DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ISTRIA

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2006
The dissertation entitled
DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ISTRIA

by

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ABSTRACT

MATIC, IGOR, Ph. D., August 2006, Mass Communication

DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ISTRIA (209 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Karen E. Riggs

This dissertation covers the Digital Divide phenomena in the Istrian region. Istria is a Northern Adriatic peninsula that is administratively divided between three European countries: Croatia (which covers approximately 90% of the peninsula), Slovenia (app. 7%), and Italy (app. 3%). In this dissertation my goal was to articulate the most influential theoretical frameworks that are used to explain the Digital Divide today and I try to give an explanation of the issue through ethnographic procedures. The goals of this research include the examination of the current Digital Divide debate, extension of the theory toward the local understanding and perception of this global phenomenon. Additionally, I wanted to identify different interpretations of the Digital Divide in three countries within one region and compare the differences and similarities in new technology usage and perceptions. Also, I was interested to see how age - which is described as one of the major Digital Divide factors - influences the relationships between older and younger generations, specifically relationships between parents and children, instructors, students and co-workers.

I conclude that in the researched region, age of the respondents makes an important distinction between computer and Internet users and that individuals shape their attitudes toward the ICTs in accordance with their perceived role in the society (primarily as parents and children).
In order to give a more understandable picture of the Digital Divide phenomena, I use the Bourdieu’s “Theory of Practice” framework and his notions about the literacy to accentuate the importance of exchange between community members and their possible change of attitude toward the new technologies that can occur in that exchange process.

I suggest three approaches toward the solution of the problem: education (which should involve the members of the community that are not currently involved in educational processes), family interaction (where younger family members have a possibility to influence the older members to change the approach toward the new technologies) and market changes (that should promote competition and more accessible services).

Approved:

Karen E. Riggs

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This dissertation is dedicated
to my guardian angels;
my sister Irena and
my best friend Sinisa.

You showed me
the meaning of hope,
and for that,
I am forever
grateful.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Their understanding and infinite trust in me helped me to understand the meaning of devotion.

To the Ron Brown Fellowship program, Institute of International Education in New York and the United States Embassy in Zagreb. They considered my projects, spent time to evaluate them, and finally they financially supported my studies and research in the United States and Croatia.

To my first advisor at the Ohio University, Professor Drew McDaniel. He introduced me to mass-communication research and shaped my future learning process.

To my doctoral advisor, Professor Karen Riggs. She showed me the potential and deepness of the qualitative research and taught me about the research rigor.

To all my friends around the world that in one way or the other showed me their support and collaboration in order to fulfill this project.
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1. INTRODUCTION

As an international student in the United States and as a person who had a unique opportunity to experience the richness and different varieties of cultural diversities in both domestic and international environments, I became increasingly aware of how mass communication channels are being used in different ways around the world. The introduction of the new powerful mass-communication medium, the Internet, at the end of the 20th century accentuated the debate through a phenomenon called by media researchers the Digital Divide.

To understand this problem better it is important to identify the technical side of new communication possibilities, the provider's role in access availability, the producer's pursuit to provide content and the user's approach toward new potentials in different socio-economical situations. In order to have a better overview of the evolution of the Digital Divide theory, it is essential to recognize the social phenomena that are happening around the Digital Divide issue, the economics that are influencing our everyday lives and activities, historical processes and cultural landscapes in specific regions, and the processes of education and learning.

A number of authors who covered the Digital Divide phenomenon came up with different definitions and understandings of the concept. The reason for different approaches about an issue in academia lies in the fact that the Digital Divide in its core is an interdisciplinary concern that needs to be explored from many different angles.
IT professionals define the divide as a technological scarcity that will naturally disappear with advancement and successfully penetrate rates of new technologies. This point of view was described by Hargittai (2002) as a simple “have” and “have nots” approach that limits its scope, as binary classification of technology use by only considering whether someone does or does not use the Internet.

Social scientists see the Digital Divide as a new level of social inclusion/exclusion situation in different societies and under different premises. According to Warschauer (2003), the focus on social inclusion shifts the discussion of the "digital divide" from gaps to be overcome by providing equipment to social development challenges to be addressed through the effective integration of technologies into communities, institutions, and societies. He concludes that most important is not so much the physical availability of computers and the Internet, but rather people’s ability to make use of those technologies to engage in meaningful social practices.

Educators usually focus on literacy and other embodied forms of cultural capitals that change rapidly thanks to the new technologies’ rapid advancement. They are especially concerned because education, as a social activity, includes a lot of time and effort. Natriello (2001) offers four major points toward this educational issue.

The way in which the disparities in access are addressed will have important implications for the evolving disparities. Second, there are difficulties of addressing the disparities in computer and Internet use in education. Third, sociologists and educators have to make an important contribution to make in examining the disparities in use and fourth, the
problem should be seen as an education issue as well instead of just bringing it to the attention of others. (p. 260).

From the mass communication standpoint, these rapid technological opportunities represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Opportunities, especially in the mass-communication business sector seem endless; from the fast broadband Internet with all its perks to new possibilities of digital radio and television. On the other side, people's perception, willingness and opportunity to access new media remains one of the major obstacles in today's media environment because the audience is being both overwhelmed with and denied of the new opportunities in the digital media world, depending on their geographical region.

From the economic point of view, Digital Divide is one of many other factors that separate Northwest from Southeast parts of the world. Since IT usage requires investments in digital technologies on both macro- (national governments, corporations) and micro- (single user) levels, the inability to access those technologies results in an unequal spread of digital possibilities around the world. According to Norris (2002), this economic reality, combined with other socio-economic factors, causes three types of the Digital Divide – global, social and democratic. Because of unequal access to the new communication possibilities, the democratic, social, educational and economic opportunities remain more favorable in technologically more advanced countries/regions. Selwyn (2004) notices that “who is 'connected' to information and technology have grown in prominence and now form an important element to the information
age policy agenda in industrialized, ‘technologically advanced’ countries such as the US and the UK. As such, the notion of the digital divide has been promoted furiously by an unusual alliance of academics, IT industry executives, politicians and social welfare organizations, all pursuing the ideal of widespread use of ICT – albeit for very different reasons” (p. 342).

In this context, the reality of the Digital Divide consequences among the authors who come from the developed western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands or the Scandinavian region is being defined as primarily economic factors that separate their countries’ population on the basis of their income, where, logically, users with the lower income experience the Digital Divide when compared with their wealthier co-nationals.

Besides some analysis about other factors that cause the Digital Divide phenomenon, the overwhelming majority of quantitative research done in the West points out the level of income as a major cause. Although I am not denying that income plays a very important role in this issue, I wanted to investigate other important elements, such as education, language barriers, age, and gender in less-developed countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Even if income is removed from the Digital Divide equation, the issues of different ICT perception and usage remain. Lizie et al. (2004) found that, so far, the policy and research inquiries have tended to equate the mere opportunity of ICT access – at work, at home, at public libraries, at community technology centers – with practices, understandings, and skills that ensure a productive ICT-filled life and livelihood. However, the meaning of ICT adoption and use is not uniform across cultures –
equal access does not equate to equal usage and fulfillment. As such, ICT success is not only a question of access, but also one of cultural sensibility: cultural background contributes to the adoption and use of ICT (p. 2).

With this research, my goal was to apply the qualitative techniques and investigate the roots of this phenomenon in a specific geographic region and try to better understand the multiple factors of the Digital Divide theory combined together.

From the cultural perspective, in accordance with Bourdieu's "Theory of Practice", I explored literacy as a complex institution that is embodied in the cultural capital, which is usually unique to every region and very specific in its expressions, but often oversimplified from the global perspective. The need for a regional approach toward the Digital Divide problem has been recognized by both policy-makers and mass-communication researchers. In 1999, The American Progressive Policy Institute issued a report on the analysis of technological evolution employing a similar methodology but adopting a regional perspective analyzing the United States. Corrocher and Ordanini (2002) accentuated the necessity to compare economic and cultural diversity of the European Union and analyze similarities and differences between different states and regions within the European Union.

Digital Divide theory is frequently debated from the global perspective where the global markets and countries are compared and analyzed. But to understand one’s personal needs and approaches to new media, it is essential to focus the research on a specific micro-culture/region. Borgida et al. (2002)
focused on cooperation and civic and political culture play in addressing the
“digital divide” in computer use and Internet access, and suggested that the
specific regions and local communities have adopted different approaches to
technology diffusion.

Regional Perspective

This research focuses the Digital Divide debate on a specific region – the
Istrian peninsula. Istria is located in the northern Adriatic Sea and is divided
between three countries – Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. Although the biggest part
of the peninsula belongs to Croatia (approximately 90%), both Slovenian (app. 7%
) and Italian (app. 3%) parts shape the cultural, social, political and economic
life of the peninsula. The reason lies in the recent history of the region, as
national borders and ethnic representations have been changed frequently. In
the last century, this geographically limited space was controlled by Austro-
Hungarian Monarchy, Italy and Germany. Immediately after WWII, the region
was under the US/UN protection and, finally, it was divided between Yugoslavia
and Italy. According the pre-war Austrian census, the region was ethnically
diverse: 41.6% of the population spoke Croatian, 36.5% spoke Italian, and 13.7%
spoke Slovenian as a native language. After WWI, Istria came under Italian rule,
where the Slavic population (Slovenians and Croatians) were exposed to a policy
of forced Italianization and extreme cultural suppression organized under fascist
regime of Mussolini. After a long post-war period of border disputes between Italy
and Yugoslavia, a large number of ethnic Italians left the peninsula and by 1956
Istria lost almost 50% of its population and parts of its social and cultural identity.
In the early 1990s, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Istria was additionally
divided between the republics of Croatia and Slovenia. Nevertheless, despite
unfortunate and often tragic history, there is a long tradition of tolerance between
the people who live in the peninsula, regardless of their nationality. Although
Istrians belong to specific ethnic groups (Italians, Slovenians, Croatians and
other), there is a strong regional identity that managed to survive over the years.
Today, the whole Istrian County within Croatia and large parts of the Slovenian
Istria are bilingual – Croatian/Italian or Slovenian/Italian respectively.

Economically, compared to other counties, the region is advanced in both
Slovenia and Croatia and relies on shipbuilding industry, winemaking, fishing,
agriculture and tourism. Both Slovenian and Croatian sides of the peninsula are
the most developed parts of those countries, and the small Italian portion (the
community of Muggia) relies on the city of Trieste (the region of Friuli-Venezia-
Giulia), which is a natural port for the landlocked Austria and Switzerland.

There are several reasons why I chose this particular region for the Digital
Divide research. First of all, this small region is the only place in Europe where
Slavic and Romance cultures and languages meet, and from many points of view,
it represents a rich mixture of two diverse ways of life. For example, in the Istrian
County in Croatia, two languages are official, Italian and Croatian, but both
languages are represented through two major dialects that are unique to the
region. Chakavian is a Croatian dialect spoken in different variations throughout
the maritime part of Croatia, but the influence of the Italian language is the most visible in Istria. On the other side, Italian language is also rich in dialects. Almost every Italian region has a unique dialect. Italians in Istria use the Istro-Venetian dialect that is very closely related to other Northeastern Italian dialects.

Second, historically, this region suffered from both Italian fascism and Yugoslav communism. Both of these two forms of dictatorship left permanent marks on almost every aspect of everyday life, from education and cultural exchange to business opportunities.

Third, economically, it is an interesting ground for research because the national borders represent three different ways of economic success. Italy belongs to a group of the most economically advanced countries in the world, Slovenia is a successful Central European country that managed to switch its economy from planned to market-oriented logic and Croatia is currently in transition with the prospect to join the European Union at the end of the decade.

This geographical region represents a wonderful opportunity for analyzing national economic success and per capita income as factors of Digital Divide in these three environments and better understanding of the impact it has on individuals in the region.

Fourth, Digital Divide theories and Bourdieu’s “Theory of Practice” are intertwined in three different segments. Education is an important factor that determines people’s attitudes towards their environment. Culture, in its different forms, shapes both the individual and national perception of what is valued as advancement. Capital represents a pathway toward the individual’s or group’s
determined goals. The variety of the research in three different countries and three unique cultures that form one single region provides an extraordinary opportunity to examine and value multiple factors that lead to the better understanding of the complexities of the Digital Divide.

Fifth, I come from the region, so it made perfect sense to do the ethnography research in the region that I am familiar with. Different authors (Ang, 1990; Beniger et. al, 1995; Boberstova 2003 and Drotner 1996) point out that native ethnographic methods in mass communication are beneficial because they provide one’s examination of both the researchers’ perceptions about the issue and the respondents’ answers toward both the issue and the examiner. This correlation is even more accentuated if the respondents accept the researchers as one of their own and break the eventual barriers between each other. La Capra (1997) points out the importance and value of the media ethnography, but also emphasizes the “subject-position(s) and voice(s) of the researcher and the manner in which they may be critically transformed in the research process” (p. 65). Also, I had the unique opportunity to perform an ethnographic media research in culture(s) and language(s) that I consider native. That allowed me to surpass some of the limitations (amount of time needed to learn about the new culture and the longevity of the research) of the ethnographic studies. Similarly, Machin (2002) pointed out that short-term ethnographic study is feasible when the research is “carried out in the researcher’s native culture(s) and language(s)” (p. 169).
Main Goals

Since this is a qualitative (media ethnography) study research, instead of research questions, I offer a list of main goals of the research that incorporate theoretical perspectives and limitations of the current Digital Divide thought and methodological angles that combine ethnographical research in the field with in-depth interviews.

My first goal was to examine the current debate about the Digital Divide and see which notions can be applied in the researched region and analyze which Digital Divide understandings can be applied globally and which ones are distinctive to geographical regions and cultural uniqueness. Additionally, my goal was to extend the Digital Divide theory and debate by offering local understanding and perceptions of this global phenomenon.

Second, I wanted to identify the reactions and different interpretations of the Digital Divide in three countries within one region and compare the similarities and differences in people’s approach towards new technologies and new media in order to realize which theory assumptions can be applied globally and which ones are unique to geographical space and cultures.

My third goal was to analyze and describe the role of ICTs in everyday life and see what happens with individuals who cannot or will not introduce ICTs into their routine at home and at their workplace. According to previous studies, this phenomenon of not including the ICTs into the everyday routine is present in both developed and developing states and/or regions. Fairlie (2002) found that income and wealth do not contribute exclusively to Digital Divide. Non-English
speakers often fear accessing technologies that require substantial knowledge of a foreign language. Additionally, Prieger, (2003) in his US equal-availability market research, concluded that there is little evidence on unequal availability based on income and/or race, but there is a significant amount of evidence that connects Digital Divide with broadband Internet availability, market size and education. The research dated after 2000 suggests that the Digital Divide definition is shifting and that individual wealth is not as important as it was in the 1990’s. These days, many other elements like education (specifically languages and computer skills) and social environment (working places, families, and peer pressure) are becoming increasingly important in an individual’s approach toward the ICTs.

Fourth, I was interested to see how age - which is described as one of the major Digital Divide factors - influences the relationship between older and younger generations, specifically relationships between parents and children, instructors and students and co-workers. There is a vast amount of evidence that audiences’ preferences change with age and that different generations use and perceive media outlets in different ways when it comes to the elderly and Internet and computer usage. Riggs et al. (2001) wrote that many participants in their study had been aware of the new technologies, but “they felt that new information technologies simply occupied a space they could not enter, because they lacked the money, or their “time has passed” or it was too much trouble” (p. 167). Similarly, research done by Morrone and Zannella (2004) showed that Media usage in Italy was undergoing an important transition, especially as young people
used new media that influenced their socialization, leisure time, education, family life and job opportunities. According to them, “geographical region and the education level of parents are the strongest determinants of access to multimedia among children” (p. 67) – a fact that underlines the importance of computer knowledge and accessibility for all generations.

Fifth, I wanted to outline the importance of educational, social, economic and cultural foundations of the Digital Divide research and emphasize the complexities of multidisciplinary approaches to this issue. Digital Divide, as our everyday reality, offers a desirable ground for research, but its complexity requires extensive overviews from different angles. Norris’s research (2002) accentuated the global issue that comes with Digital Divide. Different Internet accessibility among different countries provides an additional level of disparity between developed and underdeveloped worlds. Castells (2002) points out that access alone does not solve the problem because in today’s world, the quality of access (narrowband vs. broadband) makes a huge difference between the Internet users and quality of their online performances. Selwyn (2003) suggested that there is a necessity to change the educational processes as soon as possible in order to prevent future divides between the Internet populations. All these researches suggest that the complex issues that come with the Digital Divide are here to stay and that with the improvement of technologies and with Internet playing a bigger role in our lives, the differences between online and offline population will become even more evident.
Finally, the intention of this research based on ethnographic methods was to enhance different thoughts about the Digital Divide theory and give a coherent understanding of the socio-cultural realities, current obstacles and future possibilities of introducing the new technologies in the Istrian region.

I also emphasize the importance of educational processes and intergenerational relationships and communications that can provide a key for a solution of this problem in the future.

Additionally, I emphasize the importance of multicultural approaches and the possibility of advancing one’s perception about the issue by analyzing and applying experiences from neighboring cultures. According to Norris (2002) the correlations, the similarities and the differences between the countries, are essential to the Digital Divide thought; they give an understanding about where the problems are, how those can be addressed and, most importantly, they teach us through examples how to override domestic/local Digital Divide issues.
Structure of the Dissertation

Apart from the introductory chapter, this dissertation is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 2 gives a theoretical background of the development of the Digital Divide thought and integrates different aspects of the Digital Divide theories. I explore both quantitative and qualitative analyses of this phenomenon and underline the importance of the understanding of global and regional realities of current conditions.

Without a doubt, the ICTs are moving and redefining the social structure. The willingness to accept or reject the ICTs causes new relations that are understood in different ways in diverse cultures. In moderately developed parts of the world, ‘being online’ represents a new form of luxury; however, in developed countries, being online has become a necessity in almost every aspect of everyday life, including education, business, personal communication and entertainment.

Additionally, Bourdieu’s notions about different forms of capital, field and habitus are put into the Digital Divide equation in order to make an understanding about what this new form of inequality means in different societies and cultures. He provided a powerful model for understanding the functions and consequences of literacy by conceptualizing people’s competences and life trajectories. Computer literacy, defined as the ability to use computers to perform a variety of tasks, is becoming one of the basic and necessary skills essential in today’s “information age”.
Chapter 3 addresses methods used in this study and gives logical explanations about the ethnographic approach to this particular research in the Istrian peninsula. Also stated in Chapter 3, the purpose of this study is not to define the Internet as a new communication tool, but rather to define and better understand the audience and its current need for the Internet. In accordance with Drotner, (2000) there should be three central characteristics that media ethnography should incorporate: the analytical point of departure should be a concrete social group, not a particular mass medium; interviewees should be seen as producers of mediated communication practices, not only as media users; and the location of fieldwork has to be multiple.

Chapter 3 also integrates methodological aspects, opportunities and possible obstacles of this media ethnography. Additionally, I discuss some of the challenges I experienced while researching in the field.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the results of the fieldwork and explain the obstacles and possibilities of the current situation. The researched individuals and groups are organized in accordance with their age. Chapter 4 covers the Baby Boomers and some members of the older generations and their attempts to access new technologies and adopt them into their daily routine. Four elements that describe their side of Digital Divide debate are education, new-media literacy, parenting and language barriers. Differences in intergenerational education were especially visible in family circles where members of different generations expressed different perception and understanding of new communication vehicles. The elements of media literacy, including access, analysis, evaluation
and creation of messages across a variety of contexts, were also important in defining the regional aspects of Digital Divide debates. The older generations showed interest when it came to access to the ICTs, but they struggled in areas of analysis, evaluation and creation of messages.

Chapter 5 covers the student population that expressed their concerns in the realm of connectivity to the new media channels, primarily the broadband Internet. In their perception, the major obstacle was not in media literacy but in the current market situation that prevented them from easily and affordably accessing the online community and perceiving themselves as equal to the rest of the world. Discrepancies in regional Internet markets proved to be both a cause of frustration and a self-identification tool that differentiated Internet users in accordance with their current residency.

In the end, Chapter 6 is the concluding segment of this research, where I underline my final ideas about the Digital Divide theories in accordance with theoretical debates and my research findings. The conclusion is divided into two parts. In the first part, I give final explanations about the research analysis and outline some Digital Divide considerations according to specific local/regional media needs. I also give the current understanding of the importance of the Internet on both economic and cultural levels in Istria and its' role in today’s life in the region. The second part of the conclusion is devoted to future academic work which includes Digital Divide phenomena as a subject of research. I outline some considerations like language barriers, cultural diversities and different
communication needs that have to be taken into consideration when discussing the Digital Divide.
2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Introduction

At the beginning of the new millennium, governments around the world and the United Nations recognized the importance of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as one of the important elements that will assure economic and social development around the world and a potential platform for mutual exchange and understanding on both economic and socio-cultural levels. Several authors like Castells (1996; 2001), Norris (2001), Mossberger (2003), Reich (1991) and Selwyn (2003) presented arguments as to how new computer and telecommunications technologies will transform countries into “knowledge economies” and “network societies” (Castells, 1996). This understanding of the new digital phenomenon was expectedly first recognized in the developed part of the world, primarily in the United States and West-Europe and it was described by Selwyn as the “evangelical zeal” of the Western governments (p. 3, 2003). During the last two decades, the usage of the ICTs spread from academia to businesses and governments, and the process of digitalization was used to describe and prove the development efforts. Wills (1999) noted that politicians defined the ICT as “the indispensable grammar of modern life …and they were hoping that their citizens do not get “left behind and win in the new global era” (p. 10).

The major concern about the Digital Divide issue is that the ICT will cause information inequalities and force new divisions between and within countries.
One of the many problems with the Digital Divide is that we know that it causes inequalities, but we are still not sure where to put the lines. Who is staying outside the digital circle and why? What are the consequences of not adopting the new technologies?

In this chapter, I will give a theoretical overview of the Digital Divide and different understanding of this interdisciplinary issue that includes socio-economic, political and communication conjecture. I will also implement today’s understanding of the problem with socio-cultural and technological realities in Central and Eastern Europe, which has its own specific possibilities and limitations that influence the understanding of Digital Divide in the region.

In the second part of this chapter, Digital Divide theories are correlated and analyzed through Bourdieu’s “Theory of Practice”, which gives a good platform for explaining the causes and the effects of ICT in our societies today (Bourdieu, 1992; Selwyn, 2003). According to that theory, the information technology and its usage can be understood as a literacy issue and it can be defined through the field, habitus, cultural, social, and economic capital where field represents information technology organization or a given technology system; habitus represents expectations, aspirations and attitudes toward technology, and different forms of capital represent our exposure, experience, expertise, relationship and ability to acquire technology and training.

The last part of this chapter gives a basic explanation of the current socio-cultural and economic situation in Central and Eastern Europe today and some possible perspectives for the near future. In the last decade and a half the
Central and Eastern European region was a place that witnessed many changes; from the political perspective when the pluralism was introduced at the beginning of the nineties, to economic changes that followed shortly after and changed the course of the development in the East and the West. Unfortunately, the development could not change the reality overnight and some of the necessary changes that include Digital Divide factors are still underway.

In the last decade, Central and Eastern Europe witnessed many changes; from the political perspective, pluralism was introduced at the beginning of the 1990s and from the economic perspective, market-economy practice followed shortly after.

**Digital Divide Definitions**

In the broadest sense, the digital divide is the gap that exists between those who have and those who do not have access to technology (telephones, computers, Internet access) and related services. Mossberger defined the Digital Divide as a term “that has been used to describe the patterns of unequal access to information technology based on income, race, ethnicity, gender, age and geography that surfaces in the mid-1990s” (2003, p. 1). McNamara (2003) argues that - despite the continued popularity of attention-grabbing crude measures - the definition of the Digital Divide has grown over time to include: differences in access, in sustained and affordable form, to the range of ICTs from landline phones, radio and TV to the Internet, mobile phones, satellite services
etc; different levels of development of the underlying structure that enables access to and networking of these ICTs and the content they contain (p. 2).

From a similar point of view, Castells (2001) noticed that “the differentiation between Internet-haves and have-nots adds a fundamental cleavage to existing sources of inequality and social exclusion in a complex interaction that appears to increase the gap between the promise of the Information Age and its bleak reality for many people around the world” (p. 247).

According to him, access alone does not solve the problem, but it is a prerequisite for overcoming inequality in a society whose dominant functions and social groups are increasingly organized around the Internet. In addition, the fact that the rise of the Internet took place in conditions of social inequality in access everywhere may have lasting consequences on the structure and content of the medium in ways that we still cannot fully comprehend. This is because users shape the Internet to an even greater extent than any other technology because of the speed of transmission of their feedback and the flexibility of the technology (p. 255).

According to Schiller (1999), the Internet may be the most rapidly spreading technology in human history, and the vast expansion of telecommunications at the end of the 20th century has been fundamental to the formation of what Castells (1997) calls “informational mode of production” dominated by “spaces of flows”. Graham & Marvin (1996) note that electronic communications form a fundamental part of the growth of post-Fordist production regimes around the world and have contributed to a massive, planet-wide round
of time – space compression that has reconfigured the structure of social relations and the rhythms of everyday life (quoted in Warf, 2000, p. 3).

Cairncross (1997) sees the growth of the Internet and its popular imagery that rests on two inter-related fantasies; both reflective of a dominant technological determinism that pervades media representations of cyberspace. The first is that everyone has, or theoretically could have, equal access to cyberspace. The second stereotype is that the Internet eliminates space, overcoming the friction of distance through the creation of communities without closeness.

Warf (2000) does not agree with these two so-called fantasies, and, in his opinion, the first fantasy is usually stereotypically described as democratic. In a simplistic view, the Internet and the new possibilities that it could offer are really democratic and under the perfect conditions, everybody can get a chance to speak his/her mind through the new medium; but in reality, the expansion of the Internet is causing the quick growth of the hyperbole that surrounds it. In order to solve this problem, Warf suggests wider theorizations of social structure class and power and then analyzes the cyberspace that is sensitive to social and spatial inequalities (p. 4). Hugill (1999) has demonstrated that communication systems have been deeply interwoven with global and local geopolitics for more than a century and a half. Contrary to utopian pronouncements that everyone can or will drive on the information highway, Warf underlines the discrepancies in access to the Internet internationally, revealing that the global geography of cyberspace closely resembles the schism between the economically developed and underdeveloped worlds and than within the most hard-wired nations, there is
a severe imbalance in Internet access among social groups and regions (2000, p. 4).

Norris (2001) sees the Digital Divide as a multidimensional phenomenon that has three aspects: global divide, social divide and democratic divide (p. 3). The global divide represents a gap between the developed West and the rest of the world where new technologies have not been introduced, and if they exist, they are available only to the privileged groups that differentiate themselves from the rest of the population by income and education. “If investment in digital technologies has the capacity to boost productivity, advanced economies such as Sweden, Australia and the United States at the forefront of the technological revolution may be well placed to pull even farther ahead maintaining their edge in future decades …, but most poorer societies lagging far behind, plagued by multiple burdens of debt, disease and ignorance, may join the digital world decades later in the long term, may ultimately fail to catch up” (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2000, p. 5).

