Chapter XXII

Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations: Elements for the Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The generalization of the new information technologies has favored the transformation of social structures and the way of relating to others. In this changing process, the logic of the social relationships is characterized by the fragility and the temporality of the communicative systems reciprocity which are established “online” in a new cybernetic culture. “Virtual communities” are created in which the interaction systems established by individuals exceed the traditional categories of time and space. In this manner the individuals create online social webs where they connect and disconnect themselves based on their needs or wishes. The new online communication technologies favor the rigid norms of the “solid society” that dilute in flexible referential contexts and reversible in the context of the “global and liquid society” to which the sociologists Bauman or Beck have referred to. Therefore the objective that the authors propose in this chapter is to try new theoretic tools, from the paradigms of the new sociology of technology, which let them analyze the new relational and cultural processes which are being generated in the cultural context of the information global society, as a consequence of the new communication technologies scope. Definitely the authors propose to analyze the meaning of concepts such as “virtual community”, “cyber culture”, or “contacted individualism”, as well as the meaning and extent of some of the new social and individual behaviors which are maintained in the Net society.
TOWARDS A MEANING OF “VIRTUAL COMMUNITY”: A NEW STUDY OBJECT IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The social dimension is one of the natural attributes of the human being, which must be understood as an individual person in interaction with a relational environment. Group, communities and culture are concepts which approach us to the man study in its complex network of social interaction as a social system. In this sense the plural evolution and interaction of the communities and the institutions as well as the forms of social relations and communication have shaped the history of humanity.

The community has been defined as a study object and subject from varied approaches, which comprise from the primitive forms of social association to the complex relationships of the post-industrial society in which the concept “virtual community” has emerged.

From the sociological point of view, community is a concept with a polysemous value, but as a global idea it responds to the anthropologic imperative of the social encounter and the need to create a sense and give shape to the human society. A possession feeling consolidates in it, understood as a psychological community feeling, in which one feels oneself as an active group member, which is decisive for the individuals own identity. Likewise, the feeling of a participation conscience and the link to a common territory are fundamental aspects (Gurrutxaga, 1991) (Pons Díez, J.; Gil Lacruz, M; Grande Gascón, J.M., 1996). The community is a network of social links, that can be based on a territory (a city), on common interests (associations, clubs) on similar characteristics of the individuals (Bar Association) or on an online platform (blogs, etc). Definitely, the community is an analytical category which defines human interaction as a constituent of the social reality, redimensioning the individual as a socialized person in a specific group, with social and symbolic representations and cultural values. Besides a social and anthropological approximation, we can consider the community as a context of action which contributes to the generation of realities based on symbolic truss.

The globalization and informationalization process has generated the transformation of our societies, including the space dimension. In such transformation the new space logic is characterized by the domination of a flow space, structured in electronic circuits that link themselves in the strategic nodes of production and management, which exceeds a space of places locally fragmented and the territorial structure as a way of daily organization. This new dimension takes us towards a Global City, understood as a “net of urban nodes of different levels and different functions, spreading all over the planet and that functions as the nervous center of Informational Economy. It is an interactive system to which companies, citizens and cities have to adapt themselves constantly. “(Castells, 1997: 2).

The Information Technologies are the fundamental instrument that allows the new logic of the social relationships to demonstrate themselves in reality. In them, Internet constitutes one of the most outstanding cases of the growing technological environment whose result has been the step from the Industrial Society to the Information Society (Cornella, 1997).

In the full expansion of Internet, the virtual communities are becoming a new social relationship format where the different communities turn to it to satisfy expectations and needs, to contribute its collaboration and to feel themselves as part of a great community. Unlike the Traditional Community, these impersonal spaces are characterized by the anonymity and the lack of human contact. These new relationship forms are giving way to a media society produced by a change of the social rules, by the capacity of transmitting ideology or by inducing behavior; definitely, by the generalization of a mass culture extensible to all social classes and communities. This turned Internet
into a virtual community as means to unify the communications (Sánchez Noriega, 1997).

The first Virtual Communities were based mainly on the simple commerce or the sale of products through the Network, or on a web site where the users could place their personal webs freely. The current Virtual Community was born in this way, whose philosophy is based mainly on the leisure and recreation field, though it houses cultural societies or with certain scientific level: Geocities. But the origin of these cyberspace centers is determined by the scientific communities that before the beginning of Internet formed a group and interchanged information (Cantolla, 2000). In 1985, the first Virtual Community of the history arose, The Well, created by a group of ecologists that “met” to debate about their issues.

