extreme problems with the situation of requisite "Canadian experience". Even though most recent immigrants' experiences with civic participation are less exploitative, as the expectation of "Canadian experience" becomes increasingly routine and structured, the potential for recent immigrants to be exploited can only increase.

5.1.5 Overcoming a lack of "Canadian experience" through individual efforts

In contrast to the examples above, for some volunteers "Canadian experience" was a

negligible factor, and one that was only as much a barrier as individual volunteers

allowed it to be. To varying degrees, the volunteers quoted below suggest that difficulty

in finding work can be overcome through individual efforts.

> People who complain that Canada doesn't offer anything maybe don't
> know that you have to do something to get a good life. I think there is a
> lot of opportunity. For my family, we are very happy. I don't know
> why most people complain, immigrants. They expect something
> different, maybe. (Volunteer 2)

> [Canadian experience] is not an obstacle. I think if someone doesn't
> want to hire you and they do not have a good reason not to hire you, they
> will tell you that it is Canadian experience. If you are really suited for
> the job, you will be hired. "I don't want to hire you because you are
> blond." It is the same kind of thing for me. I was hearing about it more
> when I was in Montreal but not as much here. If you think that you
> won't find a job because you are missing the Canadian experience, you
> will not find a job because you make this obstacle for yourself.
> (Volunteer 9)

These perspectives place the onus of responsibility for employment on individual

newcomers; the second view in particular does not acknowledge the potential for

systemic discrimination or a lack of support from the federal immigration department.

While this may seem to be the most positive and personally empowering perspective

shared in this section, it has drawbacks, as it does little to create change in the institutions

and systems that may be contributing to the challenges faced by job-seeking recent

immigrants.

The majority of the perspectives presented earlier in this chapter also emphasize the

belief in individuals' abilities to change their circumstances. Those volunteers who

identify cultural differences that they wish to learn about are doing so—on their own

individual impetus—by volunteering at VCN.

5.2 Perspectives of self-sufficiency and individualism

Interestingly, this last perspective that places the onus of responsibility for improving

their employability on the recent immigrants themselves, closely reflects the "discourses

of the digital divide" described by Clark et al. (2004) as well as Scott-Dixon's (2004)

critique of "human capital theory."

The idea of the individual being responsible for his or her own relationship with the

internet comes up repeatedly in discussions of uneven access. Drawing from findings of

an ethnographic study of adult Americans with varied levels of access to and

competencies with ICTs, Clark et al. (2004) suggest that the "dominant discourse of

individualism shapes, distorts and limits possibilities for challenging the current market-

driven approach to computers which priviledges corporate interests at the expense of any

other interests" (p. 544). While participants in Clark et. al's ethnographic interviews did

sometimes mention "the system" or allude to class differences (p. 542-3), "the discourse

of individualism" which emphasized "the importance of self-reliance and initiative" (p.

530) played the major role in the ways that participants describe their own experiences

and understandings of the digital divide (p. 530). In Clark et al.'s study, the participants'

socioeconomic levels varied, and some households had computers with internet

connections while others did not. Although interview participants from wealthier

families with internet access did tend to use the language of individualism most often, all

of the conversations "argued from the perspective that parents could, and should, take the

initiative in addressing themselves to the problem of discrepancies in computer access, ownership and competency" (p. 538).

A Canadian-based, quantiative study demonstrates similar attitudes. According to a survey completed in 2000, three-quarters of Canadians believe that it is "at least somewhat important for everyone to have access to the Internet" (Dryburgh, 2000, p. 4). What is less clear is how that access should be attained. When asked who should remove barriers to access, 45% said it should be the responsibility of individuals while 42% placed the responsibility on the federal government. The highest level of responses in support of access being an individual responsibility came from regions where internet penetration is highest (Dryburgh, 2000, p.5).

5.2.1 Human Capital Theory

A critique of "human capital theory" offered by Scott-Dixon (2004) bears a resemblance to critiques of the digital divide being conceptualized in binary or physical terms. Just as simply supplying computers and internet connections to Canadian schools and libraries does not ensure beneficial, effective use of these tools by the communities they are meant to serve, nor do skills automatically lead to progress (Scott-Dixon, p. 70). Regarding the *real* impacts of ICT use, we need to ask how technologies are used, by whom, and for what purposes. Similarly, Scott-Dixon suggests that pertaining to human capital, we must ask

> What skills are actually needed and who is able to possess these skills or have them recognized? How are these skills implemented once they are acquired? And above all, does the promise of reward for skills hold up? (p.70)

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Scott-Dixon points to evidence that "human capital theory" is misguided. While education levels are on the rise, so is the general precariousness of the labour market. Part-time, temporary or contract work without benefits or employee security are becoming more common; "our job quality is decreasing as our certifications pile up around us" (Scott-Dixon, 2004, p. 70). In a Vancouver-based study, Bauder (2003) finds that "the correlation between education and labour-market performance is weak among immigrants compared to the Canadian-born population," which suggests that Scott-Dixon's claim is particularly true for recent immigrants (Bauder, p. 706). While our notions of Canada as a meritocracy may not be founded, this sentiment is especially fallacious in the case of newcomers.

Human capital theory is "particularly insidious", continues Scott-Dixon, because much like Clark's "narratives of individualism", it "blames individual workers, not larger economic or social factors, for this apparent employment failure" (Scott-Dixon, 2004, p.70).

5.3 Introducing Factors beyond the Individual

While Clark et al. suggest that narratives of individualism privilege corporate interests (2004, p. 544), Scott-Dixon argues that the ICT industry has a vested interest in promoting "individual self-empowerment" (2004, p. 66). When individual factors are made the focus, our failures are "entirely our own fault" and complex systems of power and privilege (such as workplace hierarchies of advancement) are hidden (Scott-Dixon, p.67). As this perspective continues and becomes more profuse, our abilities to imagine

another kind of work environment to move toward, or to fight for inequalities in our own or others lives, are weakened (Ibid).