The social divide represents different diffusion of technological opportunities within societies and it exists in both developed and underdeveloped countries. The social divide is becoming more and more important because certain groups within a society and different areas of the specific countries are systematically excluded (Norris, 2001, p. 10). In the developed countries, the minorities like the African-American and Latino populations in the United States or new immigrants in the EU that are coming from Eastern Europe or Northern Africa, do not have the same opportunities to use new technologies. Apart from
the specific, predefined, social groups, the social digital divide can be defined by using the usual demographic indicators: different levels of income, education, race, gender and age.

The democratic divide deals with the “potential impact of the digital world on the distribution of power and influence in political systems … democratic divide may still exist between those who do and do not use the multiple political resources available on the Internet for civic engagement” (Norris, 2001. p. 12). Researchers like Golding & McChesney (1999) suggest that the Internet, as a virtual community, will not only revitalize mass participation in public affairs, but will also disproportionately benefit the elite (pp. 70-85). The elite here are the portions of the population that can afford and understand the possibilities of Internet communications. This could entail a large percentage of the population in the United States or Norway that has a chance to be politically involved in the chat rooms, or a very small group of the population in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (McChesney, 1999, p. 13).

From the political point of view, Selwyn (2003) noticed that the Digital Divide issue emerged with “social inclusion” theme throughout centre-left governments in Western Europe and during the Clinton/Gore era in the United States. Throughout the 1990s, “the issues of combating social exclusion and establishing an inclusive society formed a bedrock of academic and political discourse in many countries … yet, one of the most intriguing aspects of recent social policy formation in countries such as the UK has been the convergence of the information society and inclusive society discourses into ongoing debates.
over the potential of ICTs to either exacerbate or alleviate social exclusion” (p. 4).

After the elections in the United States in 2000, the newly appointed FCC chairman Michael Powell declared the Digital Divide a non-problem and proceeded to ignore it, “adopting policies to eliminate all public interest obligations for the advanced telecommunications networks used to provide high-speed and voice over Internet service.” According to Powell, “there is a Mercedes-Benz divide. I’d like one. I can’t afford it” (Washington times, April 2005).

Governments’ debates about the Digital Divide and social exclusion continue, and the focus in both the United States and Western Europe is the difference in new technologies usage within individual countries. According to Castells, (2001) core economic, social, political and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet, and other computer networks … Exclusion from these networks is one of the most damaging forms of exclusion in our economy and in our culture (p. 3). Today, the prevailing view concerns a dichotomous divide between those who are connected and those who are not connected to the Internet and other digital services. The United States Department of Commerce outlined these divisions:

[Some individuals] have the most powerful computers, the best telephone service and fastest Internet service, as well as a wealth of content and training relevant to their lives … another group of people don’t have access to the newest and best computers, the most reliable telephone service or the fastest or most convenient Internet services. The difference between these two groups is the Digital Divide. (quoted in Selwyn, 2003, p. 5)
So far, the Digital Divide research assumes that people can convert IT access into other valued goods, services and life outcomes (Kvasny & Keil, 2002). Until today, little research has been conducted to actually test this premise for IT access and use by non-traditional users (DiMaggio et al., 2001). In order to understand the Digital Divide issues in Central and Eastern Europe, it is important to evaluate and analyze the possibilities and weaknesses of the particular region that forms the reality based on its own strengths and limitations.

According to Eggleston et al. (2001), technology is the latest “knowledge, skills and practices involved in the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services in an economic development process; technology in itself is not inherently good or bad, the outcome results from how it is used” (p. 74). In addition, Rodriguez and Wilson, (2000, p. 23) through empirical analysis, conclude that there are two fundamental factors that separate highly technological countries from those that are not: “an economic environment conductive to investment, and a climate of civil liberties conductive to research and expansion of communications”.

The differences between the understandings of the Digital Divide today and five to seven years ago lie in the fact that previous studies have referred to the Digital Divide in terms of differences in access to the relevant hardware and explained it mainly by social and structural factors. Current research tends to focus on the Digital Divide in terms of use rather than access and explains it mainly by micro, individual, and situational characteristics (Soker, 2005). Once the advanced delivery system has been introduced, the first barrier was to get
access to the new distribution channel, but today, when the channels are readily available at lower costs, a number of potential users are still kept at a distance, not because they cannot access the new medium, but because they do not know how to use it. Van Dijk and Hacker (2003) concluded that the simple distinction between those who have and those who do not have access to the Internet does not address the essential issue. In their example, one person may own a computer and have unlimited access to the Internet yet never use it, whereas another person will travel a great distance in order to use a computer at a public facility (quoted in Soker, 2005, p. 3).

According to Warschauer (2003) “the key issue is not unequal access to computers but rather the unequal ways that computers are used” (p. 46). So far, researchers in the United States and Western Europe concluded that these two phases of the Digital Divide - accessibility and usability - have to be seen as two different issues that happened in two different periods; before and after the Internet became a widespread medium

According to Castells (2002), and Van Dijk and Hacker (2003), there is a difference in access according to gender, age and ethnicity and those differences are gradually disappearing, but that does not mean that the differences will disappear at the same rate.

Soker (2005) notices that levels of computer ownership and Internet access are approaching saturation in the affluent Western societies and growing rapidly in the developing countries. This phenomenon shifts the discussion of the
Digital Divide from the differences in ownership or access toward the individual’s inclination and/or ability to use the technology (p. 4).

These two stages of the digital divide research show that there has been a historical change in understanding the issue. The first studies that emerged in the mid-1990s concentrated their findings on age, gender, ethnicity, social class and other structural factors. The more recent studies (2002-2005) are shifting the discussion toward the actual personal Internet usage and its effect on the micro level. It is important to notice that this shift occurred in the more developed part of the world, where the Internet penetration reached satisfactory levels.

Those findings can be hardly accepted in other parts of the world for three reasons. First, the Internet has not reached a significant part of the population in less-developed countries, so the Digital Divide phenomenon still remains in the realm of accessibility. Second, phone and cable industries in the United States and Western Europe are advanced, but in Central and Eastern Europe, old-fashioned state monopolies are investing into new technologies very slowly and academic research of the Digital Divide in the region is still erratic and done only occasionally.

Bertot (2003) states that there are five dimensions of the Digital Divide in the world today: technology, telecommunications, economy, information access and information literacy. Technology access in itself is multidimensional and different access points lend themselves to different technology competencies and adoptions (p. 185). The telecommunication’s aspect represents access to broadband or narrowband telecommunication services; economy as a Digital
Divide dimension affects a number of communities that face a number of challenges in attracting and promoting economic development within their communities. “A knowledge society dependent community needs minimally a combination of an educated workforce, technology infrastructure and telecommunications infrastructure” (p. 186). Bertot states that information access is also a part of the Digital Divide definition because it is a foundation to a democratic society and information literacy is in direct relation with an individuals’ access to technology. It has four elements: knowing how to use technology, knowing how to locate and retrieve useful information, knowing how to evaluate and assess the relevance of the information and knowing how to synthesize the information in order to solve their information problem (p. 186).

Martin (2003) noticed two issues with the digital divide definitions: the understandings and the analyses of the digital divide are not necessarily wrong, but they are clearly misleading when applied to trends in inequality because they are inherently asymmetrical. “When applied to questions of who owns computers or uses the Internet, these analyses consistently and automatically show that inequality is decreasing. However, when one reframes the analyses in terms of who does not own computers, they show with equal certainty that inequality is rapidly increasing” (p. 4).

Today, in order to better understand the issues that come with the Digital Divide, one has to consider a number of different factors: demographic variables, urbanization rate, infrastructure indicators, telecommunications pricing measures and regulatory quality (Chinn & Fairlie, 2004).
Development of the New Medium

As mentioned before, one of the problems with the Internet is its oversimplistic understanding and generalization of the universal access for everyone and possibilities that everyone can have benefits from logging in. At the beginning of the 1980's, Bell (1980) and Toffler (1980) thought that electronic communications would have inherently democratic impacts, facilitating equal access to data and knowledge regardless of social standing or geographic locations. Around 25 years ago, new electronic media and the rise of the computer industry gave hope to researchers that new technologies will help societies around the world to become more developed in a shorter period, and that new electronic systems will be devoid of social roots and serve emancipatory interests. Mungo & Clough (1993) advocated unfiltered, non-hierarchical flows of information with no overlords and numerous counter-cultures that helped the cyberspace to resemble the 19th century US West: vast, unmapped and legally ambiguous (Warf, 2000, p. 4). The Electronic Frontier Foundation contended that:

...in its present condition, cyberspace is a frontier region, populated by the few hardy technologists who can tolerate the austerity of its savage computer interfaces, incompatible communications protocols, proprietary barricades, cultural and legal ambiguities and general lack of useful maps or metaphors. Certainly, the old concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context, based as they are on physical manifestation, do not apply succinctly in a world where there can be none. (www.eff.org, quoted in Warf, 2000).

Unfortunately, these early suggestions that the new medium will be a stronghold of individualism did not have any logical ground in the real world. The Internet itself represents “a network of networks” and it has been developed by
the US Department of Defense and the European Particle Physics Lab as a high-capacity transmission network that was supposed to facilitate the communication between academic institutions.

As Warf (2004) noticed, the development of the Internet occurred approximately at the same time with an enormous wave of mergers and acquisitions in the field of telecommunications. “Corporate providers, spurred by deregulation, globalization and technological changes, have steadily consolidated into a shrinking pool of suppliers that enjoy significant economies of scale and scope” (p. 5). Under these circumstances, the Internet, as a new medium, became a new business opportunity for the phone, cable and multimedia companies that started exploring this new, unregulated, global market. Instead of becoming a medium that will enforce individualism, it became a medium for commercial purposes, primarily on-line advertising and shopping.

Because these new commercial circumstances happened so quickly, there was a gap between the growth of digital systems and development of an adequate conceptual framework to understand them. Cresswell (1997) concluded that “unfortunately, most efforts to address the Digital Divide have taken a decidedly technical approach to what is essentially a social and political problem, focusing on hardware and engineering concerns rather than the politics of information. Recent literature on the relations between knowledge power, discourse, representation and geography, much of which is inspired by poststructuralist social theory, has contributed significantly in this regard.”
Castells (2001) acknowledged limitations of this approach. “First, it largely preceded the widespread diffusion of the Internet, building the statements on the observation of a few experiences among early users of the Internet, thus maximizing the social distance between the users and the Internet and society at large. Second, it proceeded in the absence of a substantial body of reliable empirical research on the actual uses of the Internet. And, thirdly, it was built around rather simplistic, and ultimately misleading questions, such as the ideological opposition between the harmonious local community of an idealized past and the alienated existence of the lonely “netizen”, too often associated in the public image with the stereotype of a computer nerd” (p. 117).

Graham (1998) notes that communications technologies can be seen as part and parcel of a broader ensemble of historically and geographically specific social relations in which production and reproduction systems, transportation, communications, and the state are all woven together as articulated moments of global capitalism. According to Gibbs and Tanner (1997), like other telecommunications systems, the Internet is a social product, interwoven with relations of class, race, and gender and inescapably subject to the uses and misuse of power. In other words, telecommunications are not inherently emancipatory, freeing people from the “tyranny of distance”, as they can be used to monitor everyday life (Lyon, 1994). Warf (2000) adds that:

The nature and impacts of the Internet are contingent and politically contested. Contra the post industrialist, utopian perspective so popular with the mass media, social categories of wealth, power, and place are inevitably re inscribed in cyberspace. The unfortunate tendency in the popular media to engage in technocratic utopianism has largely obscured these power relations. These themes are readily evident in the topography
of wealth and power that circumscribes access to the Internet at the global level. (p. 6).

**Digital Divide and Computer Literacy**

One of the issues raised with the Digital Divide theory is the computer education and the difference it makes when it comes to computer usage during the education processes and later in life. Computer literacy - the ability to use computers to perform a variety of tasks - is becoming one of the basic, necessary skills that are needed in today’s “information age”. In order to connect the computer literacy with the digital divide, I will use the sociological framework developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1986; 1991). He provided a powerful model for understanding functions and consequences of literacy by conceptualizing people's competences and life trajectories. His model draws on theorization of different types of “capital” available to the “habitus”, in particular social “fields” (Carrington & Luke, 1997). As stated before, the Digital Divide can be understood and worked upon better if its’ geographical and local implications are recognized. Because of that, Bourdieu’s sociological model that implies habitus, field and capital can be used as a template through which it is possible to make a better understanding of the issue. In this research, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework becomes very useful because of the geographical and political situation of the researched area where a relatively small region with about two hundred thousand residents that are divided between three European states. Under these
conditions, the capital, fields, and especially habitus represent useful grounds for the comparative research of the Digital Divide.

According to Bourdieu, (1986) all human activity or practice involves an exchange between individuals and groups within what comprises into the “economy of practice”. In Carrington & Luke’s (1997) explanation, the theory of practice then outlines the dialectical relationship between the objective structures of a society and the practical, goal-seeking activities of individuals. When it comes to ICT usage, a connection has to be made between the individuals who are willing and capable to access the IT and the institutions of the society that can provide enough knowledge and physical accessibility of the ICT (schools, working places, family circles). Following the line of the “economy of practice”, the exchange between individuals and social groups has to be successful. In other words, both individuals and social groups have to have a feeling of the worthy exchange: an individual that goes online should satisfy his needs (education, business, and entertainment) and social groups should have a feeling of accomplishment that makes them laudable. These exchange conditions are, according to Bourdieu, “a powerfully mediating moment where human agency, social structure, motivation and norm are realized.”

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) these social interactions take place within a multi-dimensional space, composed of “fields”; semi-autonomous, structured, social spaces characterized by discourse of social activity. When compared with the Digital Divide theory, this assumption can be put side by side with the Castells’ notion of the geography of Digital Divide, where different socio-
economic and cultural facts in different areas of the world cause different reactions toward the ICT.

In my research, these semi-autonomous fields are represented on three different levels. The first and the most obvious level is the differentiation between three states: Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. The second social field is defined by the age of the respondents and their ability to successfully use the Internet. The third field is defined as an institutional field that combined families, educational institutions and local businesses, and their approach toward the Internet.

One of the institutions that count as a significant factor in both theories is education. Bourdieu counts school institutions and education as intersecting and competing social spaces that every individual goes through. Bourdieu’s explanation is that institutions, like schools in this example, “are not organizations per se but any relatively durable sets of social relations that endow individuals with power, status and resources of various kinds (1991).”

According to Carrington and Luke (1997), family and community structures, corporations and businesses, government departments and agencies, community and fraternal organizations all constitute fields through which individuals may pass as they play out individual life trajectories (p. 100). When it comes to the ICT usage, all these interactions within the social groups are also causing the difference between the individuals; people in different countries form different social groups that are not equally developed and organized, and are going through different ICT experience and unequal usage of the available
communication technologies because their needs and assumptions about what the new technologies can do are built with different logic and experience.

The objective social conditions prevailing within fields, along with primary socialization, result in the development within each individual of the “habitus” described by Bourdieu (1997):

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated and regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, and being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (quoted in Carrington & Luke, p. 101).

In addition to “field”, the Digital Divide theories and Bourdieu’s “Theory of Practice” also share the “habitus” which is described by Kvasny & Keil as “an internalized strategy-generating framework that bounds thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions; choices are bounded by opportunities and constraints that make some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable” (2002). According to Carrington and Luke (1997), features of habitus are formed via a process of inculcation, which begins at birth. “One develops distinctive, class, culture-based and engendered ways of seeing, being, occupying space and participating in history” (p. 101). In this definition of habitus, it is visible that the same parameters are used by Norris and Mossberger in their definition of Digital Divide where demographic indicators, socio-cultural conditions and levels of democracy shape one’s ability to use the new
communication technologies in everyday life. Put simply, habitus represents human agency that guides individuals in a manner that is not calculated or rule-based. Rather, it is a set of dispositions that are learned over one’s life history which generate perceptions and guide practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The geographical definition of this research (the Istrian peninsula) makes an interesting ground for the deconstruction of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Because of the presence of three national cultures in a relatively small region and their interconnected history, the notions of national and cultural identities are somehow distorted. Significant percentage of inhabitants (especially in the biggest, Croatian part of the peninsula) define themselves on a regional (Istrian) rather than national (Croatian or Italian) basis. Under these circumstances, the meaning of habitus has to be evaluated in a different way because culture, language and national identity of the respondents are not the same.

According to Bourdieu, the notion of “capital” plays a major role in his Theory of Practice. Since the mid-1980s, descriptions of literacy as “cultural capital” have become an integral part of the debates over its social effects and consequences for the individual. To better understand the relationship between the Digital Divide and the Theory of Practice, Kvasny & Keil (2002) evaluated distinctions between three forms of “capital”: cultural, social and economic.

In order to give a better understanding of this issue, Bourdieu introduced the concept of capital to describe the material and symbolic resources that are at stake in the field. He introduced four basic forms of capital: symbolic, cultural,
social and economic. Symbolic capital covers the accumulated honor and prestige and cultural (informational) capital involves cultural knowledge, competencies and credentials. On the other hand, social capital refers to social networks that one employs to improve social standing and economic capital refers to monetary resources.

Cultural capital is the accumulated stock of knowledge about prestigious forms of cultural expression, such as information technology, which is learned through educational training. Social capital represents the benefits that one can potentially receive from participating in communities and networks. These benefits come in the form of information, support, guidance or additional social contacts. Economic capital is connected to monetary means such as property, stocks, and money that can be employed as power resources in one’s struggle for social mobility within a field (p. 818).

From Castells’s and Norris’s perspective, cultural capital seems to be the most difficult to achieve for an individual because it is almost entirely determined by the attributes of the social group in which the individual lives and works. The levels of information technology available and educational training are almost always determined by the society. For example, a single user cannot improve the speed of his/her Internet connection if the broadband infrastructure does not exist. Similarly, the level and quality of the educational training is usually determined by the society as well. If an individual is not satisfied with the quality and/or level of the education given in his/her social group, the only way to avoid it is to leave the given group temporarily or permanently and join the other one.
From the Digital Divide perspective, the social capital represents the most valuable one in terms of development. Because of its potential to influence whole communities and networks, most efforts in computer literacy involve a form of social capital. For example, individuals who already have the ability to use the ICTs can help others, through social networks, to improve their computer skills and increase the value of the social capital. In accordance with that logic, it is possible to draw a world map and determine which countries - and regions within those countries - have a higher level of social capital when it comes to computer usage. In Europe, for example, the Scandinavian countries rate better than the Mediterranean countries.

Several authors (Castells, Norris, Kvasny, Keil) agree that the issue of the Digital Divide lies in economic capital rationales. If people cannot afford to buy computers and/or subscribe to the Internet service, there is a divide between the ones who have the technology and the others who do not. The lack of economic capital is maybe the most visible one, as it is not possible to hide this dichotomous situation of have/have not, but it is also important to underline that having all the necessary hardware, software, and connection lines is not enough to cross the Digital Divide. More importantly, all the elements of Bourdieu’s “capital” have to be present on satisfactory levels in order to understand and eliminate computer illiteracy.

At first, Bourdieu (1986) devised the concept of cultural capital into three subdivisions in order to explain the unequal scholastic achievements in different social classes. He put knowledge, skills, dispositions, linguistic practices and
representational resources of the bodily habitus into the “embodied capital”
category; (cultural goods, texts, material objects and media physically
transmissible to others were described as “objectified capital” and academic
qualifications, awards, professional certificates and credentials became
“institutional capital”). According to his rationale, embodied cultural capital is
directly linked to the biological being and it represents the composite set of skills,
dispositions, practices, and knowledge “embodied” by an individual. It is
important to underline here that embodied cultural capital requires the investment
of time needed for the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, so it can be
perceived as a form of luxury, because the devoted time is not used for other
activities within the social group. This transmission of cultural capital via
inculcation and assimilation into the individual habitus through parental and
community socialization practices can be viewed as a principal form of
intergenerational transmission of capital (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The
difference between the linguistic literacy and the so-called “computer literacy” is
that the latter does not (and cannot) involve a process of intergenerational
transmission of capital because previous generations were not educated to use
today’s technology, so the process of acquiring knowledge from previous
generations is disrupted. In order to teach and educate younger generations to
use modern communication technologies, the whole process of learning has to
be redefined, and both teachers and students have to go through the process of
learning at the same time. This moment creates new possibilities and new
dangers at the same time. The new possibilities come under the “constant
learning” idea that existed before, but it is, in fact, emphasized today. The willingness of the educators to adopt the philosophy of constant learning could represent a possible danger for the educational processes because of their ideas of what constant learning really is in today’s competitive market and challenging wages in education.

According to Bourdieu (1986), objectified cultural capital refers to cultural capital that takes the form of transmissible, material objects. This form of cultural capital is dependent on individual habitus’ characteristics that are the result of intersections between objective social structures and the socialization processes. In other words, objects of cultural capital do not represent the same value to everybody, and different appreciation of cultural artifacts can be used as a starting point for comparisons of different social groups and their values.

Institutional cultural capital refers to academic qualifications, professional certificates or credentials, which are granted to the individual by authorized social institutions, such as schools, universities and other agencies (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 103). Institutional cultural capital is, in a sense, a willing choice of social groups to quantify and recognize the value of the earned knowledge, but the danger of taking the institutional cultural capital for granted is its immediate conversion into the “cultural currency”, something that is recognized as a value, something that is there to stay, and something that every individual can turn into economic capital once on the labor market. The critique of the institutional cultural capital is in its changing value, especially when it represents the value of knowledge of the field that is updated in short periods. For example, a degree in
medicine earned in the 1900’s had a similar value of the degree earned in the 1930’s, but the degree earned in the 1960’s can not be compared with the level of knowledge required to earn the degree in the 1990’s. These huge differences in knowledge leaps are especially evident when it comes to computer technologies where the level of institutional cultural capital changes every 18 months in accordance with Moore’s law.

All these forms of capital face the same problem - they all have to be recognized and acknowledged by someone. That someone, who can officially recognize the value of a certain capital, is the social group itself, the same one that defines capital within its boundaries and within its limitations. According to Bourdieu, the acquisitions of all forms of capital result in accumulations not only of the particular capital itself, but also of social prestige and standing. The critique of this definition of the capital from the Digital Divide standpoint is in the introduction of new forms of capital that are still not recognized by all social groups. New knowledge and new skills that are required to operate a computer are something that represents a new form of social capital and something that everyone should learn and use. But the social understanding of what that really is, and how that can contribute to individual and social well-being is still uncertain in a number of social groups that lack sufficient cultural and economic development, and, for now, computer technologies are still considered within the realm of entertainment and not as something that can generate and sustain economic capital.
All forms of capital merged together with information technologies and allowed flexibility in several key dimensions. According to Duane (2004) "economic capital flows from place to place electronically; intellectual capital is captured and distributed in much the same fashion … management becomes increasingly virtual in a world of increasingly virtual organizational and social arrangements; skills change rapidly and the employee must take responsibility for gaining these skills and keeping them current “(p. 4).

When it comes to literacy, Bourdieu offers his understanding of this complex issue. According to him, this is a social construction and each individual’s literate practices reflect his or her cultural and social capital resources and contribute to the further development of habitus and subsequent life trajectory across fields. Simply put, the literate habitus constitutes a form of embodied cultural capital. Of course, there is a big difference between the linguistic and computer literacy. The first one is profoundly studied for a long period and today it represents the very basic social skill that is required from almost every individual in almost all social groups, regardless of their other differences. In different cultures, it might not have the same definition and it might have different elements, but basically it represents “the participation in the language activities of families and other primary fields that entails the acquisition and articulation of specific literate practices and beliefs about literacy itself as a part of the development of a linguistic habitus” (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 104). Here it is obvious that “computer literacy” is not something that can be learned within the primary field (family circles), and even when it is learned from the
parents and other relatives, it cannot be seen as a universal pattern that will solve the question of the ability to use computers. More often, because of the generational differences, the computer skills have to be learned elsewhere because of the parent's inability to successfully share their abilities when it comes to the new technologies. In order to learn the new techniques, younger family members are forced to join other social groups and acquire this new knowledge for other sources. This new momentum is shaping both the cultural values of the social groups and the definition of the family as a core element when it comes to literacy.

Following this logic, all forms of literacy together (including linguistic and compute literacy) may constitute new forms of cultural capital that can change both individuals within the social group and the social group itself. It is important to understand this new form of development, because it offers an opportunity to change the notion of literacy on a global perspective, and when it is combined with the new forms of capital that value new knowledge and skills, it can change the understanding of field, capital and habitus designed by Bourdieu.

A possible danger that arises from this new momentum is how to shape the future education processes and adequate training. New situations and continuous updates are requiring changes in knowledge acquisitions. Both the structure of learning and the allotted time for learning have to be redefined. When it comes to structure, families and school institutions cannot offer a continuous quality of education without them being constantly improved, which will represent a challenge because these institutions are still defined in accordance with the old
traditions. If a student joins an educational institution and accumulates its embodied and institutional capital, it is no longer a guarantee that he/she will be able to transfer that capital into the economic capital in today’s market for an indefinite period of time. Today, all forms of capital, especially the institutional capital when it comes to ICT, come with the expiration date and a constant need to invest into education.

Another point raised by Lankshear & McLaren (1993) follows the same rationale. According to them, literacy is indeed a social construction, but these contexts are sociological and political sites and, hence, that construction is either benign or freely negotiated, nor disconnected from local configurations of power and knowledge. All forms of literacy are viewed not only in terms of its potential consequences for the individual and his/her community but also in terms of its connections to the operation of both local and universal power relationships. Indeed, computer literacy, does involve a certain degree of power relationships because today, especially in less-developed social groups, additional knowledge and skills can be treated as an extra opportunity to compete more successfully on a market today; therefore, it does make a certain divide between people who have and people who do not have newly established working potential.

In addition, knowledge as a capital in today’s knowledge based economies represents two distinctions. According to Lundvall (2000) the major impact of the information technology revolution is that it speeds up the process of change in the economy, while the most important inherent contradiction of the learning economy has to deal with polarization and social exclusion.
International Discrepancies in Internet Access

Norris (2001) pointed out that one of the most important issues when it comes to Digital Divide was the uneven spread of the new communication technologies around the world. This happens because of different growth rates of market processes in different areas of the world and it represents one of the elements of the economic and social divide between the North and the South. According to Norris, many communication scholars have attempted to characterize the mechanics of the diffusion process, and economists and marketing specialists have attempted to identify the driving factors behind the demand for new products. In order to better understand the global Digital Divide and its influence on the future development of the under-developed world regions, Norris thinks that it is important to answer these questions (pp. 39-40):

1. What is the global pattern of Internet diffusion?
2. Does this pattern represent the particular characteristics of Internet diffusion per se, or does it reflect similar trends found in adoption of older forms of info-tech, such as radios, telephones and televisions?
3. In exploring the reasons for inequalities of Internet access, how far do cross-national differences reflect basic economic divisions between rich and poor societies so that we can predict the uptake of info-tech from standard economic indicators like level of per capita GDP and investment in R&D?
4. What non-economic factors determine technological diffusion across societies, including the role of human capital and democratic development?