Within the Network, new communication forms appear promoted by the use of the electronic mail, but the information exchange among the members was not immediate (deferred communication). Later, with the arrival of the World Wide Web as a hypermedia system that works on Internet, the communication is produced in real time, coming up the interactivity.

This new communication form obliges to distinguish between the Traditional Real Community and the Virtual Community (Iparraguirre, 1998).

**Online Virtual Community**

- The physical and temporal space is not a limitation any more.
- It is developed in the Virtual Society, the cyberspace territory, where there are no frontiers and is planetary.
- It appears when a Real Community uses the telematics to keep and widen the communication.

The breakage of the space-time barriers through the use of the new technologies allowed the development of numerous Virtual Communities. The permanence on the Network depends on basic elements such as the interactivity time and the emotional component among the members that form part of it, what refers us to the traditional sociability forms.

In order to understand the concept of “virtual community” properly one has to get back to the original concept of “community”. For the sociologist Tönnies (1986:97-98), the concept of community (Gemeinschaft) is the stage on which the modern industrial society settles down (Gesellschaft). The community is characterized by the sort of relationships that prevail in it (based on the family, the homeland and the blood). He defines the community as a sort of social interaction in the emotional identification: he refers to the reciprocity that arises from sharing bonds based on the family, race or blood. The communication will is in the basis of this relationship which gives place to the social action. Therefore, for Tönnies, the community has its original root in the feelings. This definition is useful to refer to the community as a space of feelings and communication. Likewise, the members of a group share specific meanings and a collective vision that come forth from the shared experiences and that generates an own jargon at the end. (Prat, 2006: 29).

**Traditional Real Community**

- Physical and temporal space for everyone.
- It is developed in the Real Society where the space-time nations and physical encounter determine its behavior and is limited by the territory.
- It is the material support of the Virtual Community.
Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations

The sociological tradition considered the community as a group of persons who, besides exhibiting the social groups characteristics, has a territorial basis or a geographic territory that serves as seat. The first conceptualizations about the communities were carried out on the basis of territorial communities where a person could spend the whole life, as they were relatively self-sufficient. A city, a town, a village, a neighborhood constitute examples regarding this community concept. Under this concept it is present the idea that considers that the community implies more close bonds among the members that the ones existing among the members of a larger society (Gesellschaft) (Society). A so called “communitarian feeling” exists among the members of a community.

However, nowadays, the use of the community concept is quite different according to the contexts and is used at present in a more varied and wide form. It is even tended to name community to groups that are not but conglomerates or social categories. Due to the urban sprawl, the social groups, the communities among them, went beyond the territorial frontiers. Those who emphasized the non territorial nature of the modern communities were the sociologists specialized in the analysis of the social networks. (Scott, 1994; Wasserman and Faust, 1995). Besides studying the attributes of the group members, the sociologists of social networks analyze the relationships that are produced among them, their objective, intensity, quality as well as the structure and dynamic that arise from them. Wellman and Gulia, for example, have studied communities whose relations network goes beyond their geographic frontiers. Besides, these relationships tend to specialize being contextualized and not globalized at the same time; i.e. a person is related to other persons not in a total and integral manner but in certain specific contexts and will establish relationships with other persons if the context and objective of said relationship are different. According to Wellman and Gulia, the relationship network in which a person takes part might comprise a group of persons that are very far away in the geographic space and besides show time variations. This tendency is confirmed even more now in the cyberspace, where the sociability capacity of the persons is strengthened and creates the possibility of a new sociability manner among them. Wellman and Gulia have demonstrated that the virtual communities are also communities, although their members might not have physical nearness, similar bonds to the ones of the territorial communities are developed among them (Wellman, 1999). Definitely, the concept of virtual community seems to have its origin in the traditional concept of community and is clearly linked with the concepts of communication and socialization.

In fact, the Web allows now to integrate also communication functions and so the virtual communities arose which have a web site as coordination centre both of information and communication reservoirs. The web site became the “territory” of a virtual community. A non geographic territory as the communities studied by the sociologists during a social development stage, but an electronic territory, distributed in the new space that we call “cyberspace”. Likewise, there are computer programs specialized in the construction and management of virtual communities, but, what is really a virtual community?

Howard Rheingold, to whom the term “virtual community” has been attributed, in his book, *The Virtual Community*, which became a classic work of literature about the cyberspace, defines the virtual communities as “…social aggregations that arise from the network when a sufficient quantity of persons enter into public discussions during a long enough period of time, with sufficient human feeling, to form networks of personal relationships in the cyberspace” (Rheingold, 1993: 5). We find three basic elements under this definition: the interactivity, the emotional component and the interactivity time, as conditions for a virtual community to exist and they are related to some of the
Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations

characteristics of the communities in general.