5.3.1 The CI Perspective of "Effective Use"

The field of community informatics (CI) provides further context to considerations of the discourse of individualism, human capital theory, and the onus of responsibility for digital inclusion, as is illustrated in the relevant situation of recent-immigrant volunteers' interactions at VCN. As a community network (CN), VCN is a locally-initiated "ICT organization committed to universal access to the internet and the use of ICT systems to promote local economic and social development, civic participation and community learning" (Longford, 2005, p. 5). The composition of VCN's volunteer base—nearly two-thirds of the volunteers emigrated within the past five years—exemplifies how a CN can meet the needs of its local community. Because more than one-third of Vancouver's population is foreign-born, it is not a surprise that many of the locally determined goals are those of recent immigrants looking to overcome the social barriers limiting them from employment reflective of their skills. The availability of the technology and the community network itself allows individuals to partake in activities to improve their individual circumstances, as well as to contribute to the network's overall mandate of providing universal access.

While some of the federal funding available to VCN, such as CAP, is extended with the intention of ameliorating the "digital divide", the kinds of barrier-recognition and reduction that take place at VCN are more complex and nuanced; through civic participation volunteers are not only helping themselves by getting over the social barrier

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of "Canadian experience", they are also contributing to the provision of universal

internet access for their community, hence overcoming a "technical barrier."

Noting the corporate interests at play in the digital divide perspective, Gurstein (2004)

argues that the "ongoing process of seeing the digital divide only in terms of 'access'

further aggravates and perpetuates the trend towards an ICT platform with a relatively

small number of producers and a very large, even universal, set of consumers" (p. 229).

His argument for "effective use" is further differentiated from a discourse of

individualism because the "integration of ICTs into the accomplishment of self- or

collaboratively identified goals" is most effective when not just individuals, but

communities are involved (Gurstein, p. 228). This situation is considered further in a

later section that evaluates VCN's social inclusion model. Next, structural inequalities

articulated by Bauder (2003) and Abu-Laban (1998) provide evidence of the need for

modifications to more than individual attitudes.

5.3.2 Labour Devaluations of Recent Immigrants

Strong arguments against systemic factors that privilege Canadian-born residents over

recent immigrants demonstrate that factors beyond those of individual empowerment are

at play. Bauder (2003) labels the devaluation of foreign education and credentials as "de-

skilling" and describes it as a "systemic effort to reserve the upper segments of the labour

market for Canadian-born workers" (p. 708) perhaps to maintain their demand. In his

analysis, Bauder describes the ICT industry as a new field where occupations, "are not

yet regulated by government or professional organizations" (p. 710). In the place of these

formal systems exists "Canadian experience," which was defined by several ICT-skilled

recent immigrants in the opening sections of this chapter. Bauder presents a conventional

argument by employers for "Canadian experience", as needing to know that an applicant

possesses local knowledge and an understanding of Canadian systems (p. 711). However,

notes Bauder, "in occupations that are not highly-desired by Canadian-born residents, the

requirement of Canadian experience does not exist", which suggests that "the lack of

Canadian experience serves as an informal means to exclude immigrant workers" (p.

711). Pertinent to this thesis, Bauder notes that employers may even be provided with

volunteers who are eager to improve their career interests (p. 713).

As was illustrated in the second chapter's discussion of the stories shared on the

"NotCanada.com" website, many recent immigrants feel "tricked into this situation by

Canadian immigration policies and labour market regulations" (Bauder, 2003, p. 713).

The outcomes of de-skilling include emotional stress for newcomers, a loss of their

financial savings—hence, security—while searching for employment, and for some it

may even force a career change and a loss of social status. While de-skilling may seem

to benefit individual Canadian-educated professionals, put in a broader perspective it

results in a loss for Canadian and global economies (Bauder, 2003, pp. 713-715).

5.3.3 Immigrant 'Self-sufficiency' and 'Integration'
In another example of systemic barriers challenging recent immigrants' successful

settlement, Abu-Laban's (1998) examination of Canadian integration and immigration

policies describes "a reduced emphasis on multiculturalism and an increasing emphasis

on immigrant 'self-sufficiency' and 'integration' into Canadian society" (p. 1). Here, the

term "integration" is stigmatized by its use in Canada's multiculturalism policy. Its use is

read by Abu-Laban as duplicitous; it is meant to sound as if both newcomers and Canadian society will work to adapt to one another's needs, when really it is the newcomer who is being asked to adjust to life in Canada, and to do so through his or her own means (p. 13). While in some circles "integration" is used positively, there are other settings where use of the term is deemed politically incorrect. Except in quotations, throughout this thesis I have avoided using the term "integration", particularly in a positive manner, because I feel that it is a term laden with expectations of people who have recently immigrated to Canada, and less demanding of Canadian-born and longer-settled people. Instead I use the term "social inclusion" to refer to the more positive ideal of mutual interaction and of communicating with each other to ensure "that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, may gain access to the opportunities, services and facilities they need to achieve their potential" (Aizlewood et al., 2005, p. 16).

Both Abu-Laban and Bauder provide examples of Canadian structures that challenge recent immigrants' periods of settlement. The current immigration policy's focus on the economic capabilities of immigration candidates, teamed with the lack of recognition of the credentials held by recent immigrants, positions settling newcomers in a challenging situation. While VCN's volunteer program offers an opportunity for civic participation and amelioration of the lack of "Canadian experience" that plagues many recent immigrants, an examination of the program under the lens of Shookner's (2002) 'Dimensions of Social Exclusion and Inclusion' provides further consideration of its impacts and potential.

5.4 How Socially Inclusive is VCN?

A settlement counselor, who recommends volunteering as a means of gaining "Canadian experience", is trying to provide recent immigrants with a cost-free way of gaining access to a broader social network, more information resources, and the potential for a work reference. While some recent immigrants opt to re-certify themselves in a Canadian educational institution in order to return to their previous work level, due to financial or time restrictions many recent immigrants do not have this option. Volunteering, however, is more often feasible, and as articulated in Chapter 4, at VCN at least, it tends to produce many benefits for those who take this opportunity for civic participation. While VCN does provide its many volunteers—past, current, and future—with "Canadian experience", in terms of its selection processes and longer-term impacts, having a measure of the social inclusion of VCN's volunteer program is beneficial. It demonstrates how VCN works both practically, to aid individual newcomers in getting established in the Canadian work force, as well as politically by providing "local experience" without monetary costs such as paying for further skills and training.