According to the Press, (1997) the Internet expanded onto a national and global scale via its integration with existing telephone, fiber optic and satellite systems, a process made possible by the innovation of packet switching and TCP-IP protocols in which individual messages may be decomposed, transmitted and reassembled virtually instantaneously. One of the answers of the global Digital Divide is given in this technical definition of the Internet. The technologies needed for the Internet to work are not equally available in all parts of the world; quite to the contrary, most of these technical pre-dispositions are available for everybody to use only in the most developed parts of the World (North America, Western Europe, Japan), so from the start, there was a technology gap between the developed North and under-developed South.

Dodge (1999) noted that given the US and European dominance, the “World Wide Web” hardly lived up to its name. Inequalities in access to the Internet internationally reflect the long-standing bifurcation between the First and Third World. “Although virtually no country is utterly without Internet access, the variations among nations in relative accessibility are huge” (Warf, 2000, p. 7).

When it comes to Norris’s evaluation of the global diffusion of the Internet, it is important to take into consideration several important issues.
First, it is not easy to determine the global patterns of the Internet diffusion and development of the new media and technologies around the world because of the different historical, economic and developmental issues in different regions. Different countries took different approaches toward the Internet and, as a consequence, it is hard to find evidence and make comparisons. For example, the number of Internet users in particular countries cannot be correlated with numbers in other countries without discussing the quality of the connection first. One dial-up user in one country cannot be correlated to a broadband user in another country. It is true that they are both connected to the Internet, but their approach and usage of the Internet as a medium differs significantly. When it comes to determining the global patterns of the Digital Divide one has to take into consideration the lowest-possible denominator. Hargittai (1999) explained that the economic wealth of a country, measured by per capita GNP, was one of the most important predictors. According to her, the Internet represents one more disparity reflecting the poverty of those living in developing nations, lacking access to the knowledge economy as well as basic nutrition, education and health care.

Second, the global patterns of the Internet diffusion are not universal, so they can hardly be called global. Data collected by the UNPD suggest that all forms of communication media are highly correlated, meaning that countries at the forefront of the information society are likely to lead on others as well (Norris, 2001, p. 51). If the United States or the Scandinavian countries are compared with the Sub-Saharan Africa, then yes, this pattern proves to be correct, but
when it comes to comparisons in Europe, there are many suggestions that this might not be true. When it comes to the economic development and diffusion of all forms of media, Western part of Europe is indeed more, but the electronic media and new technologies usage in the newly emerged states, such as Slovenia and Croatia, was slightly higher than in Italy and Austria (according to UNPD survey). This shows us that - together with economic development - other factors, like the size of a country, its educational system and ability to make reforms, can significantly change a country’s approach toward better distribution of the new media.

Table 1 and Table 2 show the discrepancies between three world regions (North America, Western and Eastern Europe) when it comes to Internet users and average percentage rate of increase per year. The data suggests that under these different conditions, it is virtually impossible to apply the same standards and same definitions of the Digital Divide because it simply does not represent the same thing in different parts of the world.
Table 1: Internet users per 1000 by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>N. America</th>
<th>W. Europe</th>
<th>E. Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>104.9</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>311.2</td>
<td>105.8</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>492.6</td>
<td>220.5</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>720.6</td>
<td>529.9</td>
<td>157.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2: Average Percentage Rate of Increase per year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>N. America</th>
<th>W. Europe</th>
<th>E. Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995/98</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/2000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/05</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sicherl, Informatica 24, 2000, p. 440

Third, when it comes to the non-economic factors that determine the Digital Divide, two big issues reemerge: education that shapes both economic and socio-cultural development of the society, and the inter-generational gap that proves to be one of the biggest concerns when it comes to connecting all age groups of the population. Here the Bourdieu’s theory of practice and Norris’s theory of Digital Divide actually interconnect. From Norris’s perspective, the “human capital” and its development within societies go through the investment
in digital skills and capacities within education, training and lifetime learning. According to her, the future facilitation of the Internet access is possible only with education – the most significant form of social development that produces skills and experiences that are likely to contribute to computer usage (2000, p. 59). In general, education also contributes to basic literacy and reading and writing skills that are essential in new media interactive usage. “If basic illiteracy is an important barrier to access, most of the world’s poor could still be excluded from the information revolution, even if computing equipment became more widely available through Internet cafes, schools, public libraries and community centers. One fifth of the world’s population remains illiterate, and the total rises to 40 percent or more of those living in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Southern Asia, with even higher figures for the female population” (Norris, 2001, p. 59).

Bourdieu’s followers see education as a vehicle in life trajectories that has to be constantly reappraised and critiqued in accordance with complexity of possible social fields that an individual and a social group may enter. Computer usage and computer literacy represent one of those life trajectories that are reshaping the understanding of communication today. Because of the new technologies advent, societies are redefining the meaning of communication and the meaning of mass media that once upon a time used to be one-way communication. The Internet represents a vehicle that allows people to communicate with other non socio-political and geographical limits, but at the same time it requires education. Without education, the new media and new
communication possibilities are simply not approachable. Norris’s notion of lifetime learning within her Digital Divide theory advocates the idea of the necessity for every social group to stay constantly updated and compatible with the rest of the world.

According to Carrington and Luke (1997), a Bourdieuan-based analysis suggests, however, that access to social power is dependent upon any number of variables and is unlikely to result from transference of a particular literate practice. Mastery of a particular genre cannot, by itself, overcome requirements for additional forms and combinations of capital upon which access to particular field may be contingent (p. 109). This means that, when it comes to computer education and computer usage, one cannot assume that the Internet and technologies that surround it can be the answer for other economic and socio-cultural issues one society faces. Better Internet compatibility with the rest of the society can represent one step toward the future development of that particular society, and we should see it as a tool for development, not as a development goal.

Theory Gaps

After analyzing the factors that determined the digital divide research, two issues arise. The multi-discipline research of the Digital Divide does not show the uniformity, and the major part of the research so far has been done in the West, mostly in the United States and in the European Union, so the research results
show certain Western bias. That bias is easily seen in the formation of research questions where the Western status quo is applied.

Van Zoonen (2002) argues that the Internet and gender are multidimensional concepts articulated in a complex and contradictory ways. Her findings suggest that in the Netherlands “a masculine domain of the Internet is not a given in a Dutch household and that there is space for feminine appropriations as well” (p. 5). Other researchers, like Norris, admit that the gender issue in the usage of new technologies is important only when it is related to other factors like education and race.

Another research from the Netherlands explores the profiles of online journalists working for Dutch and Flemish print, broadcast and online-only news websites. Deuze and Paulussen’s (2002) research suggested that “technology-driven audience-oriented and service-minded are three appropriate adjectives to describe the first generation of online journalists in the Low Countries” (p. 237).

All these and similar findings are important and help us understand the new conditions of mass communications today, but the findings from these researchers can be applied only to specific regions of Western Europe. When moved from a specific region into a region that is deficient in similar political, social and economic opportunities, the findings cannot be applied with the same success and understanding.

The reason for this lies in different approaches toward the digitalization of the mass media and in different understanding of what is expected from the new medium. For example, the questions that can be asked in the Eastern part of
Europe is not how journalists are behaving in the new online environment, but how can they get online and stay online. In reality, where less than 7% of the population manages to go online on a daily basis (Croatia), the more important question is how to diffuse the new technology and educate possible users.

Another important bias that comes from the West concerns the development of technology which is partially explained by Castells (2001) in his notion of the “technological divide”. Castells concluded that the online population today was divided into two groups: the one that has the broadband (fast) connection to the Internet and the other one that was still relying on the narrow dial-up (slow) connection. The Western understanding of the technological divide implies that both the broadband and the narrowband connections are available and that possible Internet users choose to take one or the other according to their financial possibilities and availability of the desired connection. The notion of connectivity is different in developing countries. Although there is a possibility to choose between the broadband and narrowband, average income and the policy of prices leave the major part of possible audience outside the broadband world, where only the middle-size and large companies can play. For an average consumer in Central and Eastern Europe, the question is usually not about the quality of the connection but the connection itself. New technologies are becoming affordable across the region, but low-income issues remain a problem.

The notion of the digital divide is seen through several different lenses: sociology, politics, communications and economics are all helpful in determining obstacles and possible opportunities, but today we still do not have a uniform
approach that can set the definitions and standards in order to give better understanding of this growing problem. Because of that, several researchers who are trying to conceptualize the same idea in the same geographical areas are often producing confusing and opposite conclusions. Corrocher & Ordanini, noticed that “surprisingly there have not been so many efforts at developing and/or improving the theoretical approaches and the statistical methodology directed at measuring this divide … the digital divide has always been analyzed by comparing developed and developing countries: research works have often noted the existence of relevant differences between these geographical areas, but have not been able to explain them in terms of different speeds of digitalization” (2002, p. 9).

Bonfadelli concluded in his study that from 1997 to 2000 in Switzerland, the “Internet was still dominated by well-educated, affluent, young males and the gap between those who do and those who do not have access widened, not narrowed” (2002, p. 65). According to him, the gap will be even bigger because “more educated people use the Internet more actively and their use is more information oriented, whereas the less educated seem to be interested particularly in the entertainment functions of the Internet” (p.65).

Bonfadelli’s research is the important one because he tries to analyze what happens on the next level, once the accessibility is not the question anymore – an issue that becomes less and less important in the West. Again, the difference in the perception of the problem is obvious because the Western audience (in this case in Switzerland) is surveyed about how they use the
Internet, while the question in the East remains the same – is the Internet used at all? Accessibility has a different importance and meaning in different regions. In his regional research, Bonfadelli does not put forward the issue of Norris’s definition of the global divide. He concludes that the digital divide among Swiss population will be bigger in the future because of wrong approaches in education and policy-making, but his research does not show how that development will influence the digital divide between his country and the countries in the vicinity (Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Hungary). The results of his analysis cannot be compared to similar analysis in his geographical vicinity because the factors that exist in Swiss society differ from other countries. At the same time, his methods are unique and have to be modified for similar researches in different regions.

**Regional Perspectives**

There are three important reasons why Central and Eastern Europe offer an interesting field for Digital Divide research: all the countries in the region suffered (and some still do) from a lack of democracy. Furthermore, the political situation - especially in the southern part - was not stable, and ten countries from the Eastern block have joined the European Union recently.

The authoritarian regimes left a permanent mark during the 50 years of communist existence. After the communism era, the countries quickly realized that their economic systems were bankrupt and their industries uncompetitive. That meant they had to go through a painful process of transition toward the
market economy. Some of the countries in the region, the ones that were formed after Yugoslavia ceased to exist, had to suffer war damages (minor in Slovenia, big in Croatia and catastrophic in Bosnia) and refugee crisis (Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia). Finally, a part of the region was accepted into the European Union on May 1, 2004 with the hope of an accelerated development.

The development in the communication field will now be looked at through two different lenses in the same region: within and outside the European Union. It is almost impossible to predict what will happen next with the political processes of European integrations, but there are still hopes for some. Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia have been promised to join the Union in the next period, while others still have to wait. Heather Grabbe of the Centre for European Reform explains: “Belarus is too authoritarian, Moldova too poor, Ukraine too large and Russia too scary for the European Union to contemplate offering membership any time soon … Frits Bolkestein, the Union’s single market commissioner argues that these four countries should be permanently ruled out as well as Turkey” as quoted in the (Economist, April 29, 2004).

Nevertheless, the region still remains unique because of its unique factors that determine the Digital Divide gap within the countries and in comparison with the developed West.

The telecommunication systems that were controlled by the governments and that held the monopoly in their local market are experiencing fast modernization and competitiveness, especially in the mobile phones markets.
Thanks to the new regulations (introduced by the EU), many of those local markets are becoming more and more competitive and that translates as better and more affordable connectivity for the average Internet consumer in the region.

Pekka Tarajanne, the Secretary General of the International Telecommunications Union, named these sudden changes “telesstroika”, wanting to emphasize the positive change in telecommunications in Central and Eastern Europe (Langel 2002, p. 2).

Still, the changes did not come overnight and the economic reality of the countries in the region forced governments to maintain the monopoly in telecommunications in order to attract the badly needed fresh capital from the West. Under these circumstances, the technology changed and new possibilities were introduced, but the pricing still remained uncompetitive and very pricey for a majority of the population. The situation is changing rapidly, but the consequences remain, and when the data is compared with the situation in the West, the gap is broadening even further.

The research of the Digital Divide in this specific region offers a great opportunity to fill the voids in the Digital Divide theory. After analyzing the data from the region, it will be possible to determine which factors are specific for the region and which variables can be compared successfully with the rest of the world. A closer look at the economic, social and political situation in the region can show which elements needed for faster development are missing and how can they be introduced into the process. The changes are happening on a daily basis, but according to Lubecka, “many changes that are visible nowadays have
been intentional choices, others often unconscious have resulted from the necessity to adjust and to follow the worldwide phenomena of globalization, technization and customization” (Lubecka, 2000, p. 33). The political change that happened at the end of the 1980’s was visible indeed, but a number of unconscious decisions were made because the environment (especially the EU) demanded it.

Nevertheless, the old problems have remained. The quality of human rights is not changing dramatically and the major part of the region is still being criticized because of its attitude toward the ethnic minorities; the Roma population is still being discriminated against in the whole region (especially in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania), the Baltic republics are still not ready to grant citizenship to the Russian minorities that live there, Croatia is still not ready to welcome back all Serbian refugees, and the situation in Kosovo is not showing any progress. Women, handicapped people and homosexuals, to mention just the most active, challenge the sense of tolerance of CE Europeans (Lubecka, 2000, p. 45). All these groups remain on the other side of the Digital Divide because of their challenging living conditions.

According to Iordanova (2000) “the proliferation of new technologies is still characterized by substantial imbalances, even within the Western world”. Referring to the high speed of technological development and innovation generated by the US, the president of the European Commission recently claimed that even West Europeans were in danger of becoming hitchhikers of the information superhighway. In Eastern Europe, the Internet is still an elitist
medium and mostly international and western, rather than local, organizations are committed to providing it, and computer literacy is still relatively low, even among highly educated people (Iordanova, 2000, p. 110).

While in the countries of the North and the West, access to the Internet is part of everyday life, in New Europe, only relatively small number of academics, social activists, media professionals and businessmen regularly use the Internet for online research and for dissemination of information. The Internet has not yet become an integral part of everyday life in Central and Eastern Europe (Iordanova, 2000, p. 111).

**Conclusion**

Digital Divide, as a new phenomenon that came together with the raise of the ICT, has been a subject of debate for some time and it has been discussed on many levels under different circumstances. Both quantitative (Norris, Mossberger) and qualitative (Castells) approaches show that the Digital Divide exist and it will continue to exist on both global and national levels for a period to come. Norris (2001) suggested that future research of the Digital Divide has to include numerous disciplines “including those of communication, sociology, anthropology, history, social psychology, market research and business studies, computer studies and industrial design, as well as political science” (p. 35). This statement shows that ICT are moving and redefining all social structures and that increasingly, all members of a given society have to accept or reject the new
possibilities that come with the new technologies. Both acceptance and rejection have consequences. By accepting the new reality that came from the introduction of the ICT, everybody has to accept the fact that constant updates and constant learning are today's necessities. By rejecting new communication technologies, individuals and groups are facing a gap that can cause a lack of competitiveness and possible isolation.

From the Bourdieu's perspective, the consequences of accepting these new forms of literacy are significant for students, working people, educators and administration, and finally government. In the end, their habitus and capitals might be different, but from the global perspective they all interact within the same field because the configuration of each field is in one way or another influenced by activities in the other fields that often overlap and compete with each other. It is important to bear in mind that education, as a form of social activity, is beyond the schools alone. Because of the constant and swift updating, all other fields, like families and working environments, are important when it comes to computer literacy. Bourdieu suggests that social power is not determined by only one variable, it is a result of many interconnected variables that result in a particular literate practice. Fairclough (1992) points out that no single literacy can be taught or inculcated with simple equivalent value in cultural capital; rather there are multiple literacies taught and learned within a community.

All these suggestions are important to remember in less-developed communities where the new communication technologies are not present and/or updated and where economic, cultural and especially educational changes are in
progress. Central and Eastern Europe represent a field where the development was historically slower, but because of the proximity of Western Europe, the awareness of what can be done is present. New political and economic conditions could represent a uniquely historic opportunity for all the countries in the region to implement the Western knowledge and attitudes toward new possibilities when it comes to ICT.

Of course, many obstacles will remain. One has to be realistic and accept the fact that big changes cannot happen over night; it takes a lot of time and effort to overcome old systems and understandings. At the same time, it is crucial to accept the fact that changes are necessary in today’s global environment and that investment in development is the only way to stay connected with the rest of the already connected world.

Poster (1998) remained skeptical that access to the Internet will result in more democratic and beneficial societies. Warf (2000) noticed that technologies, including telecommunications, are never socially or spatially neutral in their impacts and there is always a persistent and continuing need to link the understanding of cyberspace and its possibilities with very real spaces of class and power (p. 13). One of the best interpretations of democracy and cyberspace was given by Castells:

While a relatively small, educated, and affluent elite in a few countries and cities would have access to an extraordinary tool of information and political participation, actually enhancing citizenship, the uneducated, switched off masses of the world, and of the country, would remain excluded from the new democratic core, as were slaves and barbarians at the onset of democracy in classical Greece” (1997, p. 351).
This quote vividly illustrates the differences between the developed and less developed parts of the world; nations with advanced economies and democracies are leading in the digital world, while others are out of it or struggling to get into it and claim their virtual presence. The same is true for different social groups within a country; the elite is well-educated and has a possibility to connect, while others miss both – the education and the possibility to connect and enjoy the online opportunities. Graham and Marvin (1996) connect this division with the “increasing polarization of Western societies in general, noting the disintegration of the public sphere and the commoditization of private ones” (p. 16).

Today, it is evident that Castells’ notion of the geographical Digital Divide is paramount in understanding the issue. That is true on both global and regional levels, there is a geographical divide between the developed north and under-developed South, but there is also a huge geographical divide between urban and rural areas within a specific country. Because of that, differences between two or more different places are not disappearing, ICT is actually making these differences even bigger, and the Internet connectivity is becoming one more factor that suggests the gap between the social groups.
3. METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to address and evaluate methodological questions of the research of the Digital Divide in Istria. This qualitative study combines ethnographic observations of the usage of new technologies in the region with in-depth interviews.

In this chapter, I explain the most important elements of audience research in the field of mass communications, especially ones that explain the dynamics of qualitative research, which is then narrowed down to the conceptualization of media ethnography. I discuss general issues of the ethnographic research and some specific issues that I encountered during my fieldwork.

In the final part of this chapter, I explain particular methods used in this research and some discrepancies between the theory of ethnographic procedures and in-field experience, especially in terms of languages, regional dialects, perception of the local culture, and habits. The issue of a “native ethnographer” and culture recognition is explained from both an audience’s and researcher’s perspectives in order to make a better understanding of the data interpretation process.

Throughout this chapter, I also summarize new challenges of ethnographic studies today. Thanks to new advancements in technologies and mass communication, the globalization process have changed people’s attitudes and behavior in many ways, but, at the same time, the “anti-globalization” efforts
have been trying to preserve domestic cultures and ways of living. As a result, ideas and methods behind the ethnographic studies have to accept this new environment and incorporate these changes into research.

Smith et al. (1998) concluded that “the traditional methods for studying people in local communities (ethnography), life histories and historical case studies, must be contextualized and historicized to take into account central dimensions of transnational socio-economic and political transformation: the globalization of capitalism and the repositioning of states, nations, and class, gender and ethno-racial formations within this global restructuring; the transnational dimension of global political transformations … the transnational social relations made possible by the technological revolution in the means of transportation and communication and the spatial expansion of social networks “from below” that facilitate the reproduction of migration, business practices, cultural beliefs and political agency” (p. 26).

**Research in the Field of Mass Communication**

According to McQuail (1994) “the entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” (p. 327). Scheufele (1999) notes that this McQuail’s statement must be understood as a temporary result of the scholarly discussion “characterized by significant changes in paradigms over the past decades” (p. 105). McQuail (1994) divided the history of research on media into four stages:
1. From the turn of the 20th century to the late 1930s;
2. From the late 1930s to the late 1960s;
3. From the beginning of the 1970s to the early 1980s and
4. From the early 1980s to today.

According to Scheufele (1999), “the first stage was dominated by an experience with strategic propaganda during the World War I, which led to a growing fear of the influence of media messages on attitudes; the second stage revisited the paradigm of strong media effects and personal influence was considered to be the main influence on attitude change … the third stage was dominated by the search for new strong media effects; the focus shifted from attitude change to more cognitive effects of mass media (Beniger & Gusek, 1995) and the fourth stage is characterized by social constructivism … where the description of media and recipients combines elements of both strong and limited effects of mass media” (p. 105).

McQuail (1997) identified three main historical traditions in audience research: structural, behaviorist and cultural analysis.

The structural tradition emerged from the media industry itself and it focuses on the concept of audience measurement. Although it does represent a type of audience research, some authors - including Murphy (1999) and Reimer (1998) - think that the aims of the media industry tradition are so different from
the aims of the academic traditions that it is not meaningful to discuss it in the context of the academia.

Behaviorist tradition in audience research has two stages. The first one implies the direct effects model described by Lull (2000) as a model that acknowledges powerful effects on people and where electronic media have a persuasive force in society.

Historically, a progression from the notion that mass media have strong effects has given way to the view that the media have fairly weak effects. This limited-effects model has been described by McQuail as a sum of different factors that mediate in process of media interpretation. (1994). Katz and McQuail (1994) described this phenomenon from the audience research perspective: “If you’re looking for measurable effect, you’re likely to be looking for something easily measurable in the short term, whereas strong effect may only be apparent over the long term … so it could be that if you start with a “limited definition” of effect, they you’re bound to end up with “limited effects” (Cultsock”, n.d.).” Clarke (2000) notes that the history of audience research has been a “successive series of powerfully influential paradigms, from classical American effects research and the uses and gratifications model to the more contemporary cultural turn which traces its influences to the very significant school of British cultural studies” (p.1).

Morley (1974) found that, in order to get a sharper picture of the researched audience, one has to take into consideration the characteristics of audiences that include social class, gender, age, ethnicity and region of residence. His early stages of ethnographic work showed the importance of
cultural codes and meaning systems. He noted that “what is needed is the development of a cultural map of the audience so that we can begin to see which classes, sections of classes and subgroups share which cultural codes and meaning systems and to what extent” (Morley, 1974, p. 12). In his later work, Morley (1986) argues that “audience research which ignores the social and familiar position of the viewer cannot comprehend a number of key determinations relating both viewing choices and responses (p. 15). Morley’s work represents the humanities tradition in the history of reception analysis and his work emphasizes the crucial aspect of the social context of audience, particularly the role of the family. Ang (1991) emphasized the importance of the ethnographic approach in the audience research because “a perspective that displays sensitivity to the everyday practices and experiences of actual audiences themselves can supply any true insight” (p. 92). Morley and Ang were at the forefront of the research of the so-called “active audiences”. According to Clarke (2000), today “a related concern is to identify the ways in which media technologies are embedded or actively incorporated into the daily routines of domestic life and the micro-geography of the household, including the dynamics of gender relations within it” (p. 2).

When it comes to audience research and new media, Wilson and Peterson (2002) noticed that despite Internet popularity and the emergence of new media in our society “there have been relatively few ethnographic works on computing and Internet technologies within anthropology” (p. 450). Often, the new medium was positioned as peripheral to culture (Dickey, 1997) or it has
been viewed as technology in general as a context for rather than a central part of culture (Hakken, 1999).

In short, today’s methods in mass-communication ethnographic studies are influenced by the notion that a consumer can often shift positions, so under these circumstances his/her role in the study can change dramatically because the same messages can change their meanings when seen from different angles. Ang (1996) concluded that “consumers of popular culture move in and out of subject positions in a way that allows the same message to have widely varying meaning at the point of reception” (p. 13). For example, in this study, a respondent’s statement that “Internet is a fun and exciting pastime” has one meaning in his own home where he acts as a parent, and a completely different meaning in a bank office where he acts as an employee. The researched media are constantly changing their definitions, especially in terms of mobility and usability, so the methods that help us understand their role in a society have to change accordingly.

Ethnography as a Research Method

According to Titscher et al, (2000) ethnographic methods are based on anthropology and sociology, “based upon the human capacity for participant observation and the capability for reflecting upon it “(p. 91). Boudourides (2001) adds that ethnography analyzes human practices in the context of culture; and “culture denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in
symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (Geertz, 1979, p. 89). According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) “doing ethnography in its most characteristic form involves the ethnographer participating, overtly and covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (p. 1). Emerson et al. (1995) noted that “the ethnographic research is immersion in the life and everyday experiences of a group of people, the ethnographer inevitable remains in significant ways an outsider.” Garson (2005) explains ethnography as a form of research focused on the sociology of meaning through close field observation of socio-cultural phenomena. According to Garson (2005), “the ethnographer focuses on a community, selecting informants who are known to have an overview of the activities of the community. Such informants are asked to identify other informants representative of the community, using chain sampling to obtain a saturation of informants in all empirical areas of investigation” (p. 1).

The issue arises when the ethnographer is not an outsider but a “native ethnographer”. For this study I did the ethnographic fieldwork in a geographical region that I consider to be my home; with respondents that I shared many of the demographic elements with (like nationality, citizenship, language(s), regional dialect(s) and regionalism). Under these circumstances, it is important to take into consideration the self-reflexivity that is even more sensitive when
ethnographic research implies a native ethnographer’s perspective (Emerson et al., 1995). Bobretsova (2003) used the example of Edmundo Morales to explain some of the issues of the native ethnographer. He studied “cocaine economy” in Peru and conducted research in the area where he was born and raised.

According to Morales, “Neither in my childhood nor later on, during my numerous homecomings, had I dared to travel beyond the borders of my native commune. In my youth, I belonged to the basic culture, but as an adult visitor I did not possess the necessary skills to understand the obvious. Although I was a local native, my conversation in order to become a researcher of the ethnography of the Andes was a long process. I realized that it was very difficult to observe the people whose culture and society represented your own roots; it was difficult to study under these people. This became possible only when I switched a more disciplined approach into everyday life.” (Morales, 1986; quoted in Bobretsova, 2003)

The question of subjectivism in ethnographic research becomes an issue when compared with the “more scientific” social science research method. Garson (2005) responds that “selection of informants is not based on the researcher’s personal judgments but on identifications made by community members. Likewise, conclusions about cultural understandings of the phenomena of interests are not personal insights of the researcher, or even of particular community members, but are views cross-validated through repeated, in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of representative informants …” Ethnographers respond to charges of subjectivity by emphasizing that their
approach eschews preconceived frameworks and derives meaning from the community informants themselves, whereas survey instruments often reflect the conceptual categories preconceived by the researcher prior to actual encounter with respondents.” (p. 2)

The rise of the critical-cultural studies in the last 20 years, especially in the UK and in the US, has attributed another dimension to ethnographic research. According to Murphy (1999), “thanks to the cultural turn in communication research, ethnography has been enlisted in assessing questions of media consumption and the ritualization of media use in various countries. This adoption of ethnographic techniques was in large part driven by desire to find alternatives to traditional social science research on media effects.” (p. 207) Morley (1980) assumed that communication scholars wanted to develop an adequate methodology for the investigation of the conditions of reception and consumption of media. This different approach toward the sociological framework contributed greatly to the theoretical understanding of media as a cultural form and its relation to everyday life (Morley, 1999).

