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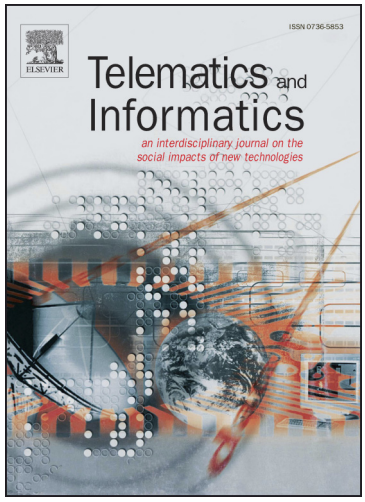

Sustainability and Community Networks

Christian Fuchs

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Sustainability and Community Networks

Christian Fuchs
University of Westminster
London, UK
Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies (WIAS) & Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI)
http://fuchs.uti.at
c.fuchs@westminster.ac.uk

Abstract
Community networks are IP-based computer networks that are operated by a community as a common good. In Europe, the most well-known community networks are Guifi in Catalonia, Freifunk in Berlin, Ninux in Italy, Funkfeuer in Vienna and the Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network in Greece. This paper deals with community networks as alternative forms of Internet access and alternative infrastructures and asks: What does sustainability and unsustainability mean in the context of community networks? What advantages do such networks have over conventional forms of Internet access and infrastructure provided by large telecommunications corporations? In addition what disadvantages do they face at the same time? This article provides a framework for thinking dialectically about the un/sustainability of community networks. It provides a framework of practical questions that can be asked when assessing power structures in the context of Internet infrastructures and access. It presents an overview of environmental, economic, political and cultural contradictions that community networks may face as well as a typology of questions that can be asked in order to identify such contradictions.

Keywords: sustainability, unsustainability, community networks, Internet access, Internet infrastructure, political economy, information society

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Christian Fuchs is a professor at the University of Westminster. He is the Director of the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies (http://www.westminster.ac.uk/wias) and of the Communication and Media REsearch Institute (http://www.westminster.ac.uk/camri), a member of the European Sociological Association's executive committee, and co- editor of the journal tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique (http://www.triple-c.at). He is a critical theorist of society.

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