5.4.1 How Accessible is VCN's Volunteer Program?

For individuals who become volunteers, VCN is an inclusive network with many benefits. However, many people who apply to VCN do not become volunteers. For candidates who are not invited for an interview, VCN may seem to be an exclusive organization. As an ISP provider, VCN could not function in its current capacities if it accepted every volunteer who applied, particularly those without ICT skills. To curb applicants' potential disappointment, the VCN website indicates that there are more applicants than

voluntary spaces and to assist in an applicant's continued search, VCN recommends a variety of other potential volunteering opportunities.

Through its volunteer program, VCN does create an opportunity for the "digitally connected" to become more "socially connected." In terms of providing internet access and training to people who aren't internet users, the organization's broader mandate of providing universal access to electronic communication offers connections in several forms: first, by offering internet access to those who cannot afford commercial ISP access; second, by offering internet courses to the site's visitors; and third, by offering web hosting and free, refurbished computers to local community groups.

5.4.2 Measures of Social Inclusion

Toye and Infanti (2004) describe social inclusion as being "susceptible to a range of interpretations" extending "along a spectrum from weak to strong" (p. 7). Although Chapter 4 describes VCN as a site of social inclusion, and the term "inclusion" is part of VCN's own vision statement, considering VCN along a continuum of social inclusion models ranging from weak to strong demonstrates the network's strengths as well as areas that need further attention. A weak inclusion model is merely redistributive; it "places the excluded at the centre of analysis and looks for ways to integrate them" (Aizlewood et al., 2005, p.20-21). However, a strong model is "politically transformative" (Ibid), as it changes "the mainstream not the marginalized" (Kunz, 2003, p. 10) in ways that reform policy as well as developing "economic, political, and social mechanisms that include marginalized groups as full participants" (Aizlewood et al., p. 21).

Shookner (2002) presents a useful set of indicators organized initially along a continuum

from social exclusion to social inclusion and next, into eight different dimensions:

cultural, economic, functional, participatory, physical, political, relational and structural.

This tool is complex enough to consider the varieties of factors that produce exclusion

and inclusion; it provides institutions and organizations with insights about how to

become more inclusive (See Table 2). With VCN's volunteer program in mind, an

examination of Shookner's process-centered categorization of elements of exclusion and

inclusion demonstrates that the program is generally an inclusive one.

Table 2: Dimensions and Indicators of Social Exclusion and Inclusion

ELEMENTS OF EXCLUSION	DIMENSIONS	ELEMENTS OF INCLUSION
Disadvantage, fear of differences, intolerance, gender stereotyping, historic oppression, cultural deprivation.	CULTURAL	Valuing contributions of women and men to society, recognition of differences, valuing diversity, positive identity, anti-racist education.
Poverty, unemployment, non-standard employment, inadequate income for basic needs, participation in society, stigma, embarrassment, inequality, income disparities, deprivation, insecurity, devaluation of caregiving, illiteracy, lack of educational access.	ECONOMIC	Adequate income for basic needs and participation in society, poverty eradication, employment, capability for personal development, personal security, sustainable development, reducing disparities, value and support caregiving.
Disability, restrictions based on limitations, overwork, time stress, undervaluing of assets available.	FUNCTIONAL	Ability to participate, opportunities for personal development, valued social roles, recognizing competence.
Marginalization, silencing, barriers to participation, institutional dependency, no room for choice, not involved in decision making.	PARTICIPATORY	Empowerment, freedom to choose, contribution to community, access to programs, resources and capacity to support participation, involved in decision making, social action.
Barriers to movement, restricted access to public spaces, social distancing, unfriendly/unhealthy environments, lack of transportation, unsustainable environments.	PHYSICAL	Access to public places and community resources, physical proximity and opportunities for interaction, healthy/supportive environments, access to transportation, sustainability.
Denial of human rights, restrictive policies and legislation, blaming the victims, short-term view, one dimensional, restricting eligibility for programs, lack of transparency in decision making.	POLITICAL	Affirmation of human rights, enabling policies and legislation, social protection for vulnerable groups, removing systemic barriers, will to take action, long-term view, multi-dimensional, citizen participation, transparent decision making.
Isolation, segregation, distancing, competitiveness, violence and abuse, fear, shame.	RELATIONAL	Belonging, social proximity, respect, recognition, cooperation, solidarity, family support, access to resources.
Discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia, restrictions on eligibility, no access to programs, barriers to access, withholding information, departmental silos, government jurisdictions, secretive/restricted communications, rigid boundaries.	STRUCTURAL	Entitlements, access to programs, transparent pathways to access, affirmative action, community capacity building, inter-departmental links, inter-governmental links, accountability, open channels of communication, options for change, flexibility.

(Created by Shookner in 2002 and reproduced from Aizlewood et al., 2005, p. 34)

- Along the *cultural dimension* VCN values diversity and recognizes differences, not only in its mandate but also in its *participant* selection.
- *Functionally*, as has been evidenced throughout the thesis, VCN provides an "ability to participate, opportunities for personal development [and] recognizes competence" (Aizlewood et al., 2005, p. 34).
- On the *physical dimension*, VCN creates access to its own offices and those that neighbour it in the 411 Seniors Centre, a public place. Community resources for access include the CAP site and the computer lab. The internet and VCN's own online resources could also be considered community resources. Access to physical proximity and opportunities for interaction are also provided by VCN's volunteer program (Ibid).

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- In terms of the *relational dimension*, VCN provides "belonging, social proximity, respect, recognition, and access to resources" (Ibid).
- *Structurally*, the volunteer program provides access to programs, transparent pathways to access, affirmative action, community capacity building, inter-departmental links, accountability, open channels of communication, options for change and flexibility (Ibid).

Along the *political* and *economic dimensions*, VCN's effectiveness is less

straightforward and each dimension requires its own sub-section for discussion.

5.4.3 Perpetuation of the "Discourse of Individualism" and the Need for "Canadian Experience"

A key focus of this thesis is to establish VCN as a socially inclusive environment in

which volunteers, as an "alternate civic core", contribute to VCN's mandate for universal

access to ICTs. The role of VCN's volunteer program must be considered in terms of

this section's previous discussion of discourses of individualism, the politics of

integration, and the devaluation of non-Canadian education and work credentials. Does

the volunteer program demonstrate weak inclusion by finding ways for individual ICT-

skilled newcomers to integrate into Canadian society, or does it demonstrate strong

inclusion by working against the systemic barriers faced by recent immigrants?