Brunt (1992) found that the importance of ethnographic research is “in the ethnographer’s profoundly important methodological possibility – that of being surprised or reaching knowledge not preconfigured in one’s starting paradigms.” (p. 71)

Finally, the ethnographer has to be aware of the criticism toward the ethnographic studies and take into consideration questions about the reflexivity and subject positions in a given study. According to Heyl (2001), there is always
a danger that the ethnographer’s personal characteristics become dominant
during ethnographic procedures, so it is critical to be constantly aware of the
ethnographer’s role within the researched group and concentrate on
respondents’ experiences.

Media Ethnography

One of the questions preoccupying today’s media researchers is how
changes in the media world are experienced locally. Murphy (2003) puts together
the issues of globalization and international communications and concludes that
media ethnography could pave the way “to what we hope will be a research
agenda that would reinvigorate international communication scholarship” (p. 305).
Van Loon (2001) acknowledged that the appropriation of ethnographic methods
“was not only crucial to the study of culture but also fundamental to the field of
media studies and audience research” (p. 273). Murphy (2003) notes that the
ethnographic fieldwork of media ethnography is often in a gap “between the
application of ethnographic techniques and the field experience” (p. 306). He
proposed that media ethnography should be understood as a research process
of forming communities and making conversations that underscore a systematic
and long-term investment in form, purpose and practice.

In that sense, Drotner (2000) suggests three fundamental points that
media studies have taken from ethnography:
1. The analytical point of departure should be a concrete social group, not a particular mass medium;

2. Interviewees should be considered as producers of mediated communication practices, not only as media users and

3. The locations of fieldwork have to be multiple (including home, school and workplace among others).

In accordance with these characteristics, the subject of this research is not the Internet as a new medium, but rather people defined by their demographics that are using or not using the advancements of the new communication possibilities. To make it clearer, I am trying to understand why certain demographics express different ideas, needs and/or frustrations when it comes to a new medium. The purpose of this study is not to define the Internet as a new communication tool, but to define and understand better the audience and their current need for the Internet.

Additionally, this research follows Drotner’s ideas: the research fieldwork has been done in a geographically defined region (the Istrian peninsula) and the starting point of the investigations have been the social groups (families and co-workers) who live in the predetermined region. According to Ang (1996), groups of audiences such as family audiences help ethnographers as a starting point in sense-making cultural formations. When it comes to the media usage, this research of the Digital Divide showed that the researched Internet users are much more than just users. The interview analysis showed that, in accordance
with Drotner’s thought, all of them acted as producers in the mediated communication practices. Interviewees showed the ability to shape the Internet usage in accordance with their knowledge, possibilities and needs, proving that they did not only use, but also (as a social group) shaped the definition of the new medium (Drotner, 2000). Finally, fieldwork had to be multiple. It was virtually impossible to gather all required data and make conclusions about the Internet usage from only one place. Interviewees were interviewed in a number of locations, including their own homes, workplaces, schools, coffee shops and Internet news groups. Their attitudes toward the new technologies in different environments gave me a much clearer picture about their Internet usage.

Another important issue is raised by Gillespie (1995) and Mankekar (1999); they ask if media ethnography must be based on something akin to participant observation to be ethnographic. According to Murphy (2003) the question is, “Is a commitment to immersion, building of trust, long-term observation and participation in the daily lives of research participants the only (or even best) road for researchers interested in studying the relation between media reception and cultural practice?” (p. 307) Bird (2003) replies that only “ethnographic research can begin to answer questions about what people really do with the media, rather that we imagine they might do, or what close readings of texts assume they might do.” (p. 191)

The purpose of this study is to use media ethnographic methods, not just to follow the media perception of a defined social group, but to put it in a context of everyday life in a defined geographical area and understand respondents’
notions about the Internet and its impact on their lives. As noted before, some media researchers (Wilson and Leighton, 2002; Dickey, 1997 and Hakken et al., 1993) concluded that new media and new technologies are often not perceived in a social and cultural environment as a context of that culture, but rather as a peripheral influence and, so far, the limited qualitative approach is giving us only a limited understanding of what these new possibilities actually mean in one’s daily routine and how much is his/her culture affected by it.

The whole idea of performing this ethnographic research was to determine and underline the uniqueness and special needs for the Internet in a specific region, something that cannot be clearly read from the official government data about the percentage of the Internet penetration or the official completed levels of education.

**Internet and the Digital Divide Research**

The late 1980s and early 1990s were described by many authors as “techno-enthusiastic” (Wills, 2000, Hansard, 1997, Selwyn, 2004). During that period, the idea of “informatization” was more of a technical nature, and the focus of the development was to introduce new technologies into the communities without much thought about its social implications. Authors like Bird and Jorgenson (2001), Livingstone (2001), Clark, Demont-Heinrich and Webber (2004) pointed out that “deep divides in society cannot be addressed with technological solutions alone.” Because development itself cannot be seen and
understood from only one perspective, the notion of digital progression and
digital inequality has to be seen as a process rather than a problem with one
issue. Webster (1999) and Colby (2001) have argued that “public policies that
are supportive of computers in schools and other public places can actually
reinforce, rather then alleviate, structural inequalities” (cited in Clark et al, p. 530).
Computers in public spaces cannot solve the problem of the Digital Divide if
people do not know how to use them and for what purpose. Strover (2003)
noticed that “the implication was that equipment access would fundamentally
alter peoples’ life circumstances and leapfrog structural inequalities, symbolically
a very attractive proposition … but the emphasis on equipment has to go in line
with presumed need for computer training.” (p. 276)

The Digital Divide discussion in the United Kingdom has embodied the
wider theme of social inclusion “which was recently prominent in policy-making
throughout centre-left governments in western nations … and today the issue of
combating social exclusion and establishing an inclusive society now forms a
bedrock of academic and political discourse” (Selwyn, 2004, p. 343). Kiiski &
Pohjola (2002) argued that differential access to the information technology is
more pronounced than national income inequalities across the world. The phrase
“information poverty” was coined in order to explain to policy-makers differences
across countries in Internet connectivity (p. 209). According to Kiiski and Pohjola,
universal access to the Internet is not the solution if people cannot afford the
service and/or are not capable of utilizing it. Surprisingly, only few researchers
like Norris (2000), Castells (2001) and Hargittai (2001) combined and analyzed
the data from different countries with a goal to give a broader perspective and global understanding of the problem. Their findings showed that two significant factors determine the Digital Divide internationally: GDP per capita (can people afford and rationalize the connectivity expense) and competition. Historically, the United States had the advantage in the competition sphere because of its deregulated telecommunication market. In Europe, the markets have been open only recently and they are still dominated by large government-owned companies (British Telecom, Deutsche Telecom, Telecom Italia, Telia Sweden, Telenor Norway etc.) that traditionally had a monopoly on their local markets, which was a cause of slow development and pricy services. According to Norris (2000), the economic factors outweighed all others in predicting cross-country differences in Internet access.

The social, cultural and economic development in Central and Eastern Europe was different from the Western part of the Old Continent. More than 50 years of the Communist dominance left permanent marks on societies around the region. From the communication development perspective, Norris’ (2002) point of the competition is the most evident. Although for many years Western Europe promoted a national telecommunication monopoly, the idea of competition was always visible in forms of private initiative. In Central and Eastern Europe, during the Communism era, private business initiative was legally almost impossible, especially in sectors such as telecommunications that require large capital investment. After the fall of Communism, during the 1990s, the change in the national economies in the region was not radical. As Lubecka
(2000) noted, “although most of them looked forward to the fall of the restrictive Communist political regime and the inefficient economic system, and greeted the changes enthusiastically when they happened, at present they find the economic reality too hard and too threatening to cope with.” (p. 33) The emergence of the new medium and the swift political and economical change in Central and Eastern Europe promised a quick and successful change in the ways people communicate. Goulding (1998) believed that “the Internet will follow the fate of other new technologies, whose promise of shared abundance has been dissipated by corporate greed and political failure.”

Digital Divide theorists often make a connection between socio-economic development and citizens’ willingness to use new technologies to explain the gap between the availability and affordability of the Internet services. Goodwin and Spittle (2002) demonstrate that there is a pattern to the ways in which computers are discussed by policy makers. They note four discursive themes that emerge in their research:

1. Information technology as both a threat and opportunity for the nation-state;
2. Technological determinism, or the belief that inevitably computers will alter the future;
3. Market determinism, or the belief that current market structures will continue unfettered and
The citizens are primarily defined as consumers (as quoted in Clark et al., 2004, p. 531).

Critical race theorists Nakamura (2002) and Sterne (2000) have noted the ways that computer practices extend injustices related to racial/ethnic inequalities while also reinforcing stereotypes about different groups. In American and Western European literature, the issue of racial/ethnic minority is almost always correlated to poverty and limited access to benefits. The situation in Central and Eastern Europe is somehow different; being a member of the ethnic minority can mean both: to have a limited and unsatisfactory access to benefits and to have access that is better than average. Ethnic minorities in both Slovenia and Croatia come from or are descendants from neighboring countries that are more or less economically and/or socially developed. For example, the Italian minority members in Slovenia and Croatia are generally perceived as wealthier. At the same time, Serbian and Bosnian Muslim minority members are stereotypically perceived as poorer and/or less educated. More importantly, as it came out during the interviews, the members of these minorities imposed these stereotypical descriptions on themselves and described themselves as richer/poorer in accordance with their ethnical identity.

This research explores how people from different socio-economical, educational and ethnical positions perceive their competency experience and computer access. Clark et al. (2004) wondered how people negotiated the tensions that emerge as computers are touted as both tools for individual and social empowerment and for leisure and consumption in the United States. I
explored the similar contradiction in a different environment: in a moderately
developed part of Central and Eastern Europe, I interviewed individuals and
groups with different socio-economic, educational and ethnic backgrounds. The
rationale for this study lies in the fact that the causes and the effects of the Digital
Divide and technological determinism are not explained in the environment
where the possibility of Internet access is only virtual; it exists as a possibility, but
the economic, educational and technological barriers are just too high so any
comparison with the more developed West does not make much sense. As
Mided (2000) notes: “One must also not underestimate the limitations that still
exist to equipment and the subscription to a dial-up network is beyond the means
of most people in the world. Access to network connections is not universally
available. While there are laudable civic projects that seek to place internet
connections in public buildings and libraries these projects cannot address
deeper socioeconomic problems, which ultimately limit who can get online.” (p.
66) When it comes to education and the level of the IT knowledge, Horvath (2000)
notices that “Compared with Western Europe and North America, overall
knowledge of the internet is at an elementary stage throughout Central and
Eastern Europe. Where it is used, it is relied upon mainly to cull information,
meanwhile the skills needed to exploit the information at hand are clearly
lacking.” (p. 86)

Clark et al. and Godwin & Spittle discussed the category of technological
determinism or the inevitability of computers in future everyday life and observed
discursive patterns as people sought to negotiate their own positions relative to
the so-called Digital Divide (p. 531). Their findings showed that one theme did override all others in discussions of the Digital Divide – individualism. Wellman et al (2003) noted that new technologies did not contribute to the formation of group or local solidarities, but rather to the formation of network individualism. In their words, “Changes in the nature of computer-mediated communication both reflect and foster the development of networked individualism in networked societies. Internet and mobile phone connectivity is to persons and not to jacked-in telephones that ring in a fixed place for anyone in the room or house to pick up. The developing personalization, wireless portability, and ubiquitous connectivity of the Internet all facilitate networked individualism as the basis of community. Because connections are to people and not to places, the technology affords shifting of work and community ties from linking people-in-places to linking people at any place. Computer-supported communication is everywhere, but it is situated nowhere. It is I-alone that is reachable wherever I am: home, hotel, the office, highway, or a shopping center. The person has become the portal.” (p. 17)

Individualism proved to be one of the major subjects of qualitative researchers of the Digital Divide, because it represents both the individual’s approach to IT and its consequences that ultimately change that person’s quality of life in both professional and private fields. Individualism as a phenomenon includes all the other elements that are not necessarily connected to IT, but are very helpful in determining one’s identification to computer usage – education, income, ethnical background and other socioeconomic factors.
Fieldwork

The ethnographic research was collected in Istria from June to December of 2004 and from August to December of 2005. Because of Istria’s geographical shape and political division, the major part of the research has been done on the Croatian part of the region that occupies around 90% of the peninsula. The research did involve respondents from the Slovenian and Italian parts of Istria, but because of the time constraints, all of the Italian and Slovenian interviewees have been interviewed during their stay in Croatia. Hence, this research focuses on Istrians as a particular group of people defined by region, regardless of their citizenship or ethnic background.

Since the peninsula has the population of approximately 200,000, one could raise questions about the ambiguity of the research, especially when it comes to ethnographic point to learn about the culture “from the inside”, but I performed this research as a “native ethnographer” in a geographical region and within cultures that are familiar and understandable to me. Horowitz (1986) pointed out that short-term ethnography makes sense if it is done in the researcher’s native language and culture. Jones (1991) noted that the difficulty for the native ethnographer is to square the new, critical view of the world with his/her picture of his/her own future in that world. After these considerations, I concluded that short-term ethnographic study makes sense because I did not have to spend time learning the culture, languages and dialects of the region.
where I was born and where I spent most of my life. The ethnography fieldwork included a number of interviews with people residing in the cities of Pula, Rovinj, Porec, Trieste and Koper.

At first, the interviews were scheduled as family interviews with all the family members involved and later they continued as individual interviews and conversations on different locations. Family interviews were usually scheduled at respondents’ homes and they lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours, whereas individual interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours (depending on different situations and activities involved). The first few families were chosen from my personal circle of acquaintances and, after that, I used the strategy of snowballing to find other families. My goal was to have a diverse group of respondents, so I paid attention to families that have different ethnic backgrounds (Croatian, Slovenians, Italians, Serbians and Bosnian Muslims), incomes, genders (40% of respondents were women), employment status (11% of respondents were unemployed) and age (particularly the relationship between the parents and children).

During the research I stayed in Pula, the biggest city on the peninsula (approximate population 60,000) where my parents have an apartment and where I scheduled most of the meetings and interviews. For the research purposes, and in order to stay in line with the ethnographic beliefs, I traveled across the peninsula with my interviewees for various reasons: spending time in local coffee shops, shopping, having meals etc. All these activities helped me to enter into their everyday life and understand their different interactions.
In order to make a clearer picture of the everyday habits and culture in the region, I believe it is important to explain these day by day occurrences. “Having a cup of coffee” is not only the national pastime but also an important way of communication with friends, relatives and business partners and it usually occurs throughout the whole day. There are no time constraints about when one should enjoy his/her cup of coffee and it can happen two or three times per day. To a foreigner it might seem that there are too many coffee shops that are literally popping up everywhere, and almost everyone has his/her favorite place. In order to make the respondents more comfortable I always agreed to meet at their favorite place, which sometimes included long driving. Additionally, the idea of shopping, even when it comes to groceries, often includes going to a neighboring country. Since the Communist era, it became popular to shop in Italy, a habit that is still present today in both Slovenia and Croatia. Therefore, I used the opportunity to drive with my respondents and talk to them during those shopping commutes.

Zaltman and Coulter (1995) defined a “mental map” as “the interviewer's reviews of all the constructs discussed” (p. 42). The fieldwork has helped me to construct a “mental map” of the region and its communities and to better understand reasons and different rationales when it comes to the issues of the Digital Divide in the region.

The interviews were performed in two official languages of the Istrian region (Croatian and Italian) and two dominant dialects (Italian Istro-Veneto; spoken in North-Eastern Italy and Istria, and Croatian Chakavian dialect, spoken
in the North-Western part of the Adriatic Croatia). As a rule, all the interviews started in standard Croatian, because everybody perceived me at first as a Croatian. Later during the interview process most of the conversation slowly moved toward the dialects, a sign that I, as a researcher in the field, understood as the ethnographic progress when the interviewees started treating me as one of their own. The Slovenian respondents also started using Croatian at the beginning, but later they felt more conformable explaining their points of view in Slovenian.

This notion of familiarity with the region and its culture raises another important consideration for this research – the issue of self-reflexivity. Although, I was at first perceived as a researcher and somebody who “came from America”, I spent most of my life in the region, so I did not have to spend any time learning the languages and the local culture that I consider to be my native. On the other side, I left the region in 2000 and I have spent five years in the United States before starting this research. I have been disconnected from the everyday life of the region for a considerable amount of time. This time spent outside the region is particularly important when the topic of computer and Internet usage is concerned.

In the world of new technologies, five years is an eternity, so for me to understand the real issues of the Digital Divide I had use my personal experience of new technologies and internet usage in the United States in the study of the subject in the region. I was aware that I could potentially bring “into the equation” my personal experience, so I tried to shape the interview process according to
my respondents’ personal experiences as much as possible. Another important issue I had to tackle during the interviews was their questions of my personal experience in the United States. During our conversations, they often asked me questions such as: “What sort of Internet connections do you have in America?”, “Is Internet faster and more reliable there?”, “How much are you paying for the Internet service in Ohio?” and “What do you think about the situation here?” All these questions, usually put at the beginning of the interviews, reminded me that I was often considered to be an outsider; someone who does not share the same experience as they do, and someone who is not part of their social and cultural group.

The ethnographic objective to immerse oneself completely into the culture and everyday life was, of course, somehow limited by demographic factors like age, class, gender and education. Therefore, after the group family interviews, I had to approach each person individually and try to continue individual conversations in accordance with their demographics. For example, men that were 40 years and older were more eager to talk outside of their homes (in cars, coffee shops, and women 40 years and older were more comfortable talking in the privacy of their homes (very often in the kitchen). Younger respondents were, in general, usually always ready to talk.
National Identities and Language Usage

As many researchers note (West, 2001; Gal, 2000), the national identities in border regions is often not a simple Self-Other construction. According to West (2001) the national identity has to be seen as “a segmented structure of Selves and Others of varying social distances, rather than a binary Self and Other.” (p. 49). In order to understand better one’s understandings of national identity it is important to consider the cultural, historic, economic and social environments of the specific border region and current development trends that occur between the countries that share the same region.

Historically, the Istrian peninsula belonged to Croatia, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Venice, Napoleon’s empire and Rome. Since the peninsula is inhabited by three European nations today it is not easy to determine the exact notions of Self and Others. As Gal (2000) suggests one has to look beyond the binaries of national policy and ideology to be able to understand the ways “individuals experience the boundaries within and between the national Self and Others and choose others against whom to define Self.” (p. 50)

This ethnographic research has been conducted in Italy, Slovenia and Croatia within a 100 km radius that was enough to cover the whole peninsula and three countries that share it. The geographic space of Istria and close proximity of two neighboring countries made my interviewees’ notions of their national identity different from people who live in central parts of Croatia, Slovenia or Italy. This national identity can be analyzed from three different perspectives.
First, the respondents perceived their national identity through their citizenship and their ethnic background. A number of my respondents had ethnic origin that was different from their current citizenship. For example, many ethnic Italians who live in Croatia have only the Croatian citizenship, but they perceived themselves as both Italian and Croatian.

Second, I discovered a very strong regional identity where interviewees perceived that being an Istrian is more important and/or more valuable than being Italian or Croatian. The reason for this can be found in family connections and way of life that includes elements of both Slavic and Romance cultures. People who had family members that belonged to all three ethnic groups preferred using the term Istrian to determine their ethnic heritage.

Third, the use of a certain language helped me to determine the interviewees’ national feelings. Since this study has been conducted for the major part in the Croatian part of the Istrian peninsula, the interviews and ethnographic procedures always started in Croatian. When I met with the families and individuals for the first time, the conversation was always in Croatian language regardless of their ethnic origin. After a couple of days and after spending more time with the interviewees, they usually made a switch from the official Croatian language to the Istrian dialect and/or Italian or Slovenian. From my researcher point of view, I understood that change as an important step forward in my ethnographic procedure because they felt comfortable to express their feelings and talk about their ICT experiences in a language or dialect that they perceived as theirs.
The notions of Self and Others in the context of this research were usually expressed during the comparison with other neighbors. For example, Italian minority members in Croatian part of the peninsula saw themselves as Italians during the conversation about culture and everyday issues, but when the conversation switched to the ICT usage and perception, Italians usually became “Others”, the ones that live on the other side of the border and the ones that experience different opportunities.

According to West (2001) “significant differentiations between the Self and Others that are familiar or perceived to be so, and those that are threatening or perceived to be so, are useful for imagining one’s own identity and place in the world.” (p. 61)

Conclusion

It is important to understand the changes that are happening in the media environment today for two reasons. New technologies are offering both the content providers and the audience new possibilities. These new possibilities are not fully utilized because of the audience’s need to adapt to the changes. Globalization is unifying the audience internationally, but different geographical regions express different needs when it comes to media usage. The gap between the real possibilities of the new media and audience’s actual perceptions of the new possibilities is a challenge for ethnographers who want to make an understanding of the media involvement in today’s societies. It is also
important to understand the audience’s economic, social, political, cultural and geographical practices before the actual Digital Divide discussion.

The ethnographic approach to the Digital Divide issue can represent a new overview of the phenomenon from the inside; as I learned during this research, sometimes the Digital Divide gap occurs because individuals simply refuse to make new technologies a part of their everyday life and not because they do not understand how to use the new possibilities. Social and cultural practices can be seen as both a positive and negative force in a given community; sometimes they can influence the rapid development and other times they can cause a slow acceptance of necessary changes that are needed in order to stay in touch with the rest of the world.

Therefore, I believe that using ethnographic methods can put a new understanding of this global phenomenon and help us recognize the needs of specific communities that express different desires in spite of rapid globalization of everyday lives. Of course, the issue of subjectivism and self-reflexivity - the major starting point for the ethnographic critiques – has been taken seriously. I tried to have in mind my “native-ethnographer” position and minimize my social and cultural assumptions by rigorously following the rules of the ethnographic research.
4. PARENTS AND ICT

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the results of the ethnographic research with emphasis on the population 40 years old or older. All interviewed individuals were married with children, so they defined themselves primarily as parents and spouses. The phenomenon of the generation born between 1946 and 1964 (the so-called Baby Boom generation) is represented in many discussions around the academic world; from pop-culture to medicine and from politics to economics. As in other parts of the Western world, this generation represents a significant share of the population in Istria (Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, www.dzs.hr, accessed in June 2005).

According to Vandebosch, Beullens and Den Bulck (2003), Western societies experience two important trends today, “the graying of the population and the “technologisation” of everyday life” (p. 951). These two trends, when in conjunction, constitute real challenges in socio-cultural and economic spheres in all the countries that experienced the Baby Boom after the Second World War. In this chapter, this generation has been analyzed according to their actual and perceived relationship toward the ICTs. The ethnographic methods approach to this issue gave me a better understanding of how parents react and shape their behavior toward new technologies in correlation with the socio-cultural and economic reality of the region. My intention was to find out how ready are they to
accept these new technological changes that are shaping their communication environment. In order to understand better the changing trends between new technologies and the elderly population, it is important to set the stage and learn more about their role in the given region.

In this chapter I analyze the Baby Boom generation and their (un)acceptance of the ICTs. Unlike their children, the respondents that were 45 years old or older did not show their readiness to accept new technologies, although they were aware that there was a gap between them and their children when it came to ICTs. Most of them accepted the fact that new technologies in general were something beyond their reach, and most importantly, they did not feel that their lifestyle suffered because of that. In order to better understand their current situation in Istria, I explain the characteristics of the Baby Boom generation in Istria and its socio-cultural and historic background in the region.

**Characteristics of the Baby Boom Generation in Istria**

Characteristics that more closely define the researched population are their age and family status, employment status, and their own understandings and beliefs about their own generation, as well as their present and future contribution and acceptation of the ICTs.

The age range of the interviewees was between 40 and 60 years. Although almost all of them officially belong to the Baby Boom generation, their own understandings showed that they differentiate among themselves between
“old” and “older” members of their group. My interviews with the parents in Istria demonstrated that individuals started perceiving themselves as “older” as soon as their children started leaving the elementary school. According to their rationale, the question of age and the feeling of being older were not represented through their own age, but rather through their children’s age.

The employment status and the relation toward the ICTs was also one of the important characteristics of the interviewed parents because it shaped the definition of how important the usage of the new technologies is in their everyday life. White-collar employees expressed more concern over the importance of ICT acceptance in their environment than blue-collar employees and stay-at-home parents.

When it comes to this portion of the researched population, the intention of my research was to find out how they perceived themselves as users of ICTs, how they perceived ICTs in their working environment and how they perceived themselves within their families (primarily compared to their children and their involvement in children’s educational processes) and what the consequences are of their different approaches to ICTs.

From the theoretical point of view, it is important to distinguish the difference between the Norris’ (2002) understanding of the Digital Divide on a global level where the individuals have or do not have access to the ICTs and a regional approach toward the same issue. From the regional perspective, in a moderately developed region the question cannot be answered from the accessibility point of view. While Norris (2002) discusses the Digital Divide
phenomenon from a quantitative point of view and draws conclusions based on number of users and available computers, I try to give a rationale based on users’ perception of the meaning of the ICTs in their everyday environment. In my opinion, the evaluation of computer accessibility represents a starting point of the Digital Divide understanding. In this particular research in the Istrian region, the generation 40 years old and older did not have a problem with accessing ICTs. New technologies were already available; the real issue was what to do with the equipment and how to use it. In order to understand this problem, it is important to understand their perception of new technological possibilities and find which elements prevent Baby Boomers from using the ICTs in a more satisfactory way.

Most respondents acknowledged a close relationship between their computer usage and their economic situation and level of education, but surprisingly, the vast majority of them did not show interest in accepting new technologies when they were asked if they wanted to do something about it. Their economic situation and levels of education have to be seen through two important lenses that separate them from the Western countries. All of them were educated during the Communism era in Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War, when the emphasis (according to their responses) was usually put on finding a job instead of applying for a university course. Additionally, their monthly income levels put them at a disadvantage when compared to the more developed countries in the West.
Socio-Cultural Background of the Baby Boom Generation in Istria

In order to better understand the social, economical and cultural effects of the ICT usage in the Istria region, I think it is useful to provide some background information about some important historical developments in the region.

The Baby Boom generation is the first generation in Istria to be officially born in Croatia (Yugoslavia), since the territory belonged to Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (until the First World War) and Italy (after the First World War). Today, according to the Census data, the Baby Boom generation represents the most numerous generation of the region. It is important to notice that Croatia is demographically an old country, with negative natural increase of the total population since 1991. According to Viertel (2001), Croatia shared the same total fertility rate as Western European countries, but it was on a much lower level of development. This position has worsened since then, along with immigration which has taken place especially among the younger cohorts” (Viertel, 2001, p. 5).

It is visible from these Census data that the role of the Baby Boom generation in Istria is even more accentuated than in some Western societies because they still represent the driving force of the region’s economy.

From the historical point of view, Istrian Baby Boomers can be divided into two groups. The first group was born in Istria and continued living in the Slovenian and Croatian parts of the region, and the second group was born in Istria but left the region after 1954 when the border between Italy and Yugoslavia was determined in the London Memorandum. According to Nemec (2004), some
40,000 ethnic Italians were included in the exodus, and most of them were Italian peasants who left Istria and settled in and around the city of Trieste.

These historical events influenced the future economic and cultural development of the region. Although the same generation continued to live in two different countries, they shared similar experiences of other Baby Boomers around the Western world. According to Vandebosch (2003), the Baby Boom generation can be described from the historical perspective as a generation “raised in a period of after war optimism and a flourishing economy, confronted with the cold war” (p. 952). These characteristics of the Baby Boom generation are even more accentuated in the Istrian region because the newly established border between Italy and Yugoslavia represented a border between the European West and East for the next 50 years.

From the economic perspective, Baby Boomers in Istria represent the biggest and the most important portion of the working population, and the situation on the labor market is not changing as fast as in other European regions because of the negative birth rate and emigration that was accentuated from 1991 to 1995 during the war period in Croatia from 1991 to 1995. Although the Istrian region was not directly affected by the war, the influx of refugees and the sudden drop of the standard of living caused the migration of younger skilled labor toward the more developed Western European markets, especially to Italy, Austria and Germany. Under these conditions, Baby Boomers’ position in the labor market hardly changed.
From the cultural perspective, the Istrian residents benefited from exposure to both Romance and Slavic culture. Recent historical events - the ethnic mixture of the population and strong economic and cultural relationships with Italy - distinguish Istria from other Slovenian and Croatian regions. Most native residents are bilingual and many families in the region fail to distinguish themselves as members of a specific ethnic group. The situation became even more complicated when approximately 20% of the population during the last census in 2001 identified themselves as Istrians, instead of Croatians, Slovenians or Italians. During the research, I interviewed a married couple that portrays this phenomenon. Laura, a 56-year-old elementary school teacher, is an ethnic Italian born in Pula. She married Slavko, a 58-year-old engineer from Slavonia (Eastern Croatian region). Although they both live in Pula, Croatia, and although she uses Italian language in her everyday communication, Slavko is seen as an “outsider” in their community. Despite the fact that they are both born in the same country (Croatia) and they both have only one citizenship (Croatian), Laura admits that their family and friends define them as “Istrians” and “Non-Istrians” and not as Croatians and Italians.
Ethnographic Procedures

For decades, the governments around the world have been pushing the idea of implementation of new technologies in the everyday lives of their citizens. Some 25 years ago, Masuda (1981) concluded that “technological innovations will provoke radical cultural and social changes that will be fundamentally different from the status quo … in the post-industrial, information-based society, knowledge or the production of information values will be the driving force of society, rather than industrial technologies” (p. 29).

Twenty-five years later, those technological innovations have provoked radical cultural and socio-economic changes. The reality, however, made us realize that those changes did not happen overnight and they have not occurred simultaneously around the world. Additionally, these technological changes required some extra investment into educational processes from both individuals and governments. Unfortunately, the technological changes were not adequately covered in educational processes with significant differences between the countries where the more developed countries managed to be more successful in implementing the changes into their societies.

Over the years, the implementation of ICTs became more and more popular, especially in the Western hemisphere. Selwyn (2004) noted that the usage of ICTs “is seen by many commentators as underpinning the social and economic progression of nation-states throughout the first stages of the 21st century” (p. 342). The evidence that supports this statement is seen in the economic indicators of the Western countries where the United States, the
United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries experienced a significant growth in their national economies during the early and 1990s, when the ICTs were introduced and became fully purposeful in business life of those countries. Significantly, developed countries in Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, and Greece) experienced a slower growth in their national economies (Eurostat data, accessed in June, 2005).

The idea was also to “increase levels of social interaction and civic involvement” (Katz et al, 2001) and facilitate easy and widespread access to education and other public government services (Selwyn, 2004).

The primary channel for increasing the levels of social interaction and more favorable civic involvement is, logically, education, because educational channels are the most useful ones for the introduction and implementation of new communication technologies into everyday lives of ordinary citizens. But not all citizens are involved into the educational processes and vast majority of the adult population that is 25 years or older is usually disconnected from the educational institutions that are providing both access and knowledge about the new technologies.

Most of the Digital Divide theories include these elements and they are often a subject of research (Norris, Castells, Webber and Nakamura). In this research, I explored a person’s perception and self-identification toward these elements and finally his/her definition of the possible Digital Divide.

The important part of this research was not only to explore the elements of the Digital Divide in the region, but to see how groups and individuals responded
to the issue and what they did about it. From a research point of view, it was important to define the factors that were causing the problem as well as to understand the roots of the problem. But I found that the investigation of people’s perceptions and their attitudes toward solving the problem was even more interesting because it included possible future actions and definitions of the perceived individual’s needs that incorporated ICTs on both personal and professional levels.

To understand better the articulated limits and material discrepancies of the computer usage and the computer knowledge in Istria, I used loosely structured interview guidelines with open-ended questions to conduct interviews. For this research, groups were defined as family groups or groups of working professionals who are supposed to work in positions that require at least some IT knowledge.

In this chapter, the focus is being put on family groups who own a computer (regardless of the age of the computer) and where computers are equally available to different generations of the same family. I focused on families with the annual income between 50,000 kunas (approximately $8,300) that is considered low-middle income range and 200,000 (approximately $33,000) that is considered upper-middle income range. According to the Croatian Census Bureau (www.dzs.hr), the average income per capita in Croatia in December of 2004 was 6,139.00 kunas per month after taxes (approximately $12,278 per year after taxes).
Family Environment

For the purpose of this research, I chose to interview families with three different ranges of income (low, middle and above average) in order to learn how income in a moderately developed country - where a home PC is still regarded as a luxury item - influences the usage of new technologies.

I also thought it was important to interview families with different ranges of income because I wanted to minimize the impact of income as a factor of Digital Divide on research results. Before conducting the interviews, I realized that interviewing only the low-income families could result in a distorted picture of the Digital Divide in the region. Since both Castells and Norris concluded that income plays a great role in the Digital Divide definitions, I decided to include families with different income levels in order to get a further understandable overview of the phenomenon and compare the perceptions and attitudes toward the ICT between the families with different amounts of wealth.

The majority of the families I interviewed consisted of four members (working parents, two children), three families consisted of two retired people and two families had two working parents and adult children who were living with them. All families had a working computer in their household, and only one of the retired couples had a PC that was considered “old” (with Pentium 2 processor, 300 MHz, 32 MB RAM). All others had a computer that was bought after 2002.

Interviewees were located through acquaintances and friendship networks of the researcher, who has been born and raised in the region. The snowballing technique helped me to start and improve my interview structure with the people I
knew personally, who later introduced me to individuals and families that had all the characteristics I needed for this research.

Families with children were interviewed on several occasions. Once they were interviewed as a family group, and after that several family members were interviewed individually during different social activities. A similar approach in the ethnographic interviewing was also applied by Clark et al (2004), who noted that “this two-tiered method of interviewing afforded opportunities to observe the family’s interaction concerning the issue of computers as well as more in-depth discussions of each member’s use of and beliefs about computer usage.” (p. 533). This technique helped me to better understand individual perceptions and needs of the interviewees who acted in different ways when they were interviewed within their family circles. The ethnographic approach helped me understand how people perceive their own roles within different social groups. Often, the respondents gave me answers in accordance with their presumed roles in a given social group, so I witnessed different approaches toward the Internet from the same person who acted as a daughter in the family group, and as a student in the companionship of her friends. Similarly, parents acted in a different way when they were responding to questions as parents and when they were giving answers acting as working professionals. This attitude helped me to realize the importance of social groups when it comes to the new technologies acknowledgment in a given society.

After collective discussions, most of the younger family members expressed the desire to discuss more and evaluate different aspects that were
mentioned during the discussions. The younger family members’ opinion distinguished them from their parents’ position toward the ICT in two ways. First, their perception of ICT was not influenced by the lack of knowledge and resistance toward the new technologies. They expressed dissatisfaction with the hardware and market situation in the region that prevented them from being able to interact more with the new-media potentials. Second, the generational gap in the region was also noticeable from the foreign language perspective, because the older respondents noticed that the dominance of the English language prevents them from the satisfactory ICT usage. Younger respondents’ approach toward the ICT is discussed in the following chapter.

Interviews

The first notion that came out of the analysis was not surprising and it was somehow expected. Families with relatively greater income were more eager to share their knowledge and their attitude toward computers. Of course, that was exactly the reason why I chose to cover families with different income levels. They had prepared their answers on the general introductory questions in advance. Before the interviews even started, they had their exact numbers about the power of their CPUs, memory size and monitor resolution. At first, I was surprised because my intention was not to discuss the technical possibilities of the computer hardware, but nevertheless, most of the families were eager to show what they have. Contrary to my research interest, they were more eager to
discuss technical questions about how computers work and which hardware parts need updating, so in order to stay in line with the ethnographic procedures I incorporated that part into my interview outline because it helped me to break introductory communication barriers between the interviewees and myself.

The reason why most of the families had the hardware answers prepared lies in the snowball technique that I used to find the respondents for the interviews. Most of the respondents were “warned” in advance by their previously interviewed friends and family members as to what the questions were. At first, my status of the “native ethnographer” was at stake, because by word of mouth I was described as “an American” who will come and ask questions about the computer usage. Since I spent the last five years in the United States, most of my acquaintances changed perception about my residence and they stopped perceiving me as a resident in their (our) local community. In order to alter that opinion, during the introductory conversation with the families, I had to explain my position and connection with the region and my temporary residence in the United States, because jokingly one of their first questions was usually why the “Americans” want to know something about our computers.

Brown & Theodossopolous (2004) encountered the same issue in their ethnographic research in South-East Europe and concluded that the relations between the ethnographer and the community were crucial. In their words “although all the ethnographers [in their study] studied in “the West”, they were all able to establish a certain intimacy with their interlocutors that derived, in part, from their own biographies” (p. 8).
Additionally, Weston (1998) thinks that the researcher needs to prove his/her authority and authenticity to “his/her own people,” and at the same time he/she is suspected of being overtly subjective and of acting as an advocate for them (p. 198). In an environment where having a PC is still considered a luxury, they were ready to give evidence that they have it – and that they had a good one; something that the others will admire and possibly even envy. This readiness to talk about the hardware ownership made me realize two points: the perception of owning a personal computer was there as people accepted the fact that it had become a necessary part of their everyday life, but at the same time they were very conscious that not everybody had a computer, so the fact of ownership represented a status symbol that separated them from other families that did not own one.

Vlado, a 46-year-old father, admitted that he had heard conversations among his friends about buying computers. He did not have long and meaningful conversations about computer shopping with his peers, but often enough, during the conversations, somebody would notice that his or her child was playing a particular game the night before, or that they could not figure out how to manage certain documents and student projects. At first, he did not pay attention to that, but soon they began asking him what was he planning to purchase for his kids, and eventually he found himself asking where and what to buy. Vlado admitted that a computer purchase symbolized their financial status in the society, as he put it:
It was a pleasure to be able to afford something like that to my children. I know that for some parents the financial situation and the uncertainty of their jobs represent a serious challenge. Buying a computer is completely different from buying all the other school necessities. For this one, you have to be “strong” and you have to plan ahead about the possible obstacles and sacrifices you have to go through as a parent.

Parents in the financially good-standing families bought a computer because they felt it was their responsibility. Their kids soon started talking about one at school, and eventually both children and parents were peer-pressured to buy one “because all the other kids have them”.

Additionally, he began making correlations between conversations he had with his friends and the ones he had with his children, and he noticed that certain subjects - like computer calculations and school projects that included computer graphics and writing - became repetitive. The environment started pressuring him to take action toward buying a computer and, in his own words; he “started to feel bad that everybody else already had a computer”. He admitted that he did not have a clue what he was actually investing in; he only knew that he had to buy something. His kids were pressuring him to buy equipment that was beyond his financial reach, so he finally bought a product from a major distribution company that offered acceptable quality for an affordable price:

My kids immediately noticed that they would have to buy extra equipment to play the latest games, but, hey, we bought the machine for the educational purposes, not for the games!

From the cultural studies point of view, it is important to analyze this different relationship toward new technologies between parents and their children. According to Sutherland et al. (2000), the phenomenon of computer being sold
as an educational tool for home encourages children’s participation in this information age. "Digital technology is increasingly penetrating the home environment, providing a point of convergence for computer and communications technologies and other leisure and entertainment media" (Sutherland et al., 2000, p. 196). This difference between education and leisure differentiated the opinion about the ICT between the generations. While Vlado perceived the family computer as a product that primarily has an educational value, his children saw it as a part of their everyday life – it was incorporated in both their educational and leisure activities.

Vlado was not alone in his approach. His friend Tomislav, a 49-year-old hotel manager, who is married and has two children, had the same experience. According to him and his circle of friends, computers for were not perceived as toys.

Computers entered my life long after I had finished my education and the process was very painful because I had to go through a lot of embarrassing moments in the hotel where I work. When the hotel management switched to using computers, I kept my job only because of my seniority and because I worked for that hotel for a number of years. Today, when people apply for jobs, they don’t even get the interview if they don’t know how to use a computer. The whole chain of seniority in my office was broken because we constantly had to ask our 18-year-old interns to help us.

Tomislav’s point of view has been analyzed in literature from the interdisciplinary perspective that includes sociology, cultural studies, education, and mass communication studies. Education analysts like Lahoe and Derry (1993) and Crook (1994) pointed out that children today experienced the advent of computers in schools with a "tremendous amount of revolutionary zeal about how
it would transform their learning processes” (as quoted in Sutherland, 2000, p. 197). Their parents did not experience the revolution of new technologies in their education processes, so the perception of the ICT in everyday life of parents and their children is based on their different educational experience. As a result, their usage of ICT as a form of mass communication and/or entertainment suffers from their perception that computers are for work and not for leisure. According to Pohjola (2002), the new technology education and adoption in working environments matters. “Better educated workers have a comparative advantage with respect to learning and implementing new technology. Also, ICT technologies and their applications, such as business information systems, have been developed in advanced countries, and therefore, tend to be skill complementary by design. But given that ICT enables the redesign of production, work and management practices in any organization, an investment in the mere training of technical skills is not likely to be sufficient to promote the adoption and diffusion of ICT. The upgrading of behavioral and interpersonal skills is at least equally important” (p. 25).

I realized during the interview that Tomislav defined computers as a "working obligation".

I hate that machine. I have to use it the whole day in the office and it took me a long time to understand how it works. When I come home, I have no desire to sit in front of it again and relax myself. I have a feeling my children adore that box, but for me it only represents work. I prefer relaxing in front of television because it doesn’t have to reboot every time I accidentally switch to wrong channel.
According to Facer (2001), children and their Baby Boom parents are differentiated as two different groups of consumers. “Young people’s use of ICT in schools is increasingly framed by the market imperative both in terms of the ways in which new technologies are deemed to be helpful within schools as information resources and in terms of the economic framework that surrounds the installation and purchase of ICT” (Facer et al., 2001, p. 95). Additionally, Facer (2001) notices that young people are seemingly effortlessly mastering complex game environments, and that is seen as a further indication of a generational divide, “a divide that is reproduced in computer games magazines in which adults and authority figures are constructed as out of touch and semi-Victorian figures in their failure to adopt and understand the significance of digital technologies within youth cultures” (p. 96). This point of view that is coming from a similar research based in England is even more accentuated in the Istrian region by two factors. When it comes to leisure, the Baby Boom generation is facing additional difficulty in adopting English as a standard language of the computer environment and the standard of living is significantly lower than in Western countries, which resulted in later adoption of new technologies based on economic hardship.

Later in the interview process, Vlado expressed his uneasiness during the buying process. At first he only stated that he bought the machine, but later, after he relaxed, he started talking about problems that had arisen while purchasing the computer. First, he needed to figure out where to buy the product he was looking for.
It is not an easy thing; when you are buying a laundry machine or a car, it is relatively easy to go to a dealer and pick whatever you want. But when it comes to computers and related products, it is a complete nightmare. Here in our region, you can’t buy them in the malls, and the specialized shops don’t have the real thing exhibited on their shelves; the only thing they have is the catalog and you have to make a decision based on a bunch of numbers that you don’t understand. After you pay in advance, you have to wait for almost two weeks for the computer to come from Zagreb (the Croatian capital).

I realized that the Digital Divide in this example does not show when a person starts using the computer, it shows long before. People who are unfamiliar with the world of new technologies are puzzled and confused during the buying process as well. In order to buy something, Baby Boomers who don’t have any computer experience have to rely on others (usually younger members of their families) and follow their lead. Both Castells (2002) and Norris (2002) mention this notion in general when they talk about the social divide in the US society. The difference here is that the social divide within a single country that is moderately developed is accentuated by one more fact – market development.

The social divide within the more progressive United States or United Kingdom begins with education and other social norms connected with the education processes. But even when the levels of education are satisfactory, computer users in less technologically advanced countries have to come to terms with a technology market that does not fit their personal needs because the aggregate supply and demand are not on economically successful levels.

It was really embarrassing; the shopping assistant put the catalog in front of me and asked me what I wanted. I told her that I didn’t really know what I wanted and I noticed that she rolled her eyes … I had a feeling that she
wanted to say ‘Oh no, not another oldie who wants to buy something.’ Unfortunately for both of us, there was no way out. We spent almost an hour together, she did her best, but I simply did not understand all those numbers and different types of monitors. At one point I stopped listening to her, and for the last 20 minutes, I just waived my head accordingly and listened her “lecturing” me. When she finished, I admitted that I have to take that catalog with me and discuss all those numbers with my family. I can tell you that she hated me after those 60 minutes, but at least she was polite enough not to say anything. I still have that catalog somewhere here if you want to see it.

His shopping story revealed three factors. He was not ready to buy anything on his own because he lacked knowledge that was needed for a successful buy. Additionally, he identified himself as the member of an older generation that is out of touch with new technologies. On the other side, the regional market itself has not been adequately prepared for that share of possible consumers; most of the marketing techniques and strategies have been made to satisfy the business needs. Home computers are still seen as a market that is not profitable enough in the region, and the majority of the sales are tailored for business consumers.

At this point, I think it is significant to describe the current market situation in the region in order to understand better the background of this shopping experience in Istria. According to the UN data, the average incomes in the world’s richest countries are over 20 times higher than those in the world’s poorest countries (Pohjola, 2002). According to Pohjola (2002), the economic growth of any given country is driven by advances in technology and a country is poor because it does not have access to the ideas that are used in industrial nations to generate economic value. Researchers like Selwyn and Castells
suggest that there is a significant difference between the developed Western European markets and moderately developed Central and Eastern European markets. The previously mentioned average income in Croatia suggests that the ICT cannot be diffused with the same rate as in more developed countries. Pohjola (2002) suggests that “the speed and extent of diffusion depend on the capacities of the receiving countries to absorb the new ideas about how to produce more efficiently. These capacities, in turn, depend on factors such as income, education, openness to new ideas, property rights and the cost of access to technology” (p. 5). The obvious difference between the levels of development between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia suggest that the diffusion of new technologies and their absorption in everyday activities has to be understood as an economic development issue. In addition to Pohjola’s economic understanding of this issue, I believe that the economic development represents only one side of the story. Since I interviewed parents from three different countries, I noticed that beside economic power, the Baby Boomers across the border shared similar experiences and the level of income had almost no significance when it came to perception of ICT.

Ms Anna lives in Trieste, Italy. She and her husband were an Italian couple from Northeast Italy that enjoyed spending their vacations in Istria because of its proximity to their home and because they could easily speak their native language in the foreign country during the holidays and still be understood. They developed a habit to always stay at the same place and rent a house from
the same renters. At first, they did it because they liked the little village they chose for their vacations, and later they stayed there because over the years they managed to get familiar with the surrounding and feel like at home. “We like to feel at home when we take our vacations” they said when I asked to talk with them. Anna, a 40-year-old mother had difficulties understanding what she was shopping for. The only difference was that in Italy, she easily found a store for personal computers, but once she arrived there she shared the same frustration as Vlado:

I went to the computer shop that was heavily marketed on TV, because they claimed they can help everybody. But once I came there, the only thing I saw was a huge line of shiny computer monitors that all had the same flashing image. I had to wait in line to ask for help. After 20 minutes of waiting, a shopping assistant showed me a bunch of boxes that all looked the same but all had different pricing tags on them. There was no way I could understand anything from his observations so I had to go back home and come back the next day with my son. Of course, he “advised” me to buy the most expensive box, so we spent around 1,200 euros - approximately $1,450, for the computer we now own.

According to Anna, at the time she went shopping, she managed to recognize a couple of people her age from Slovenia and Croatia who evidently came to the same mall for the same reason. In her opinion, they were as confused as she was. The only difference was that she was alone; Slovenians and Croatians took their children with them to buy a computer in Italy.

Regardless of nationality or citizenship, parents in the region had to rely on their children and younger generations when it came to the actual buying of the computer hardware, which caused two reactions:
They had to realize the fact that they do not understand the world of the new technologies and

They had to admit to themselves that they have to go through the learning process one more time together with their children.

The fact that they did not understand something was easier for them to comprehend and the thought of the lack of computer knowledge was usually dismissed with the sentence I heard often during the research, “That stuff is not for us, that is for our children and their future”. The realization that they actually have to sit down and spend a considerable amount of time, energy and money to learn how the new communication technologies work was much harder for them to endure.

Similar findings were reported by Riggs et al. (2001). They discussed the intersections of age, race, gender, social class and work with Internet perception and usage and found that the older generations in the United States rely on help from the younger members of their family. The sticking difference between the American and the Istrian market was the age when the Internet and new technologies were perceived as something out of reach. According to Riggs et al. (2001), “a growing impression of Web-savvy elders has come to suggest that older people who haven’t joined the information rich “haves” of society have failed to do so out of choice, or stodginess, or they just haven’t been tapped as a market segment … there are some people who want a computer and cannot afford them, but most American who do not own a computer simply do not want
one” (p. 154). It seems that the market in the United States differentiates and recognizes different needs between the 50- and 70-years-old consumers, while the markets in Italy, Slovenia and Croatia are still differentiated on business and family levels.

Matjaz, a 56-year-old real-estate agent from Koper, Slovenia, and his wife Anka, a 52-year-old retailer, could not find what makes them different in terms of computer usage from Matjaz’s parents that lived in the same neighborhood.

According to Anka, they pretty much had the same experience.

The only difference when it comes to computer usage is the fact that I am using a computerized cash register in the grocery shop where I work, but I am confident that you can not count that as computer usage. I see that the Slovenian educational system has become very integrated with computers; our children and I’m sure all the children in this neighborhood have one. In our house, we keep it in our children’s room where it belongs. Matjaz and I don’t play computer games and, I guess, we don’t have to write home works, so we don’t have the need to use it.

I tried to shift the conversation toward the new possibilities that computers offer today, like on-line banking or on-line shopping, but they did not recognize the possible benefits from that. Matjaz thought that the old-fashioned way of banking or shopping was more reliable.

In order to bank or shop online, you have to be an expert in computers and you have to make sure your English is not rusty. To youngsters like you, everything seems to be better if you don’t have to leave your room. I find it more useful to actually walk to the bank office and deal with the banking issues with real people. If there is a problem, you solve that problem directly with the teller and you explain everything in plain Slovenian without the need to go through the English dictionary to see how much money you have.
Anna in Trieste had a similar approach. She did not see a personal computer as an improvement in her life. In her opinion, the computer was primarily an educational tool “used by young people” and she could not imagine herself going through the educational process one more time because she did not feel that she suffered from not being technologically savvy.

According to Livingstone (2004), new notions about the media literacy include for elements: access, analysis, evaluation and creation of messages across a variety of contexts (p. 3). By having that in mind, the conversations I had with the families in the region proved that the interviewed parents struggled with the first step toward the media literacy that includes new technologies. Access in terms of shopping and owning a computer product was for them a financial and/or logistical obstacle that they managed to overcome, but the analysis, evaluation and creation of communication data was almost impossible without the educational processes.

During the conversation with parents, three reasons why they had finally accepted the fact that they had to sit down and learn came to realization: the sense of parental responsibilities, the working environment and, finally, the entertainment possibilities.

The sense of parental duties was especially strong with the parents who had children in elementary schools because they felt that it was their responsibility to help their children with the homework and school projects, and because of the age of their children (between 6 and 14). Although they showed interest for computer technologies, their confidence was understandably not as
strong as among the high school and university students, so they relied on their parents’ help.

The competitive working environment, especially between the white-collar workers, was also a strong cause for learning how to use a computer and, in some cases, it was an even stronger influence than the one that came from the family circles. Finally, the entertainment that was described as a form of game-playing and/or media product consumption was a good starting point for some of the interviewees. At first, they were intrigued how much time their children could spend in front of a computer screen playing games, but soon enough they realized that they as well could spend hours playing even the simplest games like “Tetris” or “Solitaire”, both at home and in their offices.

**Ethnicity as a Digital Divide Factor**

Surprisingly, all the interviewees that belong to one of the major ethnical minorities in Istria (Slovenian, Italian, Bosnian or Serbian) incorporated that fact as a rationale for their good or insufficient knowledge of the IT. The notion of ethnic identity did not come explicit in their answers at first because I had never explicitly asked them about their ethnic origin. My intention was to research a diverse group of individuals and families, but for that I relied successfully on the snowball technique, which provided me with a very diverse group of people with different ethnic origins. My first intention was to use the ethnographic methods in Istria and research the population in the region regardless of their ethnic origins,
but the interview processes and ethnographic procedures that included a number of family meals, coffee breaks and coffee shop visits resulted in conversation topics that did not necessarily involve computer and Internet usage. Ethnicity was one of those topics that evolved during the interview processes and helped me realize that a person’s self-identity toward his/her ethnic group shapes the notions and attitudes toward the educational processes, and ultimately toward the ICTs.

In order to understand ethnicity as a possible Digital Divide factor, I think it is important to give a brief explanation of the ethnic situation in Istria today. As mentioned before, two historical events in the 20th century caused major movements of the population in the peninsula and changed the ethnic configuration of the region. Firstly, during the fascism era in Italy, the local population that approximately consisted of 50% Italians and 50% Slavs (Slovenians and Croatians) was “Italianized” and Slovenian and Croatian languages were banned from public use. Secondly, after the Second World War, the Istrian peninsula was integrated into the Yugoslav communist state and a large number of Istrian Italians left the territory. (According to the latest Census, the percentage of the Italian minority in Istria is under 10%). During the next 50 years after the Second World War, a number of people from other parts of former Yugoslavia came to live in Istria because the economic situation was more favorable than in other parts of Yugoslavia. Today, according to the Census, 6 to 8% of the Istrian population recognize themselves as Serbians or Bosnians.
My interview analysis showed that almost all Baby Boomers that came to live in Istria after the Second World War, and especially during the 1960s, came because of tourism and industry expansion, as a lot of job opportunities became available.

The notion of the ethnicity usually popped up when we started speaking about the economy or educational experience, where the ethnicity or the origin of birth was used by interviewees as a rationale for their current situation. The ethnic background was usually revealed in sentences that started with phrases like “You know, we in Slovenia….my education in Bosnia…..before I came here” or “this is not the way we do it in Italy.” The ethnic background was usually connected with their experiences in computer shopping, where experiences and purchasing power between different countries were compared and with their educational opportunities in different geographical areas.

The fact that they reside in the Croatian part of the Istrian peninsula and that they pretty much share the same socio-economic situation with the rest of Croatian citizens did not prevent them from identifying themselves with their “native” countries and the current socio-economic situation in those countries. Parents that came from Bosnia or Serbia/Montenegro noted that they were lucky enough to be able to provide computers to their children and they were eager to continue the conversation about the current situation in those countries.