VCN's volunteer program does not purposefully look for ways to integrate newcomers.

It was not initiated to assist recent immigrants, but using Gurstein's "effective use"

language, newcomers discovered that at VCN they were able to meet their social and

human capital building needs by taking part in the network and volunteering. As the

volunteer program became more established, more people began to contribute through

civic participation, and the varying needs of the local communities were met so well in

fact, that in 2005, more than 60% of the volunteer team members were recent immigrants.

VCN does provide volunteers with the "Canadian experience" required by many employers, and it does not directly fight this systemic barrier, yet it is inaccurate to say that it simply contributes to the maintenance of this barrier. A work experience reference from VCN stretches the already ad-hoc definition of "Canadian experience" as it allows people who have not been officially employed or educated in Canada, to gain access to local work opportunities. Rather than theoretically arguing against systemic discrimination, VCN's volunteer program provides a practical mechanism by which otherwise marginalized newcomers can achieve gainful employment.

VCN accepts volunteers on an individual basis, and the program runs on the initiative supplied by the volunteers themselves. However, in contrast to the discourse of individualism, or the digital divide perspective, as an organization VCN has identified the systemic barriers that limit effective use of electronic communication as well as particular skills-deficits amongst volunteers, and through its daily activities demonstrates the multiple perspectives and strategies that are required to overcome them.

Importantly, the appreciation of diversity that is included in VCN's mandate ensures that all volunteers are treated with respect and the tacit rules that govern interactions suggest that this must be the case. This opportunity to interact with people of varying ages, cultural origins, and gender is perhaps one of the most vital and acknowledged of elements of inclusion offered at VCN. Warschauer (2003) suggests that the agreed upon

norms and expectations of a society increase social capital. At VCN this is demonstrated

by each member of the network benefiting from the respect they grant each other (p. 8).

5.4.4 Participation in Governance and Decision-Making at VCN

VCN is a political organization; in its work to ensure universal access to communication,

it provides a donation-based alternative to the plethora of corporate internet service

providers for which user-bases are limited to those who can afford the higher fees. To

ensure its ability to provide internet service as a charitable organization, VCN applied for

charitable status in 1993, and in a groundbreaking decision in 1996, was granted the right

to proceed in this capacity. This political action ensures that other Canadian CNs faced

with similar fundraising challenges can make use of this legal decision and also apply for

charitable status.

VCN's political dimension continues through the physical site in the day-to-day

interactions of the coordinators, volunteers and network members. Because of the

coordinators' transparent decision-making and efforts to involve volunteers in decisions

about their work and the functions of the community network, volunteers report their

ability to make suggestions at VCN:

> I feel that I have been able to make suggestions. Sure, I feel comfortable
> doing that. (Volunteer 5)

> I make a suggestion and [the coordinator] makes a decision. I suggest a
> way that maybe we can do things and he makes the decisions. Sometimes
> I might focus on one thing, and not realize the full effects. [The
> coordinator] knows a lot so he knows best what to do [and] in what order.
> We have good discussions. (Volunteer 3)

In the latter excerpt a decision-making hierarchy is described in which it is the

coordinators who execute decisions. While initially this may make the volunteer

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program seem like a closed system, details provide more perspective to the situation. Given the high turnover of volunteers and their once-a-week presence at the network site, coordinators are often privy to more information; as well, the majority of the responsibility to complete projects rests with the coordinators. A policy of transparency and a focus on eliciting as much input as possible from the volunteers ensures that the volunteer program does not become restrictive.

In terms of ongoing political action, much of it exists in VCN's presence as a charitable ISP. During my first morning at VCN, I saw one example of the type of interaction that takes place when individuals first learn about VCN. An older man came into VCN just as a coordinator was opening the offices. No volunteers had arrived yet, so the coordinator asked the man if he could help him. The man asked how VCN could help him use the internet at home. The coordinator explained that the man could use dial-up internet access from VCN for free if he had a computer with a modem in it at his home. The man asked why it was free. The coordinator responded, "Because we think it should be." The utterance of this simple sentence has resounding impacts. Amidst all of the advertisements for the internet and wireless technologies, there exists a community of people who are working to make the internet freely accessible and who believe that basic access to the internet—as well as training to use it—should be free. And that morning at VCN, one man became aware of this alternate perspective and how it could benefit him. Internet access is free "because we think it should be."

Using Shookner's "Dimensions and Indicators of Social Exclusion and Inclusion" as a

gauge of VCN's impacts on its community's social inclusion indicates that the network is

based on many elements of inclusion. In Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, VCN

provides an affordable means of internet access and web presence for individuals and

community groups, and it simultaneously demonstrates that alternatives to corporate

delivery for internet services exist. By providing a relatively cost-free means for recent

immigrants to gain local work experience in the ICT sector, while meeting culturally

diverse residents of Canada, practicing English skills, and participating in a social justice

project, VCN provides social inclusion with long-term impacts.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Recognition

There are two points of recognition highlighted in this thesis that are lacking in federal

policy. The first is that in terms of civic participation, the contributions of recent-

immigrant volunteers such as those at VCN are not currently recognized. A 2004

recommendation report on the Community Access Program (CAP) suggests that recent

immigrants should be better targeted as a group that could benefit from free access to the

internet, yet the volunteers I spoke with are not only key contributors to the overall

functioning of the network maintaining the CAP sites in the Lower mainland, they are

also well-educated and digitally-included. The second point to be recognized is that

individual newcomers' skills vary and are also dependent on their positions in settlement

processes. While all of VCN's volunteers are well-connected *digitally*, many rely on

their interactions at VCN to become more *socially* connected. Given these oversights,

what impact does the lack of recognition of the diversity, abilities and contributions of

recent immigrants apparent in some federal reports have on the continued need to gain "Canadian experience"?

While numerous recent immigrants do benefit from the CAP program by accessing the internet through systems at public libraries and community centres, at VCN newcomers contribute to CAP as members of the "alternate civic core". The impacts of volunteering at a community network may be even greater than being able to access the internet upon initial arrival, though this is immeasurable given the variety of skills and needs of each newcomer. Accessing the internet on CAP-sponsored computers and opportunities for civic participation are both of potential benefit for recent immigrants. However, while the CAP site is funded by federal resources, VCN's volunteer programs are not.