People from Serbian/Montenegrin and Bosnian origin were critical about their situation in Croatia, but at the same time they were also quick to notice that it is still better than in their native countries of origin. Sometimes, their
comparisons of situations in different countries facilitated in my understanding of the origin of the problem they were trying to share with me.

The Milic family considered themselves as Istrians. Although they originally came from Vojvodina, a region in the north of Serbia, they spent the last 20 years in Istria, where Mr. Milic began employment at the local shipyard. Both of their children were born in Pula and, in their own words, they settled here permanently because they took a liking to the climate and the fact that a job at the shipyard was safe and permanent. The parents admitted that sometimes they do not feel “right at home” because they are not bilingual, but they added immediately that their kids are and that the fact that they live in a bilingual area might be beneficial in their children’s lives. Mr. Milic, during one of our talks over the obligatory cups of Turkish coffee that were usually served before, during and after the interviews by his wife, told me that he had the opportunity to compare prices and shop in both Croatian and Serbian markets.

In Croatia, the stuff is nicely organized, one does not have to run around to buy something, but everything is so prohibitively expensive; the prices here are just crazy and the VAT (value-added-tax) of 22% is, in my opinion, pretty much ruining the market. In Serbia, the situation is different. The prices there are much friendlier, but it is very hard to find the products you want to buy because the market is not very well organized. Croatia is much easier, but if you want to save some money and if you have extra time on your shoulders, it makes sense to go East and shop there.

At the same time, Italians and Slovenians compared the current economic situation in Croatia with the EU standards, and their first thought was of the more competitive markets and more favorable possibilities of financing in Slovenia and Italy. Interestingly, the same was true for both Italians and Slovenians, who
actually live in their respective countries, and for the Italian and Slovenian minority members that actually live in Croatia. The respondents concluded that a problem with Slovenia and Croatia is the size of their markets.

Italian competitiveness is in its size. It is impossible for us in Croatia or Slovenia to have those big computer centers because we do not have enough people to go there and make them profitable. Italians know that, that is why they have all those shopping centers two meters from the border.

In conclusion, ethnicity as a Digital Divide factor and the social awareness of belonging to a certain ethnic minority group influenced the attitude toward the IT in two ways: respondents used the ethnicity as a logical rationale for their current IT situation and they used it as a comparison vehicle – to compare their situation with other co-nationals in Croatia and neighboring countries. The ethnicity factor was used to rationalize the economic realities and cultural approaches of the respondents toward the ICTs. Economic realities were used by the respondents to give a simplistic overview of their position within the Digital Divide with regards to both positive and negative perspectives. From the cultural perspective, the ethnic origin was used to describe their educational processes and relationships toward the ICTs. According to Bourdieu (1982), in order to understand the social construction of literacy, it is important to deconstruct the notions of embodied capital and social prestige. In that sense, it is essential to recognize ethnicity as a factor that determines embodied capital that a person develops through intergenerational communication with his/her surroundings.
The respondents that identified themselves as ethnic minorities in this study understood their position toward the new technologies through their embodied cultural capital that is different from their current environment.

The fact that they live in the Croatian part of the Istrian peninsula, and that they pretty much share the same socio-economic situation with the rest of Croatian citizens, did not prevent them from identifying themselves with their “native” countries and the current socio-economic situation in those countries. As most of them stated, they came to live in Istria soon after graduating from high school. Since they decided not to attend the universities, their primary goal was to find a job with a decent salary. The economic reasons that include the quality and steadiness of jobs and income levels that were higher in the western regions of former Yugoslavia were the most important reasons for their relocations to Istria from their original place of residence.

Parents that come from Bosnia or Serbia/Montenegro noted that they considered themselves lucky enough to be able to provide computers to their children. For them, it represented a certain type of pride because they saw the computer purchase as an expensive process that proves their willingness to support their children’s education. During a lunch with the Bakic family, the parents agreed that it was an important step forward for them. Both of them came from a small town in central Bosnia and the decided to stay here in Pula. They were both blue-collar workers in the local shipyard.

We did not have an opportunity to get the University diploma, but we work hard and we are making sure that our children do not miss an opportunity.
People from Serbian/Montenegrin or Bosnian origin were critical toward their situation in Croatia. Their major concern was that, in some cases, they and their children will not benefit from equal opportunities in the Croatian society because of their different ethnic background that became even more visible during the war in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. When I asked them to be more specific, they explained that their biggest fear was for their children not to have the same access to higher education as native Croatian children, and consequently better jobs. Later in discussions, they stated that the current situation is still healthier than in their native countries of origin.

Since Mr. Bakic did not use the equipment, the price was the most important detail for him. He admitted that his children, both elementary school students, were not happy with his shopping decisions, but, in his words, he was trying to incorporate this huge purchase into his limited budget.

Sometimes, it pays to know the neighborhood. I would definitely not go to Vojvodina to buy something if I was not from there. I have relatives there, and it paid off to have somebody who was familiar with the situation in the local market.

When I asked them about the actual computer usage, most of the parents from Bosnia and Serbia/Montenegro were dismissive. Their first rationale was that they are simply not educated enough and spending time to learn about the new technologies was costly and unaffordable. Their primary goal was to be able to provide computers to their children, but for them it was just something out of
reach. Again, this uneasiness and unwillingness to learn when it comes to new technologies was another element that separated them from their children.

Gianni, a 49-year-old father and member of the Italian minority in Istria, whose son was studying in Trieste, Italy, knew exactly what the problem was. He said that he was using the Internet occasionally because that gives him a possibility to communicate with his son in Trieste on a daily basis.

The reality is that we live 60 miles apart, but they still charge us international rates. I had to learn how to use the Internet, it was a very good economic decision, because this way we save a lot of money.

He claimed he was able to learn how to use the Internet quicker and more efficiently than his friends because the software that he was using was in Italian, and he did not have to learn English in order to productively use the computer. According to him, it paid off to be a member of a minority group, because in his case “the Italian minority” is backed by the Italian market, which, in turn, is huge. Because of that, the major software packages are translated into Italian, which is not the case in Croatia or Slovenia because their markets are not profitable enough.

In conclusion, ethnicity as a Digital Divide factor and the social awareness of belonging to a certain ethnic minority group influenced the attitude toward the ICT in two ways: respondents used the ethnicity as a logical rationale for their current ICT situation and they used it as a comparison vehicle – to compare their situation with other co-nationals in Croatia and the neighboring countries. In both cases, ethnicity as a factor was used to rationalize economic realities and cultural
approaches of the respondents toward the ICT. On one side, being a member of a certain ethnic group was used as a rationale for the cultural and economic approach toward the issue. The past and current situations in their countries of origin objectively made an integral part of their standard of living and education success, but it was also used as a subjective explanation of their current efforts to include ICTs into their daily routine.

While the economic realities were used by respondents to give a simplistic overview of their Digital Divide situations from both positive and negative perspectives, from the cultural perspective, the ethnic origin was used to describe their educational processes and relationships toward the ICTs. In that sense, I believe it is imperative to identify ethnicity as a Digital Divide factor in the Istrian region, because ethnicity as a social construct in this study includes elements like socialization, the importance of family circles, perception of the importance of education and willingness to communicate with other groups and adopt new knowledge and skills. Finally, all these details help us understand the local construction of literacy and media literacy that form the Digital Divide perception.

**Generational Gaps**

As Clark et al. noted in their research (2004), interview results showed strong individualism. All computer-based conversations included a notion of self-determination toward the ICTs. In some instances, when the older family
members did not disclose information about themselves, they self-identified with their children. Parents in the Novak family and the Kovac family who have children in elementary schools believed that it was their personal responsibility to provide successful computer education for their children. Regardless of school programs, they strongly felt that the school itself is simply not enough and that it is every parent’s responsibility to provide an ICT environment for their children at home. At the same time, they thought that it was also government’s responsibility to provide successful education in the ICT area, but they were sure their kids would miss out if they did not have the computer access at home. They believe that parents in both of these households were sure they were doing their best, and within their financial possibilities, to ensure that their children have adequate computer skills.

The detail that surprised me the most was that during the conversations, I could not find a difference between a 40-year-old and a 60-year-old parent. Simply put, when it comes to ICT usage, Baby Boomers reacted as a homogeneous group that did not show age difference. As Riggs (2001) noted in her ethnographic study of the elderly and ITC usage in the United States, there was a difference between people who were in their forties and fifties and people who were approaching their seventies. Additionally, according to van Dijk et al. (2003), the usage gap between generations represents a new definition of the Digital Divide, where the possession of hardware together with other elements like employment, education, age and ethnicity represent a historical approach toward the issue. The new approach, according to Van Dijk (2002), should
incorporate “skills and usage of ICT” (p. 315) because the usage gap is likely to increase. The difference here is that in Central-Eastern Europe, the usage gap is significantly more connected to user’s age. In more developed countries like the United States (Riggs, 2001) or the Netherlands (van Dijk, 2003), the gap between ICT users and non-users progresses in accordance with the user’s age, where the users are not necessarily left behind because of their income or education but because they willingly choose not to use the ICTs. In Slovenia and Croatia, the gap in usage is most visible between children and young adults and their parents regardless of parents’ age.

Conversations in the field proved to me that parents are aware of the Digital Divide between themselves and their children; they realize that computers are important in the field of education and they all share the thought that “computers will be more and more important in the future. What struck me the most is that they do not recognize new technologies as something that is already important in their lives as well and that they are not embracing those new technologies. I realized that, in their understanding, they use two definitions for the ICT; one for their generation and the other one for their children. Under those circumstances, the most important variable appeared to be the age. For their generation, the ICTs are not perceived as something important, but for their children, the issue has a vital meaning; something that will help their kids to live a better life in the future. In an era where Castells (2001, p. 1) defines ICT as the present day equivalent of electricity in the industrial era, I realized that in Central
and Eastern Europe certain social groups -- parents, Baby Boomers-- are aware of the change, but they are simply not too eager to join the digital club.

Mr. Stipe Novak, a 57-year employee in the local shipyard, was quite proud that he could provide his children a computer at home. Even though he described himself as a “computer illiterate”, he knew exactly what he has at home: a Pentium-4 computer with the 17-inch monitor, a solution that will enable his kids to have a “good and fast machine” with a monitor that “does not provide a headache”. Like other parents in this research, Stipe was concerned about the future of his children, but he had no desire to start using new technologies:

I’m too old for that; that stuff is for the younger generations, not for the old folks like me, we do not need that fancy stuff.

Since he defined computer technologies as “fancy stuff”, I was interested to know what he thinks about other new technological innovations like cell-phones, but he immediately dismissed the comparison of these two gadgets, because, according to him, cell phones cannot be called luxury anymore.

I have a cell phone, my wife has a cell phone and both of my children have one. The cellular phone was a luxury ten years ago, but today I have a feeling that my life depends on it. It is a great, maybe sometimes annoying little thing in your pocket, but the benefits are obvious.

I told him that computers, as well as the Internet connections were considered luxury ten or fifteen years ago, but the situation has changed, and he did not agree. In his mind, computers are just overpriced toys used only for entertainment, especially at home.
I know that it is supposed to be a big thing; people are saying that they use computers for almost anything these days. I think it is just like an expensive television set. People don’t buy huge televisions to watch educational programming; they use it to watch movies and soap operas. It is the same thing with computers. You can easily use the phone to communicate with somebody; you don’t need all those shiny add-ons to communicate better.

Here, I realized two factors that are important for understanding the Digital Divide in the region. First, at the age of 57 he already considers himself as “too old” for learning the new skills; this is something that he did not learn at school and he either does not want to learn or he is not able to find the right vehicle to learn the new skills. More importantly, he has already set a pace for the rest of his life; he and his wife consider themselves successful members of the society; they have two kids at school, they have steady (although limited) income and they both recognized the present situation as real and livable. In my understanding, they reached the social level in the society they wanted to reach when they began a family; now they have a house, a car, kids at school and they do not have the need to change anything in their life. They also see the ICT as “something new that has to be learned” and they are resistant toward going through the learning process at their “old age”.

Their self-identification in the society is primarily paternal; they do not have to have a better life anymore, but their desire is to maximize possibilities for their children. Ms Andrea Novak followed her husband’s idea in that she also found herself as too old to learn something new. Being a janitor in the local hospital, she has declared to me that her life is not easy; she has to work hard to
support her family and any leisure activity that does not provide additional income simply does not interest her: “Anyway”, she noted, “I was never good with the technical stuff”

When she described herself as a non-technical person, I realized that her self-identification toward the new technologies is not identical to her husband’s. In addition, she identified herself through one of the old-fashioned stereotypes – women are in discrepancy with any technology and she, as an individual, does not have time and/or energy to prove in her own example that the stereotype is wrong. When I raised that issue, she simply said:

No, I am not saying that women are bad with technology, I am saying that our lives are harder; we have to have a steady full-time job and we have more obligations at home. Under these conditions, it is not fair to expect that we can just sit in front of the computer and play for hours.

In the statement above, she implied that computers were meant for play; a luxury item that provided entertainment and not as something that was vital and/or useful in her household. She was aware that in her life and in her family surroundings her role as a wife and as a mother would not change. Although she admits that it is nice to see that women are becoming more active and more independent (“I see many active self-sufficient women on TV”, she said) she also admitted to herself that this was the life she had and it was very unlikely that something radical will change.

I know that it is not impossible to learn how to use the Internet, and I think it is a very interesting thing. I see how excited my children are when they use it, but in real life people have jobs, and after that somebody has to do the laundry and somebody has to prepare meals and in our real life that somebody is me.
Both Stipe and Andrea agreed that it would be nice to learn the new skills, but in their busy schedules there was simply not enough time and willingness to commit to that. According to Stipe, there is a missing link between their generation and the new technologies.

We simply don't know what to do with it, and to tell you the truth, we don't have the need to go there yet.

It is possible to see the issue of self-initiative; they did not find a justification of putting an effort into computer education because they do not believe it will change their lives for the better. In their minds, the effort to go through the learning process was simply too costly and too time-consuming that they were not ready to allocate time and energy to cross the computer barrier.

The Novak parents were interesting because their opinions about the new technologies and the usage of a PC at home were also shared by other parents whom I interviewed during the summer of 2004. Several rhetorical phrases were repeated constantly when talking with people in their forties and fifties: “I am too old for that”, “You should ask my kids about that”, “I do not have time for computers” and “That stuff is for the younger generations (our children), I (we) can live without it.” The only exceptions to the rule were persons with office jobs where computers were used for business purposes. The main belief was that home PCs, apart from the educational purposes, were perceived as luxury items
related to children’s entertainment and nothing more. For them, computers make
sense in the school and offices and they are used only if absolutely necessary.

This opinion about computers might seem contradictory at first; at the
beginning of the interviews, all participants were proud to say that they do own one and it was clear that a computer as an object represents a symbol of status in their social circles. However, when the conversation moved from owning a computer to using it, most of the parents in their forties expressed their doubts about the practical usage of the computer equipment in the home environment. Interviewees who use PCs in their offices expressed different attitudes toward the computers in their offices and at home. They explained this from different angles: as an ICT-knowledge problem, as a software issue and finally as a language barrier.

When it comes to ICT knowledge, most interviewees 45 years old or older complained that they use PCs in their offices because they have to; Marin, a 49-year-old bank clerk said:

I am using a computer at work, but the logic of that system is automatic; [the monitor] is telling me what to do and I just put numbers when I am asked to do it. The computer my kids have at home is just for my children, I am not using it because it is completely different and, to be perfectly honest, I do not understand how it works.

When I asked if he felt that his age was the major obstacle for him, he said that his age might have been a factor, but he rejected the idea that was the major issue.

I learnt how to use the computer in the bank, it did not take a long time to master it. But that one is different, all the instructions and menus are in
Croatian; everything on my home computer is in English and, unlike my children, I do not understand English.

Oddly enough, this notion never came up first during the interviews and most of the respondents felt a little bit ashamed after the revelation of this “hidden secret” that they do not understand English. Matija, a 53-year-old pharmacist explained:

My children’s life practically happens in English, they learn English in their schools, they watch English-speaking shows on television, they listen to music in English and they use English when they use their computers. I learnt Italian and German when I went to school. At that time, all foreign languages were equally important and I did not put any thought into that. Today, English dominates everywhere and I feel I am out of my children’s lives when they listen their music and play their videogames.

His 49-year-old friend Ivan had a similar opinion; he could not understand why the computer services are not offered in Croatian or Slovenian.

There is a law in Croatia that all the instructions for the equipment you buy have to be translated into Croatian. When you buy a TV set, a refrigerator or the oven, all the manuals are in Croatian, but when it comes to computers English is the only language. I don't understand why.

The language barrier was not limited to the low-income families where parents had only high-school education. Because of the peculiarity of the Croatian and Slovenian educational system, most people learn foreign languages that were taught in their school districts and during higher education they simply continue with the same languages they started learning in their elementary schools. During the conversations with Matija and Ivan, it became evident that together with income and education and other well-known factors, there is one more element that contributes to the Digital Divide in the region – the knowledge
of the English language. As many authors noted (Simon, 2001; Pym, 2003; Vidal 2004), during the last ten to 15 years, the rise of computer technologies contributed to the rise and importance of the English language that became dominant in computer industry around the world. As Pym (2003) noted, “globalization can be seen as a consequence of technologies reducing the costs of communication … and this reduction has let the rise of English as the international “lingua franca.”

The generational gap between the computer and Internet users proved to be multi-layered. The simple notion of somebody’s age carried additional socio-cultural elements that have to be taken into the equation – the constant change of educational policies, the economic and financial changes in the region and, from a global perspective, the emergence of one dominant language that cannot be seen only as a foreign language, but as a dominant communication channel in today’s world. The rise of English as a dominant communication structure proved to be a knowledge power for the younger generations that adopted English quickly. At the same time, it became a burden for the older generations that cannot adopt an entirely new language in a short period of time.

**Conclusion**

In order to understand the Digital Divide issues in the region when it comes to Baby Boomers and younger generations, it is essential to analyze the problem from five different angles.
First, from the historical point of view, the Baby Boom generation in Istria is the generation that grew up after the Second World War. While this is true for all other Baby Boomers around the world, it is important to notice that the uncertainties of the post-war period and political situation in region settled only after 1954, almost ten years after the war ended, when the border agreement that separated the region between the West and the East was signed. As a result, significant migration of the population occurred and the socio-cultural and economic image of the region changed. The same generation experienced different development advances and possibilities in accordance with their newly established countries of residence. Sixty years later, those differences became visible in different economic development in Italy, Slovenia and Croatia and different standards of living that caused different approaches education and job opportunities. Interviews revealed that Baby Boomers are aware of their differences in the region, and that they compare their current personal situation with the neighborhood environment. That comparison was also visible in the realm of new technologies, where the rationale whether to pursue the road toward the ICTs differed in accordance with interviewees’ perception of ICT affordability and usefulness.

Second, education as a process has to be seen as a changing factor that determines generations’ understanding and attitudes toward the new social environments. This study analyzed the perceptions toward the ICTs and the interviews showed that parents who belong to the Baby Boom generation (or to older generations) have a different understanding of the ICTs from their children.
I was amazed to realize through ethnographic procedures that parents recognize and accept the fact that we live in a different era and that the education they received in the high school and/or university education processes is simply not enough for the current technological needs and demands. They seem to be aware that in order to understand, accept and, most importantly, benefit from new technological possibilities, they have to sit down and go through the educational process one more time. Respondents who chose not to go through that process seem to comprehend that they will not enjoy the benefits that are offered to other individuals in their surroundings (primarily their children). Other authors like Vandebosch et al. (2003) and Castells (2002) recognize the importance of education when it comes to Baby Boomers and ICTs. The point they present is that as this time of their lives, the economic inequalities and hardware that is out of reach because of high pricing is not the most important Digital Divide factor for the named generation. If they chose not to purchase a personal computer, it is usually because they decided not to have one. The real issue is the lack of knowledge and unwillingness to spend a considerable amount of time to learn how to use new technologies. Additionally, in the Istrian region, the Baby Boomers faced a two-level education barrier. Unlike in other English-speaking countries, the Istrian Baby Boomers had to accept the fact that in order to learn how to use ICTs, they also have to learn a new language.

Third, I identified parenting as the most successful vehicle that pushed the “older generations” toward the new technologies. It seemed that the children pushed the idea of the computer purchase that introduced these “new machines”
into their living rooms and everyday routine. Their sense of parenting and responsibility for their children’s education was the most successful force that propelled them forward. When it comes to parenting, the interviewees portrayed both the need and the obligation toward their children to provide the necessary tools needed for the ICTs.

Fourth, media literacy was identified as an issue during the interview processes. In Livingstone’s (2004) understanding, that media literacy requires access, analysis, evaluation and creation of messages across a variety of contexts, only the access to new technologies was identified as a first step for the media literacy challenge. The financial obstacles and the acquisitions of personal computers appeared to be an easier step than the actual usage of the ICTs in everyday situations. Additionally, Livingstone (2004) suggests that the renewed understanding of media literacy is necessary in the Digital Divide debate because “it encompasses the historically and culturally conditioned relationships among three processes: the symbolic and material representation of knowledge, culture and values, the diffusion of interpretative skills and abilities across a population and the institutional, especially, the state management of the power that access to and skilled use of knowledge brings to those who are literate” (p. 6). Under these premises, it is important to approach the Baby Boomers’ needs and address the Digital Divide issues that are causing their media literacy situations. In my opinion, the family circles and the intergenerational communications could be the easiest and the most effective means to integrate them into the new technologies world.
Fifth, language barriers, especially the possibility to comprehend English as a dominant language in the ICTs world, crystallized as an additional Digital Divide barrier specific to the region. The struggle to understand messages in English proved to be an obstacle that cannot be easily solved for two reasons: some of the interviewees did not show interest in learning another foreign language and, at the same time, English as a communication vehicle in their minds was set as the necessary tool for the ICT skills. As a result, a number of them just stopped using the ICTs, proving that the analysis, creation and evaluation of the messages is as important as access to new technologies when it comes to new media literacy.
5. YOUNG ADULTS AND ICT

Introduction

In this chapter, I continue the analysis of the ethnographic research in the Istrian region with the emphasis on young adults (specifically high school and university students’) and their approach toward new technologies. This chapter provides a general context and characterization of the high school and university students in Istria. Although, in the recent years and during my ethnographic research in the field, the market in the region was experiencing a boom in new technologies that included digital cable, satellite television programming and cellular phones. I focus primarily on personal computers and Internet usage and I try to articulate the current situation, obstacles and needs when it comes to computer usage.

This chapter covers three obstacles that the young adults included in this study perceived as the most important: aging hardware, slow Internet connections and current monopoly issues with the national telecom provider(s). The first two issues can be generally connected with Castells’ notions of the new Digital Divide thoughts that the question of access is not about having and not having the access, but having a narrowband or broadband access that determines and differentiates users according to their quality of Internet connection. The third issue integrates a new element in the Digital Divide debate that is closely connected with the development of telecommunications in Central
and Eastern Europe. It is in this region where for a long time state-owned national telecommunications providers held a monopoly that resulted in slow development of telecommunication infrastructure and an uncompetitive market dominated by an unreliable service and high-pricing policies.

According to Wallsten (2003), this issue became significant during the early 1990s when most of the Eastern European countries rushed with the privatization of the national telecommunication companies in order to provide additional income for the state budgets. It was assumed that private ownership would boost the competitive market and result in swift development of the telecommunications sector. “More recent thinking emphasizes establishing institutions conducive to promoting competition before privatization” (Wallsten 2003, p. 217). In Croatia, for example, the rapid sell-out of the national telecom resulted in prolonged monopoly and slow development of the sector.

During the ethnographic procedures, I interviewed 23 students in many different occasions that included their home environment, schools, computer rooms and coffee shops where socialization occurred. The students’ age was between 17 and 25 years and they were all high school or university students that included schools in Pula, Rijeka (Croatia), Koper (Slovenia) and Trieste (Italy). Apart from their temporary summer jobs, they were all unemployed and living with their parents or in university dormitories.

In accordance with their place of living and/or studying, the Internet users managed to identify and compare themselves with Internet users in their close neighborhoods in Croatia, Slovenia and Italy. As a result, they became aware of
the current market situations and their (un)competitiveness when it comes to broadband in the region. The most obvious difference was visible between Croatia and its monopolistic telecommunication market on one side, and Italy and Slovenia with their more advanced competitive telecommunication market on the other side.

Additionally, in this chapter, I describe some important differences when it comes to Internet usage in these three countries, I briefly describe and analyze the current formats of the Internet services and usage in the region and I discuss some different aspects of the computer and Internet markets. Finally, I integrate current market trends with opinions and perceptions of my respondents in relation with their specific new media needs and desires in order to get a full picture of the Digital Divide situation in the region.

**Hardware**

After his computer stopped working, 22-year-old student Ivan discovered that the only way to stay connected online was through busy computer rooms at his University or through pricey web coffee shops that charged for the service by hour.

I had an old computer that served me well for the last eight years and I managed to preserve it with little repairs throughout my high school and my college years, but now the game is over. Repairing this machine would be more expensive than buying a new one and those old components are not even sold anymore. This is it, from two weeks ago, I officially do not have a computer anymore.
In Ivan’s life, the computer was the most important piece of equipment he personally owned and that computer was something that, for the first time in his life, was truly his, something that he did not share with anybody else in his environment.

I remember when I was a kid, my six-year-older brother wanted a motorcycle. Our parents bought it for him when he was a senior in high school and I still remember how happy he was. It was something that he wished to have since the elementary school. I had the same feeling when I got a computer from our parents. Officially, it was a family computer because our parents bought it for both of us. But my brother never showed any interest, so after the first two weeks when everybody got tired from the “new toy in the house” it became mine. For the next eight years, I was the only one in the house who knew how to operate it and fix it. In the last three or four years, I was trying to convince my parents that we need a new computer, but they had other worries on their minds, buying a new computer when the old one is working and “just fine” was excessive to them.

The first and the most obvious difference between the older and younger computer users in the region was the satisfaction about the hardware and software they owned and/or used. While their parents and other members of the older generations took pride in equipment they bought and used for work and explained in detail how they obtained whatever they had, the younger users could not stop complaining about how bad and old-fashioned their computers were. A couple of interviewees even refused to show me the machine they had at home and some asked me not to talk about that “painful” issue anymore. This hardware dissatisfaction could in general be divided into three categories in accordance with their computer usage:

1. Computers were too old to do anything useful;
2. Computers were OK for school usage but not for any type of entertainment and
3. Computers were OK, but for the latest games an upgrade was needed.

Although the early Digital Divide thoughts (Katz and Aspden, 1997) point out that the digital gap between the users and non-users of digital technologies (specifically personal computers) could be narrowed down with the purchase of a second-hand equipment and government subsidies, it is important to notice that older computers do not have the ability to run the new and updated software and often they cannot be connected to the Internet. The most visible change evident from today’s perspective is the rise of the entertainment value of personal computers that has been identified as one of the most important driving forces in computer purchase. Facer et al. (2001) concluded that, when it comes to computer acquisition, young people are influenced by software design, family discourses, peer-group culture and gender identity that determine potential uses and benefits of personal computers (p. 199).

Today, in order to understand the Digital Divide issue, it is important to understand the users’ perception of what can he/she do with the equipment that he/she owns.

I wanted to learn how the students analyze their situation and which elements contribute to their perception of “old”, since it was obvious that many of the interviewed students shared a similar opinion about the “old state” of their
computers. After analyzing their answers, I concluded that the perception of old
is coming from three different sources.

First, unlike their parents, most of the young adults understood English
and for them it was not hard to receive and understand data that is coming from
outside, specifically from the foreign media (satellite television channels,
specialized web portals).

Second, the communication between them and their peers in neighboring
countries was on a higher level than their parents' communication with people
from other countries. That is because in this border area young people are more
likely to travel around the region because of their education and/or entertainment.

Third, peer pressure between students was also present and students felt
that they have to stay in range with their friends and university colleagues. If their
perception was that they have an old computer, their understanding was that
they are staying behind and uncompetitive. More importantly, they thought that
their education efforts might be less successful. The same was true for students
who said that they have new, updated computers. They said that the financial
investment into the new personal computers helps them with their education and
that they will stay more competitive and successful in the future job search.

Students who claimed that their computers were too old to do anything
were the individuals who purchased their computers in the 1990s and did not
make any upgrades or any other purchases. These individuals were in the
minority (only three of the interviewed students) but their approach to this issue
revealed some interesting thoughts. First of all, they felt like outsiders and they
felt that the Digital Divide theory was targeting their particular group. Matija, a 21-year-old student explained:

I have a personal computer at home, but to be more honest, I actually have a type-writing machine with the monitor. My parents bought it in 1995 when I was just a kid. At that time, it was a great machine and I remember that, as a kid, I was impressed because it was really something new for me, something that other children in the neighborhood did not have and I remember being really, really happy. My father showed me how to use different software and, most importantly for me at that time, how to play games that he installed for me. From today’s perspective, the machine we still have in the living room is useless, it cannot be connected to the Internet, it does not have a modem, the hard drive is just too small and the only games that can be played on that PC are the ones that can fit on a floppy disk. My father uses it for writing memos and some basic calculations, and that is about it.

Matija’s only Internet connection is at school where the computer rooms are usually crowded or used for classes or Internet coffee shops that are expensive and out of reach for student’s everybody usage. According to Matija, those Internet coffee shops are not intended for students:

This is really a curse when you live and study in the tourist resort. All our university exams are scheduled in June and July, which coincides with the start of the tourist season. All the prices, including the Internet coffee shops, are set in accordance with foreign tourists’ needs, primarily Austrians, Germans and Italians. There is no way I can afford ¿0 kunas (approximately $ 3.00) per hour to use a computer there.

Additional problem for Matija is that he had no income and cannot afford to buy the computer equipment he would like to have. His parents postponed the purchase of the new family computer because Matija’s sister joined the University out of town this year, so any major purchases for their parents was simply out of question at the moment.
From the theoretical point of view, it is important to notice that Matija does not belong to the Castells’ group of users that are Digitally Divided because of their slow connections and/or inability to use the new technologies. Matija, as a computer and Internet user, adopted all the necessary knowledge he needs in order to be a successful user, and his Internet connection in the school or library is, in his words, fast enough for “normal usage”. According to Bourdieu, his ability to use the new technologies is limited by his economic capital.

While the discussion about the Digital Divide in the United States or the United Kingdom usually describes young adults that lack necessary knowledge and efficient education because of their low income, and results in insufficient media literacy levels the situation in Istria differs in two distinguished ways. First, the awareness of possibilities that new technologies can offer is present, and users are aware of the potentials and possible competitiveness that new computer technologies can offer. Because of that they were aware of the real Digital Divide between them and people who can afford the purchase of a new computer. In other words, the lack of education that was visible as a dominant Digital Divide factor in their parents’ example was not the crucial factor of Digital Divide between the students’ population. The perception of the Digital Divide in Istria between young adults was determined by two factors: low (or non-existent) income and the relative ease of comparison between the neighboring countries.

The city of Pula does not have a university on its own. Although, the government plans to officially open the university before the academic year
2006/07 starts, the higher-education schools in Pula, officially belong to the University of Rijeka. The School of Economy and Tourism and the School of Philosophy operate as a part of University of Rijeka that is 100 km (approximately 65 miles) up north. The students that are enrolled in these two schools are predominately coming from the Istrian County and only a small percentage of students come from the other parts of Croatia.

Since this ethnographic study was performed during the summer months when all the universities in the region organize the final exams, both schools with surrounding cafeterias, public gardens and coffee shops were crowded with students. By using the snowball technique and in addition to students that I interviewed in their family circles, I managed to meet with 23 students from both schools.

My student sample reflected a more or less balanced mix of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, but when it comes to gender, the interviewed students were 65 percent male and 35 percent female. Almost all of them spoke both Croatian and Italian language and most of them were fluent in English as well. Additionally, most of them owned some sort of a personal computer and identified the Internet as a necessary tool for both their academic and future professional career. During the interview processes, I managed to schedule the interviews with single students and small groups and I observed their computer and Internet usage in both their homes and at the university.

When I started the interviews I was surprised that finances, although a very important factor, were not the only reason for not having new and updated
hardware that could serve current needs. Darko, a 20-year-old sophomore, said that he enjoys his old machine that still operates a DOS operating system and that he is virtually virus-free because his old-fashioned machine is not connected to the Internet and because “you cannot install on that machine anything anymore.” The last software he installed on that computer was a table calculator five years ago when he was in high school and he did not need anything else ever since. He is using a DOS-oriented version of Word Perfect for his school papers and he plays the “good old DOS games”. He admits that Internet is a great thing, but having it assumes that you have to communicate with everybody all the time:

Yes, I have an e-mail address, and yes, I am using it, but all my friends know what I think about it so they do not bother me with that. I check my e-mail at school once or twice a week, and it only concerns the school stuff, nothing private. If you want to talk to me, pick up a phone or even better, come and meet me.

During my research, Darko was the only individual I could find with this unique approach toward the new technologies, and I decided to include his comments to accentuate the fact that sometimes (although rarely) some people, regardless of age, culture or economic wealth, consciously decide to stay on the other side of the Digital Divide. People like Darko consciously decide not to be connected and it is their decision to stay that way for their own reasons. Castells (2002) notices this phenomenon as well. According to him, access alone does not solve the problem; it is a prerequisite for the digital mass communication, but at the end, the users shape their own personal notions of the new technologies
and their need to communicate with others. Caincross (1997) adds that those are two related fantasies that everyone has to have access and that Internet and other new technologies eliminate space. At the end, an individual makes those decisions, in accordance with his/her perceived needs.

The interviewees noted that when it comes to computer acquisitions and computer usage at home, they often disagreed with their parents because they did not have the same understanding about the possible use of the computer technologies at home.

Prensky (2001) identifies this difference between parents and young adults as a difference between “digital natives and digital immigrants”.

According to Prensky, “the young adults today have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Today’s average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV) computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives.” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

On the other side, the older generations did not grow up with digital equipment in their surroundings and today they have to find a way how to “immigrate into the new reality” and learn how to adapt. In Prensky’s words “As Digital immigrants learn – like all immigrants, some better than others – to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their "accent," that is, their foot in the past. The “digital immigrant accent” can be seen in such things
as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it. Today’s older folk were “socialized” differently from their kids, and are now in the process of learning a new language. And a language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain.” (Prensky, 2001, p. 2).

When it comes to hardware issues, a majority of students that identified their computers as both academic tools and entertainment vehicles, expressed their dissatisfaction with one major issue: the middle-range computers that their parents bought were not good enough for game-playing.

Other hardware issues like monitor resolution or the size of the hard disk and memory were barely mentioned, but the lack of the 3D video cards and graphic accelerators was first on their minds. According to their rationale, it was just out of their financial reach, a fact that separates them from the other game players in other countries. The whole gaming circle was out of reach; the hardware components are, in general, expensive. They are imported to Croatia and heavily taxed so they become even more expensive for the average Croatian gamer. Gaming software is also expensive and if you want to play the game online, there is an additional fee in the form of a monthly subscription.

These expenses seemed to have caused a real playing divide between the young players in the region; the ones who can afford the expensive hardware and software and play the current games easily. The second group of players can barely afford the hardware, but have the pirated version of current games.
that are hardly played online; and the third group of players consists of wannabe players that cannot afford anything current.

Sasa, a 19 year old student explained:

It is not like I am going to die if I do not play that game. My computer is just fine, I can do everything else with it, but I still have that feeling that I am excluded from a part of society; because of my hardware and financial limitations I cannot access a community of other wealthier players. I know that it is not supposed to be a big deal, but I still feel like an outcast and the criteria are very simple. You either have or have not the access to the online gaming community. Right now, I am out. I can read about those games and communities, I can make comments about those games, I can join the on-line forums, but I cannot join the community of players because I cannot financially afford it. It is a very sad feeling because the online gaming community is supposed to be huge, but for now it is without me.

I think it is important to take a step back and analyze the importance of game-playing within the Digital Divide context. While the bulk of literature underlines the Digital Divide issues around the world and emphasizes the importance of education and media literacy, it would be unwise not to take into consideration the importance of video gaming. According to Loges and Jung (2001), time spent on interactive computer activities that include game- playing incorporates into the unique feature of the internet users that interact to other people online. Additionally, they concluded that gaming opportunities should be expanded and made more suitable for seniors who tend to be excluded from research that focuses on gaming, because if given the opportunity computer usage, gaming and Internet connectedness could represent a turning point in closing the age gap between the Internet users" (Loges and Jung, 2001).
Of course, there was a communication problem between Sasa and his parents who believed they had spent more than enough money for the computer purchase and who believed that Sasa’s attitude toward the more expensive hardware components was excessive. Their rationale was that they had a parental obligation to provide Sasa with a computer that is good enough for school projects, and spending more money for a “fancy toy” was not necessary.

Sasa agreed to show me the computer room in the School of Economy and Tourism. It was late June and exams were in session. The classes ended some 20 days ago, so the access to the computer room was almost unlimited. The room was rather small, so it looked very crowded with approximately 20 computers inside and at least 30 to 35 students in it. A couple of students in the front row performed some statistical analysis, but to my surprise in the middle of exam period, most of the students in that computer room used public computers for their entertainment purposes. They either read online newspapers or watched personal photos and some of them even played games. “It is like this everyday”, Sasa explained. Students have free access here, the computers have been recently bought by the University so they are in good shape, and of course, the Internet is both free and much faster here. According to Sasa, “Dial-up connections at home are just too slow and too expensive.”

Tatjana, a 20-year-old sophomore who was sitting next to us, explained why she uses the university computers for her personal communication.

I come here everyday to check my e-mail and read some stuff online. I do not have a computer at home because I do not feel I need one. Last year I
had a summer job in a hotel and I was trying to save some money, but when the school started in October, I decided that I need a new car more than I need a computer. Sure, computer would be nice, but I live outside the city and the public transportation is horrible, so I felt that a car is more important. My parents contributed for the car as well, so I felt bad to ask them money for the computer at the same time. A computer will have to wait; it is not on my list of priorities right now.

After our trip to the University, Sasa explained that Tatjana’s opinion about the computer was not out of the ordinary. Some of his friends and even his girlfriend shared the same opinion about the computers. According to them, home personal computers represented a luxury item. It would be cool to have them, but they were not giving it a second thought. There were other luxury items on their priority lists that needed more attention; cars were one of those items, but new cellular phone models were also rating high, some of them pricy, but still more affordable and, in their opinion, more useful for communication than personal computers.

This definition of computers and new communication possibilities fits with Castells’ (2002) notion that when it comes to Digital Divide in today’s society there is a social distance between the users of the Internet and society in general. Even if today we have new technologies (in a form of faster and better personal computers) and new communication channels (Internet, cellular phones), that does not mean that everybody accepts those new tools.

Tatjana’s point of view reveals that some people are not experiencing Digital Divide issues because they do not have access to technologies or because they do not know how to use this machinery. Their social environment
did not accept those new tools as something necessary and the number of users is still not high enough for some individuals to feel excluded.

Tatjana, stated that she does not have computer technologies on her priority list, because she does not feel that she is missing anything important in her daily routine. She has no computer, her family members are not using one, and her personal friends are using other channels to communicate something to her. Beside school obligations, the Internet does not play an important role in her life because she and her social environment are still distant from the ICT possibilities.

On the other side, people like Matija and Sasa experienced the possibilities of ICTs in their lives, and they managed to compare their situation with people who have recently updated machines. For them, the divide was both technical and social; they lacked new technologies and because of that they felt their communication possibilities are suffering as well because of that.

From the development perspective, notions about personal computers and especially about the Internet here in the region are different from the more developed regions of the Western world. At this time, personal computers and the Internet are still not perceived as a new mass medium, so people do not have the same feeling about the new medium like they had for television or, more recently, cellular phones. In other words, the penetration of new technologies and users’ need to use the services that those new technologies offer did not reach the satisfactory level.
Although the education and the financial situation of the local population play a significant role in development, it is also important to notice that the general attitude toward this issue also plays a significant role in understanding of the local Digital Divide.

Another student I had an opportunity to meet through the snowball technique was Livio. Livio was a 23-year-old student originally from Pula who studied modern languages in Trieste (Italy). His online experience differed in accordance with the country where he dwelled at any particular time.

Livio is an ethnic Italian and a Croatian citizen. After finishing his Italian elementary and high school in Istria and after living nearly his whole life in a bilingual environment, he decided to take the opportunity and continue studying modern languages in a prestigious language school in Trieste. His computer experiences and everyday usage vividly depicts different ICT perception in the different parts of the region. In his own words, when he is in Trieste, he pretty much lives online twenty-four-seven.

My whole experience in Trieste is pretty much online. Everything I do in Italy is connected to the Internet in one way or the other. My class schedules at the University are published online, my grades are online, I submit my school work online, I register for the classes online and I pay my college bills online. My private life in Trieste is also organized on-line, via endless daily emails with my friends, instant messaging and nightly online chats. In addition, I started banking online and I have been paying all my bills via the Internet for a year. Italy took a while to go online, but once they started it, at least at the university I attend, it seems that everybody eagerly accepted it.

I was glad I had an opportunity to discuss Livio’s daily routine because of his weekly trips between Pula and Trieste. Since these two cities are only a two-
hours drive apart, Livio used that opportunity to study in Italy, and go back home to Croatia at least three to four times every month to meet and spend some time with his family and friends.

I was the one who took the real advantage when the Epsilon was open [the major highway in Istria that has a shape of the letter Y]. If you avoid the rush hours and heavy tourist migration toward the coast on Saturday mornings, you can be in Pula in less than two hours, it is fantastic.

He started noticing differences in ICT usage between Croatians and Italians approximately four to five months after he had relocated to Italy. During his first Christmas break when he came home to spend holidays with his family, he started arranging meetings with his friends around the town and, without thinking, he started emailing them. After two days, he realized that only a couple of his friends had replied to his messages. His other friends told him that it was Christmas, they had not gone to school and because of that they simply had not checked their e-mail accounts. Livio realized that he couldn't use e-mail as a communication vehicle in the same way he used it to communicate with his friends at the University of Trieste in Italy. His friends in Croatia perceived email accounts as school-related communication channel that is used only when the school is in session. Outside the school environment, cell phones and especially text messages were used for peer communication. Livio learned that, when it comes to ICTs, he lived in two different worlds and that he had to act accordingly.

He knew before going to Italy that the telecommunication systems in Croatia were not as advanced as the ones in Italy, but after he experienced fast and reliable Internet connections in Trieste, he understood the importance of the
divide between these two countries. According to Livio, the difference was not necessarily in technology but in users’ perception about what the technology can do. He concluded:

I was not surprised to see the difference in technological advancement; I expected that. I was surprised to realize that students in Italy use the Internet without thinking about it, while my friends in Croatia use the Internet only when they have to and only if they evaluate that the result is worth the money. They don't use the Internet for entertainment or personal communication but for work only.

Another thing that Livio did not appreciate in Pula was the speed of the Internet connections. Since his parents and his younger sister did not show interest for the Internet after Livio went to study in Trieste, they never switched to broadband connection because they did not find the cost acceptable. According to Livio, the dial-up connection cannot be identified as an Internet connection anymore; it is just too slow and too painful to do anything useful. “Whenever I have to do something online, like check my grades or submit a school paper from here, I just go to the Internet coffee shop. It costs money but it is more efficient than to wait at home for a web page to upload.”

**Internet Speed**

Of course, other Internet users shared the same thoughts about the speed as Livio. Speed was one of the most talked-about topics during this research among young adults. Everybody seemed to be very enthusiastic about it, and all interviewees seemed to have their own opinion about that issue.
In their minds, the Internet speed was a very important negative quality that influenced their perception of it. Interviewed students, who claimed that they belonged to a group of active Internet users because they use it daily, for both academic work and entertainment, agreed that the speed of their home connections determined what would be done on-line and what would not. For example, dial-up is fine for simple emailing and quick instant messaging, but downloads of school reading material requires something better than the dial-up connection. Additionally, extra time spent on a dial-up connection was not the only concern; financial issues were also important, because dial-up Internet connection is charged by minute - like phone calls - so long on-line activities were not recommended.

Mauro, a 20-year-old sophomore explained:

I remember when we started using Internet for the first time in our home. I asked my parents if they were OK with signing up for a dial-up connection, and since the national telecom provider offered a plan with no monthly fee, they were fine with it. Of course, since we took a plan with no monthly fee, the minutes spent online were more expensive than usual phone calls. I was only 15 at the time, so I did not bother with the online costs. At the end of the month the bill came and my parents were shocked, because the amount was somewhere around 700 kunas (approximately $130). Their usual monthly phone charge was around 100 kunas (app. $22) so you can imagine their surprise. I lost my Internet privileges for a month, and after that they forced me to count my online minutes and connect to the Internet after 10 pm when the charges were cheaper.

Since we had this conversation in the middle of the day in front of the school building after the exams, some of Mauro’s friends joined us eager to tell us what they thought about it. Adrian, his sophomore friend, added:
You know what is really sad? I remember that story, because a similar incident happened in my house as well, but that had happened seven years ago. The world has moved on but here nothing has changed. The telecom company charges the same amount per minute, and the connection is as fast as it was seven years ago. Absolutely everything is the same. It may be even worse, because there are more Internet users today, so if you are lucky enough to live in a part of the town that has old phone wires, the situation is even worse.

This feeling of desperation quickly became the topic of the day. Everybody around us wanted to share their own "slow and expensive" moments with the Internet provider. Bourdieu (1992) analyzes a similar framework in his notions about the habitus and literacy. Habitus, as understood by Bourdieu, is a set of dispositions that are learned over one's life and it generates perceptions and guides practices. With that in mind, it is clear that the Internet habitus was defined by these young people as a set of expensive tools that are not available to them for two reasons. They cannot control the costs and, so far, their personal experience was unsatisfactory because of the slow speed and unreliability of the service.

According to them, the Internet cannot be used like other media, because the parameters and outside control (from the Internet provider) differ. For example, there is no additional financial cost for watching a television program for two more hours and there is no difference if a daily newspaper has 50 or 80 pages, the costs and the consumption of the media material are controlled by the reader/watcher. In their understanding of the Internet, the current predispositions prevent them from practicing and perceiving the Internet as a new mass medium.
Similarly, according to Bourdieu (1992), literacy is defined through capital, habitus and fields in addition to geographical and local implications. In that sense, the local implications in Istria assume the rationales of the economic capital that is set through the market situation in the region and current (under)development of the new media. In addition, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) suggest that the construction of media literacy is not freely negotiated; it has to be understood through the power relationships that shape the structures of learning and availability of the new possibilities. In this case, the relationships between the Internet providers and the Internet users and current market situation shaped the social environment for learning.

In his updated overview of the Digital Divide theory, Castells (2002) points out that this difference between narrowband and broadband users represents the future most important issue of the Digital Divide globally. While in the past the most obvious difference was between having and not having access to the new technologies and the Internet, today the difference lies on a quality of the Internet connection. Again, like in the past, the difference is most visible when West and East are compared. In more developed Western countries, the progression of technology and the market competition resulted in better quality of the Internet service, while in the East, users had to face technological stagnation and market monopolies.

The telecommunication market changes in Central and Eastern Europe were named “telestroika” by Pekka Tarajanen, the secretary general of the International Telecommunications Union, who wanted to emphasize the positive
change of the telecommunication situation in the CEE region. (Langel, 2000, p. 2) Still, the changes did not come overnight and the economic reality of the CEE countries forced governments to maintain the monopoly system in telecommunication sectors in order to attract the badly needed fresh capital from the West. Under these circumstances, the technology changed and new possibilities were introduced, but the pricing still remained uncompetitive and unaffordable for the majority of the population.

Ironically, students who expressed their dissatisfaction with the Internet service provided to them did not hate the Internet itself as a new medium, they liked the possibilities it offers. They were aware of and unhappy about the difference between their access possibilities and other Internet users, especially form the neighboring countries. Livio explained it as two different services.

The Internet service I use in Italy is an entirely different world, a completely different product that serves different needs. When the Internet service is fast, reliable and, most importantly, affordable it is truly a mass medium and I can see the connection between Internet and other media, like television or radio. But here, the Internet does not have the same purpose. In Croatia, the Internet service is just an updated version of the Office software package. Here, the dial-up Internet makes sense only when you are writing something; it is useless for receiving a large amount of data. In my mind, the broadband and the dial-up internet are two different services.

Desirable computer and Internet usage for these students included a well-equipped “not too old” machine and an Internet connection that is comparable to other countries. It seemed that these two themes dominated their computer and Internet experience. Contrary to their parents who showed a lack of education and understanding of new media environment in general, the young adults were
fully aware of the new possibilities and advantages that the new technologies have to offer. Their main obstacle was not the knowledge but the lack of quality access to ICTs.

Internet Connectivity

During the second half of 2004, the leading Internet provider in Croatia started offering ADSL service on a commercial national level. For a long period, the service was in its “testing phase”, available only to randomly chosen subscribers mainly in the areas around the capital. The Internet community that includes universities, businesses and private citizens were waiting in anticipation for the service to start running.

The national telecom provider in Croatia – Hrvatski Telekom (Croatian Telecom – T-HT), owned by the Deutsche Telecom (German Telecom, T-Com) started offering the ADSL service on a commercial basis at the end of 2004. On both national and local levels, the move was praised as an important step forward, since T-HT was the only business subject in the country that could offer a broadband service on a national level. The cable companies in Central and Eastern Europe do not have the size and commercial strength to offer a similar service like in other more developed parts of the world, so the Internet infrastructure is pretty much in the hands of the national telephone companies.

The fact that makes Croatian telecommunication market unique and commercially different from other countries in the neighborhood is the monopoly
that the national provider has when it comes to landline telephones. The Croatian
government was successful in developing a competitive market in the area of
mobile telephony, but the sale of 51% of the Croatian Telecom to the German
government-owned Deutsche Telecom required a moratorium on allowing
competitors to enter the landline phone market until 2005. (Croatian

In line with the monopolistic power, the Croatian Telecom introduced the
broadband internet service and pricing that reflected the uncompetitive market.
The first and the most striking difference (when compared to other ADSL
services in the neighboring countries) was that the Croatian Telecom did not offer
a flat rate (un-metered service) for its new ADSL service. Instead, it offered a
metered service and pricing that allowed the company to charge broadband
Internet users in accordance with their monthly amount of downloaded and
uploaded data. The first commercial ADSL service that was introduced, included
340/120 kbit/s download/upload speed and 512 MB of traffic for 99,00 kunas
(app. $18) and an additional charge of 20,00 kunas (app. $3.35) for every
additional 512 MB of monthly traffic.

According to T-HT press release from 2004 (www.t-com.hr) the company
refused to provide the service for a nominal flat fee because, according to the
release, that type of business was not profitable and from the business
perspective it was not leading anywhere. After almost a year, the company
agreed to offer better Internet service packages and the desirable flat rate that
ranged between 378 kunas (app. $6,500) for the 512/128 kbit/s package to 668,00 kunas (app. $115,000) for the 2048/256 kbit/s package.

As expected, many Internet users in Croatia struggled to switch from narrowband to broadband under these financial conditions and, according to government analysis, it took more than a year to reach 100,000 broadband users in Croatia.

The researchers of the Digital Divide issues concluded that the introduction of broadband Internet services has huge potential in all areas, specifically in education and business, because it becomes a cheap and fast way to communicate with other users and share large amounts of data. According to Prieger (2003), “a new wave of Internet accessibility, the availability of broadband, high-speed access, has the potential to be as revolutionary as the first wave. Broadband access, usually through Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) or cable modem technology for residences and leased lines for businesses, allows users to send and receive enormous quantities of data, audio, video and voice communication and relaxes the constraints of the “World Wide Wait” (p. 346).

During my research, I was interested in finding out how broadband users experience this new technology and how they put it to use. I discovered that there are two groups of users. The first group of possible users was a group that included students who were actively thinking about the ADSL service, but their financial situation prevented them to become broadband subscribers. The second group included students who managed to afford the new service and whom were eager to share their new broadband experience.
Castells (2002) in his study identified this new relationship between narrowband and broadband users as a new gap that causes a new level of the Digital Divide. The Divide is becoming less and less a quantitative question that is determined between users and non-users. Today it is shifting toward the more qualitative realm that determines the quality of the connection and divides the users between the dial-up slow-speed connections and ADSL or cable internet users that experience faster and a better quality service.

Toni was a 20-year-old sophomore who switched to the ADSL service six months ago. Toni and his parents lived in an upscale neighborhood and their lifestyle reflected the financial stability of the upper middle class. Toni’s room was full of electronic gadgets that included a TV set, DVD player, stereo, iPod, and two computer sets. He explained that he has recently purchased a new computer and now he enjoys playing with the new equipment and components. His goal was to build on his own a new machine from all the components that seemed to be everywhere around his room.

I was so tired of dial-up. When I switched to the ADSL service, I realized that it is 2005 and the dial-up technology is the thing of the past. It was OK seven or ten years ago when the web pages were mostly textual and the only purpose of the Internet connection was your email account. Things are different today, the Internet in the rest of the world represents new form of seeing and understanding the world. We seem to be the only ones who are stuck in the 1990s with no possibility to more forward.

He enthusiastically spoke about the broadband connection, but after a short optimistic introduction, he turned to a more pessimistic overview. In his opinion, the service provided by the T-HT is not really a broadband connection,
because 340/128 kbps/s can not be identified as a faster internet experience. His biggest disappointment with the major Croatian Internet provider was in fact that just an hour away, in Slovenia, the Internet users could enjoy "a five times faster and three times cheaper" service. The problem with the Digital Divide here was not in access or missed opportunities of staying connected. The Digital Divide was visible in comparison with the neighbors who lived in close proximity and who could enjoy a more favorable service.

I really do not understand the fact that T-HT refuses to offer a more friendly service because it is not profitable. Our country is twice as big as Slovenia, and yet, somehow, they manage to make profit with faster connections and lower prices. It is a scam and everybody knows it. They [T-HT] are really enjoying their little monopoly game here.