Arguably, volunteering at VCN provides experiences that are of great individual benefit to recent immigrants. As well, the more opportunities these volunteers—or any residents of Canada—have to socialize with culturally diverse populations, the better. Interactions with people outside of known circles allows for exchanges of information that may have immediate or future benefits. Such interactions also build social capital and foster feelings of inclusion. In terms of more specific recommendations, I suggest that as a site where inclusion is fostered through face-to-face interactions, investments should be made to VCN's physical site, as well as in support of the network's integrative activities such as training programs for volunteers. These recommendations are expanded in the following section.

As was described throughout the thesis, the current economic situation for recent

immigrants to Vancouver and other major Canadian centres is not positive. While

opportunities for civic participation such as those at VCN do help, in their current,

unfunded capacities they cannot grow or offer more learning opportunities to newcomers.

More structured, federally-funded work experience programs do exist, but they have long

waiting lists and less flexibility for newcomers who are unable to commit to a full-time

program.[14]

5.5.2 Funding

Recognition of the ways that VCN's volunteer program promotes social inclusion could

be made by appropriately funding these activities. VCN's physical site has limitations;

an investment in the network's operational capacities—in consultation with its

coordinators—could greatly enhance VCN's functions. Currently, many of the network's

operations are confined to regular, weekday office hours and restrictions on the amount

of space available for the repair and storage of donated hardware exist. Because VCN's

site itself is a vital third place for face-to-face interactions, it is important that the space

facilitates rather than hinders these interactions.

Another recommendation requiring additional funding is based on a suggestion from one

of the coordinators. It is to provide training to the volunteers at VCN—including

recently arrived, longer-settled and Canadian born individuals—in order to broaden the

volunteers' skill sets in the area of open source software. This is an area that many

volunteers identified themselves as having little experience with before coming to VCN.

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[14] One example is the 'Work Experience for Immigrants Program' at Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta http://www.bowvalleycollege.ca/weip/sa_eligibility.htm

Use of open source is also increasingly popular in Canadian organizations and businesses.[15] Besides expanding the volunteers' scope of skills for VCN, it would also benefit their future in the ICT employment realm, and it would contribute to furthering the open-source movement. Federal support for integrative programs such as VCN's volunteer programs is an investment in a more prosperous and inclusive society.

5.5.3 Organizational Costs

While the focus here is to describe how VCN functions develop human capacities, build social capital and foster social inclusion, it should be noted that assisting newcomers in the settlement process does not come without costs to VCN in terms of time and effort as well as how the network is perceived by its users and the general public. Because newcomer-volunteers tend to leave their volunteer positions once they find full-time work, volunteer turnover is high. Less-experienced newcomer-volunteers may take longer to provide assistance and their less-practiced language skills may create misunderstandings, resulting in less efficient service for VCN's users. It is possible that these high-turnover outcomes may discourage use of the network. Through what means can VCN continue to assist newcomers while maintaining its user base?

VCN does receive support from Industry Canada for hosting a CAP site, and in fact is supported for managing an entire region of sites from its offices. These 105 sites are dispersed north to south from Bowen Island to Tsawwassen and as far east as Langley and Surrey. Currently, VCN's volunteer program receives no support from Industry Canada or other federal departments—such as the Department of Canadian Heritage,

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[15] A 2003 list of world-wide businesses using Linux includes 557 corporations including Canadian National Railways, Corel, Sony, Cisco, and The Calgary Winter Club. Retrieved May 3, 2006 from M-Tech Information Technology, Inc. http://mtechit.com/linux-biz/

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Social Development Canada, or

Citizenship and Immigration Canada—that should be attuned to the benefits of VCN's

volunteer program in terms of community inclusion. In recommendations made to

Industry Canada, EKOS Research Associates (2004) considers recent immigrants to be

one of the "'hard to reach' and 'have-not' target groups" to whom CAP site use should be

promoted (p. 44). Based on these recommendations and the lack of financial support for

VCN's volunteer program it seems likely that recent immigrants are recognized more as

CAP-site *users* than as a valuable "alternate civic core". In fact, VCN's newcomer-

volunteers work as part of a team of *providers* of internet access to the less digitally-

included. Because of the ways that it increases human capacities, social capital and

social inclusion, federally-supported recognition of VCN's volunteer program as a key

provider of newcomer inclusion would greatly benefit current and future newcomers, and

other residents, of the greater Vancouver area.

In a country where immigration and the economy are functionally intertwined, efforts to

better team federal and regional needs should be made. Placing the onus of becoming

employable on individual immigrants is growing more futile. The process of selecting

immigrants based on their abilities to succeed in Canada's economy without

simultaneously working on reducing the systemic barriers to their inclusion in Canadian

society, including the economy, is increasingly ineffective. In this way, Citizenship and

Immigration Canada's selection process and the Department of Heritage Canada's

multiculturalism policy are at odds with the theory of social inclusion currently

encouraged by Social Development Canada. Recent immigrants cannot independently

make themselves included. Social inclusion relies on interactions from all kinds of

people living in Canada. Opportunities for individuals from diverse social, cultural and

economic backgrounds to interact—such as the sort fostered at VCN—are of

immeasurable benefit in increasing social inclusion.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Key themes—including the benefits of civic participation and social inclusion—run through this thesis, while others—the negative consequences of both human capital theory and the discourse of individualism—only emerge in the previous chapter. The aim of this brief, conclusive chapter is thus to ensure that the most significant ideas and findings are reiterated and positioned so that the significance and purpose of the thesis is understood. To accomplish this, an overview of the previous five chapters is necessary.

Throughout the first and second chapters, recent developments in community networking are described and Industry Canada's promotion of digital connectivity through the Connecting Canadian's program is explained. Policy evolutions over the same timeline (the past 10 to 15 years) in immigration and cultural policies are also briefly described. These threads are tied together in a description of VCN, one urban community network where—through civic participation—recent immigrants who are challenged to find work because of their foreign accreditation are investing in their local community and their own skills by contributing their ICT knowledge to VCN's mandate.

The methods I used to conduct research at VCN are described in Chapter Three, and the following chapters describe and analyze findings. The key observation is that the majority of the volunteers at VCN are recent immigrants who have discovered that civic participation at a VCN may benefit them while they look for work. These individuals are an "alternate civic core" who contribute at least four hours a week to the maintenance of VCN's internet service provision.