Toni was not alone in his regional Internet overview. Other students expressed their anger toward three issues: Croatian government sold the national telecom company to the German government, the same (German) company offers the same service under different quality conditions and pricing in Germany and Croatia and, finally, they felt that other Internet users, outside Croatian borders enjoy a better service and cheaper prices. The most painful evidence was the example from Slovenia where the national telecom provider “Telekom Slovenia” stayed in the hands of the Slovenian government and it was not sold to the bigger telecommunication corporation.

Toni’s friend Marko, a 24-year-old senior who hoped to graduate in the next two to three months, could not believe the situation.
It is like a nightmare; I am trying to graduate and right now I actually depend on the Internet service. The school library is not stocked well, so my only reliable source for the completion of my studies is the Internet. When I first saw the prices I could not believe my eyes. The idea to charge by megabyte is simply vicious. I know that the government is talking about the development and more competitive markets, but that is not true. The development cannot happen if the basic service, like the Internet, are out of hands for the majority of the student population. This is just an old-fashioned old-school-communist monopolistic rip-off.

Beside anger, Marko also felt jealousy, as, in his own worlds, “just half an hour up north” in Slovenia, this has never been an issue, because they never sold their national telecom company to foreigners.

Laura, his graduate fellow, was also disappointed with the broadband service offerings and her disappointment resulted in two things: she did not subscribe to any Internet service and she did not plan to buy a new computer in the short term. I asked her how she managed to study without the Internet connection, and she said that one has to get used to the fact that some things are just out of one’s hands.

I planned to have the Internet connection at home, and I could really benefit from having one. For a short period, I considered having just a dial-up connection, but then I realized that it is not usable anymore. Some of my friends subscribed to the ADSL service, but I find it too expensive. I know I would exceed the 512 MB limit, and they [the telecom company] would definitely charge me extra every month. I don’t have a job and I feel bad asking my parents to pay for that since they already pay most of my bills.

By analyzing their responses, it is clear that the interviewed students experience the broadband divide. It is interesting to see from their stories that
they are aware of the Divide and the lack of services. They seem to have understood what the potentials of the broadband connections were and they all agreed that the internet connection it was a necessity. However, they were also aware of the obstacles that prevented them from connected.

The Croatian students in this case differed from other Internet users in three ways: their situation could not be characterized as a media literacy issue because they knew how to use new technologies and how to apply them into their everyday activities. They were also aware of different quality of services in their schools and libraries and their homes; they were using both broadband and narrowband connections at the same time. They also had an idea about how the service should look like and how much it should cost, based on their knowledge from the surrounding countries. When it comes to Internet connectivity, the students in the region knew exactly what they wanted, but, because of the market situation and the (un)competitiveness, they were unable to reach the desired levels of connectivity.

Anti-German Feelings

One of the most interesting details that came up during this ethnographic research was the anti-German sentiments that were evident when students talked about issues regarding telecommunications. As mentioned before, Deutsche Telecom bought 51% of the Croatian Telecom and effectively became the major player in the telecommunication sector in Croatia.
Since Deutsche Telecom controls all landline telephone connections, that meant it controlled the spread of broadband internet in Croatia, too. There are some other local Internet providers in the region as well, but since they do not own or control telephone landlines, they are in business of re-selling the national provider’s service.

I first realized that there is an anti-German feeling in this context in Istria when Kreso, a 20-year-old sophomore, expressed his feeling about the Croatian Telecom (HT).

I hate them. Whenever Hitler Telecom (HT) offers a new service, you can be sure that you are going to lose a lot of money. It is not only the Internet. They cancelled local and long-distance calls in Croatia, so now we all pay long-distance charges, even when you call your mother across the street. Who else in the world has a service like this? I bet they did not do anything like that in Germany, but they rule here. Whatever they say you have to listen to, because they are the only ones. It is a case study of how monopoly works.

I asked him whether he thinks that naming a company after Hitler is a little bit too harsh, but he disagreed.

No, I am being honest. At first it was a joke, but now everybody calls HT a Hitler Telecom and I don’t feel embarrassed about it. They deserve it, because they are mean to their costumers. When I bought a cell phone I went to a different provider. The price and the quality of service was pretty much the same, but I don’t want to give them [HT] more money. They are already taking too much money from my family for the landline phone and the Internet.

The anti-corporation feelings are not new in the world of marketing and public relations today. The literature and the abundant academic research offer many causes of this phenomenon. In the economic and marketing sphere, it is often understood as a part of the globalization issues that shape business
perspectives in today’s world. According to Bhagwati (2004), “Economic globalization constitutes integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment by corporations and multinationals … and often, those activities among the critiques of the globalization processes translate into the arguments that economic globalization is the cause of several social ills today, such as poverty in poor countries and deterioration of the environment worldwide.” (p.439).

People often try to prove their point of view by actively ignoring goods and/or services from companies that are disliked for different reasons, but in this example, for some reason, the feelings were not reserved only for Deutsche Telecom as the anger went beyond the corporate headquarters and toward the German government that owns the corporation.

According to interviewed students, they were frustrated because they were unable to do anything to change their personal attitude toward the Internet. Although they all perceived the Internet as an important communication vehicle and they all wanted to use the service like their Slovenian and Italian peers, the unfavorable financial terms forced them to limit their internet activities.

It is not like we don’t know what Internet is. We know perfectly well how awesome and useful it is, especially in an educational environment. Here, we have this awkward situation where we learn how to use it and we implement it in our school activities, but in our home environment it is like a forbidden fruit. You can have a peanut or two, you know how good it is, but you have to pay extra for the third one.
Obviously, Kreso’s frustration with the Internet was not the lack of knowledge and the inability to use the technologies. He was frustrated because he thought that he was being ripped off by a corporation whose insensitivity toward local markets and uncompetitive pricing prevented him from being digitally equal to the rest of the connected world. Vera, his college friend with whom he shared a table in the computer room, shared his feelings.

When it comes to telecommunications, particularly the Internet, I have a feeling we are being treated like a German colony here. It is just not fair, and when the bill comes at the end of the month you feel powerless because there is nothing you can do. As a student you need the connection so you have no choice, you have to play by their rules. Last week I went to pay my bill and when I came back I checked the price list in the German market. Can you imagine the frustration when I saw that Germans do not have a metered service and that their flat rate is 35 euros per month? I don’t understand, is there a biological difference between Croatian and German internet users?

I found out that there are two reasons for this anti-German feeling in the telecommunication sector. First, costumers in Croatia, especially the younger university educated students, were aware that Deutsche Telecom is owned by the German government and they knew that the same service had better quality and lower prices in Germany. Most of the interviewees felt that the German government was responsible for their Digital Divide situation, and they felt disappointed because the Croatian government did not take any action to change the situation.

“It is a classic globalization story” Kreso concluded. “They are the biggest country and the biggest telecom provider in Europe, and we are one small
country that other people find difficult to find on the map. The Croatian government thought they had made a good deal when they sold their stake in the company, but we all have to pay the price now. They did not come here for the development purposes; they came here to maximize their profits and that is exactly what they are doing.”

This anti-German feeling was not reserved only for Croatia. Slovenian students were also very aware of the situation in Croatia and they also feared that their current situation might change if Deutsche Telecom came to the Slovenian market. Anica, a geology student from Koper (Slovenia) who came to visit some of her friends in Pula, noticed that there was a big difference between her and her Croatian friends.

I was online with my friend yesterday in her apartment. We were in her room and I told her about new songs I like. I showed her where she can download them, but she told me that she almost reached the download limit for this month and she did not want to pay extra for a new download package. I totally forgot that users in Croatia pay for the Internet in that way. It is ridiculous; I hope that nobody will do something like that in Slovenia. Deutsche Telecom held talks with the Slovenian government, but I don’t think it will be sold to Germans. We can see what they did in Croatia.

Other students evaluated their options when it comes to Croatian Telecom and as an act of revolt they made a decision not to use the Telecom’s cellular phone service (T-Mobile). Although the situation on the cell-phone market is also limited when it comes to competition, at least the national telecom does not have a monopoly. Vera and Mladen, both freshmen, admitted that they chose the Vip-
net service (owned by the Austrian Mobilcom company) because they did not want to support the “Germans”. Mladen stated:

Of course nothing is for free, I have to pay the cellular-phone service, and I have two options here in Croatia. I can use the service provided by the Germans or I can use the service provided by the Austrians. I am perfectly aware that the pricing is almost identical and that most probably they have a deal between each other, but I feel better when I know that the money is not going to T-Mobile.

From the Digital Divide perspective it is important to notice two important elements. First, the more favorable Internet services and the closure of the gap between the narrowband and broadband Internet users can hardly happen without a competitive telecommunication market. Similarly to other goods and services, the competition in the market is usually the driving force that connects supply and demand in a point that allows future development. With the monopoly situation, it is hard to imagine a more favorable situation in the market because the only provider does not see the economic rationale for additional costs that could expand the market and attract more customers with lower pricing policy.

Second, having an Internet connection does not automatically mean that the gap is closed. Terms and conditions given by an Internet service provider influence the Digital Divide situation from market to market, and, in a case where the service provider has a monopoly power, the image of the Internet connectivity can be distorted, because the users are not likely to use the medium if the usage becomes a financial burden.
Conclusion

The “digital natives” in Istria showed that they understood and used the new technologies, specifically the Internet, in a much different way from the Istrian “digital immigrants”. The first and the most obvious difference between the parents and the young adult was in the perception of what new technologies mean to them and which purpose they serve. While parents expressed their concerns with the equipment purchase and stressed the importance of “owning a computer”, the student were more concerned about the actual usage and communication possibilities that new technologies can provide. Although their thoughts and concerns can be seen as similar, it is important to underline the difference between the ownership and the actual usage of personal computers. The “digital immigrants” in Istria treated the computers like all other technological devices; the “digital natives” understood the meaning of new possibilities and expressed their concerns when those possibilities were limited.

Second, the ethnographic procedures showed that there is a divide that cannot be described as absolute because the users were not differentiated as users and non-users. Instead, there are gradual differences between the users that shape the Digital Divide picture in the region. Those differences include the users’ attitude toward the current market situation and their ability to shape their Internet usage in accordance with their actual needs and their financial strength. Those gradual differences were hardly visible among students, because they did not lack the knowledge when it came to new technologies and, in a way, they were the integral part of their educational and entertainment experiences. On the
other hand, those “gradual differences” were very visible when the generations were compared. Unlike their parents, the young adults did not show any fear and anxiety toward the computers and the Internet because they formed a natural part of their lives. Instead, they felt discomfort when they were prevented from using the equipment and the services that they wanted to integrate into their everyday activities.

They identified three most important reasons that prevented them to be digitally equal to the Internet users in Slovenia and Italy and those were the prohibitively expensive hardware prices, the uncompetitive telecommunication market in Croatia and the monopolistic power of the national telecom provider. In their opinion, the Digital Divide situation could change only if the situation in society changes, because the factors that they named were beyond their reach.

According to Van Dijk (2003), “the fundamental task of future society will be to prevent structural inequalities in the skill and usage of ICTs from becoming more intense. Inequalities become structural when they solidify, that is, when positions people occupy in society, in social networks and in media networks … become lasting and determine to a large degree whether they have any influence on decisions made in several fields of society” (p. 324). The analysis of the interviewees’ answers shows that the students already perceive themselves and digitally unequal when compared to their surroundings and they already feel that they are staying behind, not because of them, but because of the rigid structure of the market to which they belong.
It is also evident that the phenomenon of the Digital Divide in Istria is narrowing and widening at the same time. Since it is truly a complex issue, it is necessary to observe it from many different angles and those different views of the issue reveal both the negative and the positive perspectives. From the positive perspective, the knowledge gap is closing and people (especially the young adults) seem to perceive the importance of ICTs in their working and home environments. On the other side, the costs of the Internet connection are causing a new divide between users who can afford the service and users who have to stay offline because they cannot afford the connection.

Today, everyday advancement in technology is evident, the hardware is becoming cheaper every day and the software applications are more user-friendly. Additionally, the level of computer knowledge is increasing and the old-fashioned elements that formed the Digital Divide thought ten to twelve years ago are slowly disappearing. Unfortunately, in the less-developed parts of the world, the effort to overcome those “old obstacles” is not enough, because the market situation and uncompetitive economies are increasingly becoming a new reason for the Digital Divide.
6. CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter, I suggest some considerations for the local (regional) and global understanding of the Digital Divide and possible future implications of this issue in the Istrian region. Additionally, I try to underline some possible challenges and opportunities for the future research of the ICT and Digital Divide in the mass-communication field. Since this is a qualitative study, I also try to emphasize the role of the ethnographic methods in the field and give an overview of the accomplished goals for this study.

Theoretical Perspectives

Fink and Kenny (2003) note that “worrying about the Digital Divide has remained a popular preoccupation of academics, NGOs, development policy makers and G-8 summiteers.” (p. 1) According to them, the main problem of the Divide is “the spread” of ICTs in developed countries that is leaving the developing world behind, with potentially cataclysmic consequences in terms of development prospects.” (p. 1) Although I believe that defining the issue as being “cataclysmic” cannot be understood in absolute terms, their approach to the Digital Divide clearly explains the possible dangers that this issue may pose in the future and the need to address the problems today.

Those problems have to be approached from many different angles because theories about the digital divide have evolved and only an
interdisciplinary overview of the current conditions could lead to a true understanding of the actual situation in the field.

Several Digital Divide theorists like Van Zoonen (2002), and Denze and Paulussen (2002) argue that in order to understand the multiple phenomena of ICT, we have to articulate the multidimensional fields in which the ICT users live and work. As shown in Chapter 4 and 5, computer and Internet users shape their attitude toward the ICT in accordance with their roles and experiences within a society. To better understand their relationship toward new technologies, I argue that it is crucial to recognize their environment, cultural understanding and expectations."

The quantitative approach used by Norris (2002) and Mossberger (2003) explains the Digital Divide phenomenon from a global perspective and gives us a dichotomous understanding of the issue. This approach is important because it gives us a basic understanding of the main problem: people around the world do or do not use the ICT. With the progression of the Digital Divide thinking, it became evident that a qualitative approach is needed because the main question was not how many people use or do not use the new technologies anymore, but why. In order to find out why there is a difference between computer and Internet users, the Digital Divide theory had to evolve into a multi-disciplinary field that includes research done by historians, psychologists, economists, marketers and others.
Digital Divide Theories and Bourdieu

By including Bourdieu’s perspective into the Digital Divide debate, I offer an overview that does not take into consideration just one single user, but a community of real and potential users that communicate with each other and influence each other’s behavior and attitude toward new technologies. By including fields, habitus and capital with the addition of literacy (and especially media literacy), I accentuate the importance of regional environment in the Digital Divide equation.

Cultural capital proves to be an important factor in the Digital Divide definition because it determines people’s understanding and approach toward the development changes. In Chapter 4, I explained that people from different countries, with different income and different levels of accessibility to new technologies, will share a similar approach toward the new technologies because they share a similar cultural capital. It became evident that levels of income and standard of living that are usually underlined as important differences between developed and developing countries are not necessarily the major differentiating factors when it comes to Digital Divide.

By using Bourdieu’s platform it is possible to understand better the role of the information technologies in today’s societies and the perception of those technologies can be analyzed through field, habitus, cultural, social and economic capital where field represents expectations, aspirations and attitudes toward technology. In this research I showed that field changes in accordance with people perception about how useful and affordable the new technologies are.
Croatian users perceived ICTs as a form of luxury and they defined the usage as something that can be affordable only to people who are willing to pay extra to stay online and connected. On the other side, Slovenians and Italians had different expectations, aspirations and attitudes toward the ICTs because in their markets, those were fully affordable to everybody. In those circumstances the definition of the field differed and it represented a divide between Italian, Slovenian and Croatian users.

Habitus as a part of the Digital Divide theory was described by Kvasny and Keil as “an internalized strategy-generating framework that bounds thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions; choices are bounded by opportunities and constraints that make some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable.” (2002). Mossberger (2001) adds that the definition of Digital Divide should include socio-cultural conditions and levels of democracy because these elements in their essence form one’s ability to use the new communication technologies in everyday life. It is important to notice that this internalized framework that forms one’s perceptions and actions shapes Digital Divide situation in Istria.

First, the socio-cultural conditions are different in Italy, Slovenia and Croatia and because of that the social and cultural attitudes toward the new technologies are shaped in accordance with users’ current environment. If the opportunities are different (and they are) then the actions and results differ accordingly. In this example, Croatian Internet users have to take different
actions in order to be online and stay online and those actions shape their ICT habitus.

As I mentioned before, Bourdieu suggests that social power is not determined by only one variable. It is a result of many interconnected variables that result in a particular literate practice. This notion is visible in less developed parts of the world where progress tends to be slower than in the more developed West. Central and Eastern European regions are a good example of that and the differences are more visible because of the proximity of the more developed Western Europe.

Similarly, it is important to notice that globalization, as an economic and cultural force in today’s environment, redefines the Digital Divide in two ways. First, the notion of geography becomes less important because new technologies offer better and rapid communication possibilities. Second, these new possibilities are helping users to see what happens in other parts of the world, so now they are able to evaluate their current position in the field and act accordingly.

From a theoretical point of view, it is also important to realize that the gap between the users is not going to close in the near future. Significant steps forward in that field have been made in different regions around the world, including educational efforts in using new technologies. Whilst the developed countries are experiencing a strong rise in telecommunication sectors, in the developing parts of the world, similar progress is unlikely to happen soon
(increasing speeds of the Internet connections, competitive markets, more investment in the communications companies).

For example, the differences between Western, Central and Eastern Europe are narrowing down in terms of perception and awareness of how important new technologies are, but the differences in market opportunities, competitiveness and governments' attitudes toward the issue are generating a new gap for the future.

Castells' (2002) notions about the new Digital Divide between broadband users who enjoy faster and more reliable Internet connections and narrowband users who connect to the Internet by using slow dial-up connections become increasingly more relevant from today's perspective. I argue that the difference between broadband and narrowband users is not determined only by quality and speed of the connection, but also by financial terms under which the new services are offered. Those financial terms became the biggest obstacle between Italian, Slovenian and Croatian users where the availability of the service was not questionable but the pricing was. Different pricing options in this case caused a divide between Italian, Slovenian and Croatian users and formed different perceptions about the same service. In Italy and Slovenia, broadband Internet evolved into a new and powerful medium, while in Croatia, it represents a form of luxury that is not available to everybody.
Digital Immigrants

As Prensky (2001) stated, the generational gap between the new technologies’ users can be understood as a gap between “digital immigrants” who have to acquire new knowledge and new skills before they become users and the younger generations, or “digital natives”, who have been growing up surrounded by new technologies.

When it comes to “digital immigrants” in the Istrian region, I notice that the majority of them, regardless of country of origin, struggle when it comes to active computer and Internet usage. Their “immigrant accent” (Prensky, 2001) was visible in a form of anxiety and uneasiness when they were asked to “digitally perform”.

The most noticeable intergenerational difference was the level of education. Interviews with parents revealed that they were aware that they lacked the necessary education needed for the ICT usage, but at the same time they were not willing to spend time and money to acquire new knowledge. According to Bourdieu’s notion of literacy, the element that they were missing was the feeling of a worthy exchange. In other words, parents in this study found it difficult to put together the benefits of the acquired knowledge with the effort that was needed to gain the knowledge.

I found that the only vehicle that forced the Baby Boomers to use new technologies was their social role of parenting. Parents acknowledged that ICTs were something important in their children’s future and they seemed to be aware that ICTs and education were closely related.
An important difference between Baby Boomers in Istria and Baby Boomers in the West (especially in the United States) was the perception of being old, which ultimately influenced the perception of ICTs. It seems that Baby Boomers in Istria begin to perceive themselves as older as soon as their children complete the elementary school education. While Riggs et al. (2001) accentuates the role of ICTs in the life of the elderly population in the United States - where the market understands and supplies the needs of Baby Boomers - the situation in Istria is different.

The phenomenon of perceiving oneself as old can be analyzed from many different aspects. From the economic point of view, the life in moderately developed regions differs from the more advanced Western countries. Parents and children live together for a longer period of time, income is limited, and every major purchase is carefully evaluated. While Baby Boomers in the United States enjoy additional income and more independent life once the kids leave for college, Baby Boomers in Istria continue to work and financially support the whole family, that often includes their children’s spouses and grandchildren.

Under these conditions, the market as a connection between the younger and the elderly population does not recognize Baby Boomers in Istria. Instead, they are perceived as a part of the elderly population that does not show interest for additional education and/or purchase of additional goods. Since ICT items in the region are perceived as luxury items (with cell-phones being the only exception), Baby Boomers or “Digital Immigrants” do not show the same level of
interest toward the new technologies like members of their generation living in the more developed West.

In addition, Baby Boomers in Istria struggle with the English language, which has been identified as a major obstacle in ICT usage. This problem could be analyzed through three different lenses: as a cultural-capital question, as a result of globalization, and as a media literacy issue.

First, the English language represents a form of cultural capital that requires educational training and, in some cases, can represent a form of prestigious capital, especially in groups where the knowledge of English is limited. Unlike in the United States or any other English-speaking country, the lack of specific foreign language literacy represents an additional gap that forms the Digital Divide because most of today’s available software, especially for home use, is made for English-speaking users.

Second, the globalization forces that regulate today’s business environment require the knowledge of the English language, which already became the official business language worldwide. As a result, the non-English-speaking Baby Boomers in Istria become less competitive in the working environment on two levels: they do not speak the required language and consequently, they struggle with the ICT usage because it is presented in a language they do not understand.

Third, if we take Livingstone’s (2004) definition of media literacy that requires the possibility to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts, it is easy to understand how important it is to recognize
specific educational needs of the “Digital Immigrants” and find a way to successfully educate them. I found that the family environment and the sense of parental duties, when it comes to children’s education, represent a very successful vehicle that forces Baby Boomers to educate themselves in order to enjoy the new environment with their family members.

Digital Natives

From the theoretical perspective, young adults in Istria represent the link that connects computer and Internet users from non-users. I found in this research that young adults have all the necessary knowledge to use new technologies in a satisfactory way – they know how ICT works, they are aware of the benefits that ICT brings, they know that not using the ICTs today means not being competitive, they are connected, they speak English and they differentiate the quality of services between broadband and narrowband Internet.

On the other side, there was a significant difference between users in Croatia, who expressed their dislike with the current Internet service offerings, and Italian and Slovenian users that benefited from the competitive telecommunications market. The current monopoly on the Croatian market was identified as a major element that differentiated Internet users in the region. Croatian students (and other Internet users) found themselves in an awkward situation. They understood the importance of being connected, but the connection itself was offered as metered service that proved to be a significant
Although they perceived the benefits of the possibilities of communication, they also had to realize that there are certain limits preventing them from being “digitally equal” in their environment.

Apart from representing the link between the users and non-users, young adults in the region also play three other roles.

First, they act as students and they perceive new technologies as an integral part of their lives. For them, ICTs represent a powerful educational tool, an excellent and affordable communication tool, and a form of entertainment.

Second, they also serve as a force that helps their parents and other family members to perceive the importance of ICTs in today’s surroundings and adopt the necessary knowledge and new communication skills.

Third, their response to the market situation could be a strong indicator for the government and other significant business players in the region in gauging the demand for ICTs.

Self-Reflexivity

In the final stages of this ethnographic research about the Digital Divide in Istria, I contemplate about what I have learned during this research, how this study changed my perception of the mass-communication field, and how the notions of the Digital Divide shape the everyday activities of the people in Istria.

First, this research gave me an opportunity to meet people and learn more about their lives and their views about everyday problems in a region that I
consider to be my home. The fieldwork experience gave me a better understanding of similarities and differences of unique cultures that share this small territory. Since I was not new to the region, I understood the complexities of multicultural experiences. However, this research was a unique opportunity for me to get an in-depth insight into views and considerations of local people coming from different backgrounds and age groups, and to gauge the intensity with which the current state of multiculturalism in Istria in conjunction with the level of the digital divide influenced their lives. Second, I realized that after a number of years of living abroad it is practically impossible to truly “return home”. During the time I have spent in the United States, people’s daily routines in Istria changed, their dialects adopted new words and they experienced different social and cultural events that I missed. In that sense, this “native ethnography” is not native in absolute terms. It explains reflections of the researcher who is trying to investigate the issue thoroughly and re-live the missed experiences at the same time.

This research also gave me an opportunity to better understand the complexities of mass-communications in field research, as well as the importance of mass-communications in today’s world.

Finally, at the end of the project, I got a better understanding of the importance of the topic I researched. Digital Divide is not just a theoretical structure used by academic researchers, media practitioners, NGOs or politicians. It is also not a simple number that makes a difference between users and non-users of new technologies. It is a real multi-dimensional issue that requires time
Considerations for the Future Research

It is clear that Digital Divide is not only a global phenomenon and that it has to be researched and analyzed from regional perspectives as well. In order to make a clearer picture of the Digital Divide, it is important to understand the social, economic, cultural, educational, and developmental possibilities of specific regions. In that sense, I propose four dimensions for the future research within the mass-communication field.

First, I believe that it is necessary to further develop the notions of the Digital Divide from the critical-cultural perspective in order to examine unique social, cultural, and educational processes that shape one’s perception of the new media possibilities and obstacles. Furthermore, these processes have to be analyzed from both global and regional perspectives; because it is important to perceive both local and global chances and obstacles we will come across in the near future.

Second, it is important to acknowledge that the Digital Divide is not just a topic within the mass-communication field. Although the literature suggests that this phenomenon should be seen as a new media issue, and that other fields should only build on it, the evidence suggests that it is an inter-disciplinary field that needs input from different academic circles. In that respect, I propose a
study that will build an inter-disciplinary framework of the Digital Divide that will give us a better understanding of the problem, and possibly more effective solutions.

Third, the current body of literature emphasizes the issues of the Digital Divide that are relevant in Europe, North America and occasionally South America. The current debate does not give an insight into the Digital Divide issues in Sub-Saharan countries and other less-developed parts of the world. The limited research so far includes comparisons with the more developed parts of the world, but it does not offer a full understanding of the Digital Divide debate in areas that require special attention from the global community.

Finally, I hope that this particular research provokes other regional inquiries that will result in a more understandable map of the Digital Divide obstacles and opportunities that are unique to every region/culture.
References:


Appendix A: Map of the Istrian peninsula

Source: [http://www.demis.nl/wms/mapclip.htm](http://www.demis.nl/wms/mapclip.htm), accessed on May 15, 2006
Appendix B: Demographic indicators

### Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Age 15-24</th>
<th>Age 40-64</th>
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<tr>
<td>Croatia*</td>
<td>4,437,460</td>
<td>604,237</td>
<td>1,458,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia**</td>
<td>1,913,355</td>
<td>280,350</td>
<td>563,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy***</td>
<td>56,995,744</td>
<td>6,387,979</td>
<td>18,444,560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
* Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, [www.dzs.hr](http://www.dzs.hr), accessed May 20, 2006
** Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Slovenia, [www.stat.si](http://www.stat.si), accessed May 20, 2006

### Estimated computer users (per 100) in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated computer users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tiscali References, [www.tiscali.co.uk](http://www.tiscali.co.uk), accessed May 20, 2006

### Estimated Internet users (per 10,000) in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated Internet users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1,628.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>4,008.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3,010.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tiscali References, [www.tiscali.co.uk](http://www.tiscali.co.uk), accessed May 20, 2006