Several factors are disconcerting about this finding. The first is that so many recent immigrants to Canada are not able to work at the types of jobs they are qualified for; in Vancouver, recent immigrants comprise 32% of the low-income population (Schellenberg & Hou, 2001, p. 51). The next is that an unpaid period of civic participation is becoming the norm as a means of overcoming a lack of "Canadian experience", an increasingly systematized devaluation of immigrant labour (Bauder, 2003, p. 699). Even though Citizenship and Immigration Canada's current system for selecting immigrants is based on their education and work experience—indicating their capabilities to positively contribute to the economy and to integrate based on their own efforts—their accomplishments are devalued immediately upon arrival in Canada, challenging the very credentials by which they were selected.

Accepted discourses contribute to the issues at hand. The first is the reliance on simple numeric measures such as those that maintain the digital divide perspective. In Chapter Two, a criticism of Industry Canada's proclamation of Canada being the most connected nation on Earth—because at one point in 2000 the SchoolNet program claimed that every public school classroom had one internet-ready computer—is more generally applied to the "digital divide" perspective, a view that suggests that digital inequalities can be ameliorated by implementing technical connections. In Chapter 5, "human capital theory" was critiqued in a similar manner, as this theory suggests that, particularly in the ICT industry, not being able to get a good job indicates a need for skills improvement. Both of these perspectives offer simple, purchasable methods for fixing complex

problems. The equations of internet access equaling social connectivity, or more

certificates promising a better job, do not do justice to the variety of complex and

heterogeneous circumstances that exist. Another example of using simple criteria to

make decisions is illustrated in the point system used to select newcomers during CIC's

immigrant selection process, as described in the prior paragraph. These simple measures

are seductive in their clarity, but misleading as they conceal the complex and overlapping

variables that exist in the analysis of issues such as social access. In response, the

research strategies of this thesis combine qualitative and quantitative research to

demonstrate that combined methodologies produce richer findings. Nuanced

understandings rely on gaining access to as broad a range of experiences and interactions

as possible.

Another discourse is that of individualism, which emphasizes the importance of self-

reliance and individual initiative over structures that differentiate based on class, gender,

or racial qualities (Clark et al., 2004, p. 538). "Human capital theory" shares elements of

the discourse of individualism. Canada is perceived as a meritocratic society, yet there is

not a strong link between academic credentials and the labour market (Bauder, 2003, p.

706). In the case of newcomers, this link is particularly fragile. Still many people,

newcomers and Canadian-born individuals alike, believe that there is more to be gained

through hard work than in protesting and working to dismantle structural inequalities. In

Canada, some federal government programs are available to address ICT-related social

inequalities. These include CAP and SchoolNet, which offer some assistance to people

and communities without internet access in their homes. Human Resources and Skills

Development Canada (HRSDC) also offers training to individuals who are un- or underemployed. Community networks and other community organizations do the same, demonstrating that while a "discourse of individualism" emphasizing self-reliance and initiative may exist, there is also some help available to those who qualify for it.

The two discourses of "simple measures" and "individualism" are combined in the employability situation of recent immigrants in Canada. The expectation that it is up to individual recent immigrants to get "local experience" by advancing or repeating their education in Canada, or by contributing in a volunteer capacity, are examples of the "discourse of individualism." When hiring new employees, the accepted category of "Canadian experience" allows corporations to make a simple differentiation between Canadian-born and immigrant applicants and to decide in favour of Canadian-based credentials and work experience, even though over time, new perspectives that a recent immigrant can bring to a workplace may benefit an employer and other employees. The potential for positive outcomes such as this cannot be related through numeric measures. As Rhae Adams (2001) suggests, we must look beyond both numbers and rhetoric to "'experience-near' investigations" that reveal realities "far from the neat, monolithic *categories* that divide demographics have created" (p. 7).

The findings of this thesis necessitate a public dialogue, and perhaps urgent policy reforms. Because of Canada's "aggressive per capita immigration targets" people selected to immigrate as Skilled Workers arrive in Canada's urban centres daily (Gregg, 2006, p. 39). The trends of urban settlement and growing income disparities between

people who are Canadian-born and those who are longer settled, are likely to increase and may eventually lead to ethnic conflicts. Allan Gregg (2006) argues that the ethnic conflicts that occurred in Britain, France and Australia in the past year could be a foreshadowing of Canadian discord, and suggests that our lack of serious ethnic conflict so far is only because Canada's immigration policy did not allow for "any real numbers" of visible minorities to immigrate until a generation after Britain and France did (p. 47). Given this timeline, there may still be time to make efforts toward closing economic disparities and reducing social barriers for recent immigrants; action is required now.

Practical efforts toward social inclusion may be the best strategy. This places the onus not just on federal programs and the initiative of recent immigrants, but also on the efforts of longer-settled and Canadian-born residents who may contribute to the perpetuation of the "discourse of individualism" and "human capital theory," and who also have much to gain from increased social inclusion. Even though we live in a multicultural society and—based on the glorification of the settlement of the West and proud stories of ancestral pioneers—many people are proud of it, Canadians tend not to dwell in multicultural neighbourhoods, instead living in separate, ethnically-divided enclaves (Gregg, 2006, p. 47). For recent immigrants, longer-settled residents and Canadian-born individuals, taking part in opportunities to meet people with different cultural backgrounds than our own, through civic participation or other interactions in a variety of third places, contributes to social inclusion. Social inclusion relies on interactions between all of us.

Community networks provide a practical means to expand social inclusion. They function as "third places" to provide information, and social interaction and support. Differing from pubs and coffee shops, CNs provide purposeful reasons for interaction. Benefits of these interactions include increased human and social capital. Because the majority of recent immigrants settle in Canada's three largest cities, urban CNs are better situated to aid this demographic, though CNs in smaller communities and rural areas also provide a means for interaction amongst community members who may not otherwise recognize their shared goals or common interests. Industry Canada's CAP sites play a major role in the maintenance of many community networks across Canada. This thesis has focused on digitally-skilled recent immigrants, but urban CAP sites provide means for technical as well as social connections for less-skilled recent immigrants or anyone else who chooses to use these publicly accessible systems. Recent discussions of the CAP program being terminated under a new Harper government are cause for alarm, as this may bring about the demise of many CNs across the country. Losing these sites of social interaction and inclusion, not to mention access to the online information and electronic communication, would yield significant damage to Canada's social fabric.

In the case of VCN, the network may still be able to operate without CAP, but the structure and organization of the CN would change significantly, even in terms of having fewer people visit the site to use the publicly accessible CAP computers. Currently, the help-desk and internet instruction volunteers benefit greatly from interacting with the CAP site users and assisting those who need help. The experiences gained by VCN's recent immigrant-volunteers are arguably improving their future abilities to take part in

the Canadian economy as IT workers. As well, in their current civic participation roles,

being involved in VCN's by-donation internet service provision situates volunteers

within an innovative, local system.

A recent policy examination by the Telecommunications Policy Review Panel (TPRP)

resulted in a (March 2006) report which—in a section on "ICT Adoption for Improved

Community Development" (7-43) —included CRACIN's proposition that:

> community networks and other community-based organizations provide
> both technological and social infrastructures for ICT access, adoption
> and use. Community networks also act as important sources of local
> economic development and innovation. Through training programs, for
> example, they help ensure that all Canadians, particularly those most at
> risk of being left behind, have the necessary skills to participate in the
> networked economy.

Arguably, VCN's volunteer program provides an organizational structure for volunteers

to act as vital sources of local economic development and innovation. As outlined in the

last chapter's recommendations section, further investment in the operational capabilities

and enhancements of VCN's volunteer program could ensure the continuation of the

social inclusion it fosters. The impacts of an ongoing opportunity for people from

diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to engage purposefully in civic

participation should not be underestimated.

OTHER SECTIONS

Includes: References, Appendices (Contextual Interview Guide, Description of Interview Participants, Overview of Quantitative Data, and the Survey distributed at VCN) and Ethics Clearances.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A *Contextual Interview Guide*

We will survey, interview and gather stories from recent immigrants to Canada who are volunteers at Vancouver Community Network (VCN) in order to learn about visiting community network facilities for the first time, contributing as volunteers, and opinions on digital inequalities. The following contextual interview guide serves as an example of the questions that we will ask during the course of the research project. However, as the interviews are only semi-structured with the intention of being open to longer narratives or storytelling, there may be some variation in how the questions are asked.

Initial Impressions:

1. Please describe the first time you came to VCN (Why did you come? What did you do? Who did you meet? When was it?).
2. On your first visit, how familiar were you with computers and the internet?
3. What skills and knowledge have you learned at VCN since that time?

Increased Involvement:

4. Please describe your volunteer activities.
5. How and why did you become a volunteer?
6. How has volunteering changed your perspective of VCN?
7. While volunteering, what is some advice that you often share with others?

Impacts and Experiences:

8. What do you like (most) about being here?
9. How have you contributed to or changed aspects of VCN?
10. During the time you have been involved with VCN, what sorts of events have been taking place in your life (changed jobs, made new friends, taken courses, moved to another home)?
11. Are there any connections between these events and VCN?

Talking about Inclusion and Exclusion:

12. Are you familiar with the term 'digital divide'? If so, how do you define it?
13. Have you felt impacted by a lack of access to information? If so, how?
14. How important do you think the internet is as a way for recent immigrants to get information or communicate with others?

Appendix B *Description of Interview Participants[16]*

Kyle (1) completed a Master's degree in computer science in Beijing before coming to Vancouver in September 2004. He intended to begin a doctoral program in computer science upon his arrival, but he was not accepted to any programs. Instead, he volunteered at VCN's Help Desk for several months before being hired by the CAP Youth Initiative. Although he is currently under-employed, he is happy to be gaining local experience in his field.

Elena (2) has been volunteering at VCN as the Russian language portal developer for over a year. Although she wasn't working when she began volunteering, she now works nearly full-time in a small technology firm. She also takes programming courses at BCIT. Elena's education and previous work experience is in mathematical programming.

Min (3) emigrated from Shanghai, China in 1999. She has a degree in Computer Science as well as eight years of work experience in UNIX administration. Three years ago she began volunteering as part of VCN's network administration team. Min recently left VCN as she found full-time employment appropriate to her experience.

Hung Sook (4) is a Korean man who came to Canada on his own in October 2003. He has a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and worked as a programmer for four years at a telecommunications corporation in Seoul. At the time of the interview, Hung Sook had been volunteering as the Korean language portal developer for just one month.

Jim (5) holds a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. He worked in the IT department of a major national bank in Shanghai until 2004, when he moved to Vancouver by himself. He volunteered at VCN's Help Desk three days per week during January and February of 2005, and in the week following the interview he began a job as a web designer.

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[16] Participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Leila (6) emigrated with her husband from their native Iran in 2000. Her work experience in Iran was administrative. In Vancouver she completed a technical diploma at BCIT, and is currently enrolled in a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. At VCN, her volunteer roles include help desk technician and network administrator.

Edgar (7) works as a project manager and business consultant for an IT firm located near VCN. When he has free time from his work projects, he spends part of his day at VCN, volunteering at the help desk and with the network administration team. He immigrated to Vancouver from India in December 2003.

Astrid (8) has a technical diploma and ten years of work experience in electronics. She lived in Austria until she and her partner moved to Vancouver in May 2004. Prior to finding full-time employment related to her previous experience, Astrid volunteered at VCN as the German language portal developer, a site that includes links to the Austrian and Swiss cultural communities.

Marie-Claire (9) and her partner emigrated from France in 2002. In Canada, she spent her first six months living in Montreal, before moving to Vancouver to avoid cold winters. She attained a Master's degree in Computer Science in France, and she is currently employed full-time as a bilingual help desk technician. As a VCN volunteer, she developed the French language portal.

Appendix C *Overview of Quantitative Data*

Source	Sample size	Duration	Volunteer Status	Data foci	Key findings
Survey of current and past volunteers **Note:** Average ages may be lower than at other times of the year because many students volunteer through the summer months.	26	July 7-14, 2005	All are or have been active volunteers	Duration in months and hours per week of volunteering Percentage of recent immigrants longer-term or Canadian-born volunteers Work status Country of origin Age	• 62% have volunteered for 6 months or less • 7.5 months is the average duration of volunteering • 7.62 is the average number of hours volunteered per week • 86% of respondents were not born in Canada • 65.2% of respondents have been in Canada for less than five years • 45% of respondents are looking for work, • China is the most represented country of origin of these volunteers • 31 is the average age of volunteers • Of recent immigrants only, the average age is 33.4
Analysis of volunteers' resumes Limited data to these volunteer roles because they match the roles of interviewees in qualitative study: -Language Portal Developer -Help Desk -Local Area Network Administrator	116	Complied between July 7-14, 2005 Resume submission dates are indeterminable	Active volunteers from within the last year	Work experience in Canada/ elsewhere Education levels	• 62.9% immigrated to Canada within the past five years • 100% have work experience in a home country • 70.5% have no work experience in Canada • 83% of volunteers have Bachelor's or Master's degrees • 91% of recent-immigrant volunteers have Bachelor's or Master's degrees

Analysis of online application database	793	November 1, 2004- June 30, 2005	Applied online to become volunteers	Total number of applicants Percentage of applicants who became volunteers	• 793 people applied to volunteer • 17% became volunteers • 80% of volunteers turned-over within this 20-month period
				Applicants self-report technical skills and knowledge	• 99% own a computer • 95% rate themselves as advanced internet users • 93% rate themselves as advanced email users • 34% list a website they own or have worked on • 66% had basic or no knowledge of not for profit organizations at the time of application
				Career status	50% looking for work 27% students 11.3% employed 1.5% retired 10.2% other
				Reason for application (Words searched in text fields of applications)	5% state "work experience" 5% state "gain experience" 1.4% state "Canadian experience" 5% state "improve English"

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CRACIN ACRRIC Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking (CRACIN) www.cracin.ca
Survey for research project examining civic participation at Vancouver Community Network , July 2005

1. Are you a current or past VCN volunteer?
☐ Yes
☐ No

2. What is or was your volunteer role? Check all that apply:
☐ Technical Help Desk Support
☐ Internet Instructor
☐ Local Area Network Support
☐ Wireless Network Development
☐ Online Researcher
☐ E-Journalist
☐ Language Portal Developer

3. When did you begin volunteering?
Day (if known):
Month:
Year:

4. On average, how many hours per week do you (or did you) volunteer?
☐ 4
☐ 8
☐ 12
☐ Other _____

5. If you are no longer volunteering, when did you stop?
Day (if known):
Month:
Year:

6. Were you born in Canada?
a)   ☐ Yes
       ☐ No (please answer questions 'b' and 'c')
b) If no, what year did you arrive in Canada?
c) If no, which country did you emigrate from?

7. What is your date of birth?

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8. Are you currently working?

☐ No, I am looking for work.
☐ Yes, I work full-time.
☐ Yes, I work part-time.
☐ Yes, I am on contract.
☐ Other_____

9. a) What is your current occupation? _____

   b) Is it your occupation of choice?

☐ Yes
☐ No (please answer question 'c' below)

   c) If not, what is your occupation of choice?

_____

10. If you no longer volunteer, why did you stop?

11. What do you (or did you) find most rewarding about volunteering?

_____

12. a) Are you willing to be contacted for further questions?

☐ Yes (please answer question 'b' below)
☐ No

b) If yes, please include your contact information below.
Name:
Email address:
Phone Number:

The time and effort you spent completing this survey are greatly appreciated. Thank you very much!

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Human Research Ethics Committee

TO: Dr. Leslie Regan Shade

FROM: Dr. James Pfaus, Chair
                University Human Research Ethics Committee

DATE: April 11, 2005

SUBJECT: Summary Protocol Form Certificate # UH2005-007

Please find enclosed a copy of the *Certification of Ethical Acceptability* for your project entitled "Canadian Research Alliance for Innovation and Community Networking: 'Narratives of Digital and Social Inclusion'," which was approved by the Committee on March 3, 2005. The original certification has been retained at the Office of Research. The reference number for your file is UH2005-007.

IMORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR SPF:

Should you intend to further modify the research instruments or procedures that were approved by the Committee, you must submit a modification request by formal memo describing what changes you anticipate, for Committee review. Further information regarding modifying an existing SPF can be found on the Office of Research website at the following address:
http://oor.concordia.ca/REC/modification.shtml.

Please refer to the above SPF number in all future correspondence related to this project. Also, please be sure to notify the Committee when the project concludes.

Please note that while your protocol remains active, the Office of Research will be requesting annual reports from you, in order to comply with Tri-Council policy. Your next report will be due on 3/3/2006. You will receive further correspondence and the appropriate form as this date approaches. Further information about this form, and the form itself, will soon be available on our website, http://oor.concordia.ca.

Follow-up of this file will be assured by Ms. Adela Reid, the Research Ethics and Compliance Officer. Ms. Reid is reachable by phone at extension 848-2424, ext. 7481. Her e-mail address is adela.reid@concordia.ca.

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #13407

April 18, 2005

Prof. Andrew Clement
Faculty of Information Studies
140 St. George St.
University of Toronto
Toronto, ON M5S 3G6

Prof. Leslie Shade
Dept. of Communication Studies
7141 Sherbrooke St. W.
Concordia University
Montreal, QC H4B 1R6

Dear Prof. Clement and Prof. Shade:

Re: Your research protocol entitled "Canadian Alliance for Community Innovation and
        Networking—Thematic Study on 'Narratives of Digital and Social Inclusion"

ETHICS APPROVAL	**Original Approval Date: April 18, 2005**
	Expiry Date: April 17, 2006

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research
Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of **one year**,
under the REB's expedited review process. Ongoing projects must be renewed prior to the expiry
date.

The following consent documents (received April 6, 2005) have been approved for use in this
study: Consent to Take Part in a Research Project and Invitation to Participate. Participants
should receive a copy of their consent form.

During the course of the research, any significant deviations from the approved protocol **(that is,
any deviation which would lead to an increase in risk or a decrease in benefit to
participants)** and/or any unanticipated developments within the research should be brought to
the attention of the Ethics Review Office.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Raquel David
Ethics Review Coordinator

xc: Prof. J. Bertrand (Chair, SSH REB)
        Prof. B. C. Smith (Dean, Faculty of Information Studies)
        Mr. D. York (Research Partnership Officer & Grants Officer, Social Sciences &
                Humanities)