According to Michael Powers, a virtual community is “an electronic place where a group of persons meet to interchange ideas in a regular manner … It is an extension of our daily life where we meet our friends, work mates and neighbors, at the park, at work or at the communitarian center”. A more technical definition would be: “… a group of persons that communicate through a network of distributed computers, … (the group) meets at an electronic locality, usually defined by a server software, while the customer software manages the information interchanges among the group members. All the members know the addresses of said localities and invest sufficient time in them in order to be considered a virtual community” (Powers, 1998: 3). The sociological concept of community as inclusive social group, with a territorial basis, is recreated in the virtual community, but the territory of the later is virtual and not geographic. The community does not occupy a space in the physical world but in cyberspace.

However, the essence of all these communities does not lie in the nature of the CMC (computer-mediated communication) that structures them, but in the fact that they are integrated by real individuals, flesh and blood and who for the sake to be included in the community, adopt a form of “online person”; a virtual identity that represents the self of the individual before the other, the totality of the social environment in which the individual is immersed (Turkle, 1995). Therefore, in order to understand the phenomenon reality it will always be necessary to take into account the dialectic of the self/other (identity/otherness), as the description of the virtual communities will always be connected to the recognition that they only exist when several individuals experience it as such, which refers us to the traditional concept of socialization once more.

Definitely, the social investigation about the virtual communities poses several serious queries on its relationship with the “real life” communi-
tics. Among them: what is lacking from the real communities for the human being to satisfy the social needs “virtually” through Internet? Do the virtual communities represent the beginning of the real communities’ deterioration? Or simply, do they represent a new way of understanding and living the social relationships?

The theoretical and empirical works performed by the science and technology sociology have not been able so far to give an answer to said queries. During the last years, these studies became an alternative and useful theoretical, conceptual and methodological framework, in order to think about the analysis of the technical innovations and the incidence in the relationships and social behaviors, though the CMC technologies, or Internet itself, have not become yet a widely extended focus of attention among these investigators. In fact, it deals with the everlasting forgotten of the social sciences.

In order to reply to these queries in a general manner, we will adopt the theoretical paradigms of authors like Bauman, Beck or Castells to seize how the human needs of belonging to a community enlarge and adapt themselves in a relational and cultural environment, much more flexible with the advent of the new communication technologies. However, this interactive process that suggests new socialization and endoculturation forms is not exempt of contradictions, as the freedom and autonomy that allow the online communications generate certain frustrations regarding that innate human wish of belonging to an everlasting relational community. This has been named as the ambivalence of the new “connected individualism”.

THE NEW SOCIAL/RELATIONAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE “VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES”

The itinerary of the new communication technologies is closely entwined with the social and
Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations

cultural changes as well as with the languages and narrative transformation. New concepts arise in order to seize new relational models as result of the convergence of these changes. One of these concepts that define the “information society”, “network society” or the “connected society” is the “cyber-culture”.

The investigation about the cyber-cultures started recently due to the accelerated advent process of the technological society. Bauman had already warned in the 90’ that it was necessary to break the individual-technology dichotomy and work on the reality/virtuality ambivalence as human product (Bauman, 1990). Therefore, it is essential to integrate the technology to the social and cultural environment (Feenberg, 1999), with the aim of knowing the dimensions plurality that characterize our existence in the information society.

In fact, the cyber-culture, understood as a set of social-technical-cultural systems that take place at the cyberspace (Lévy, 2007: XV), starts transforming the beliefs and speeches of the cybernauts through constant leaps and interactions between the “interface” and the “real world”. The online practices start in this way to overwhelm the virtuality and to burst in the reality of the individuals beyond what has been imagined.

The transformations that we are witnessing in these stages of attitudinal zapping between the virtual and the real are configuring new ideas of the “being” and new expressions and representation manners of the individual and the community online.

Internet, more than a communication technology, constitutes itself in a par excellence representation technology of the new century. The initial fictional construction of the self is being replaced there by the reconstruction and recognition of the individual in the virtual practices.

The new forms of symbolical representation that are emerging from the Internet virtual space are giving place to new ways of privacy, personal and collective identity and, in brief, to new social relationships as manifests the use of spaces or virtual communities such as Youtube, Myspace, Hi5 or Facebook. Therefore the virtual and the real should not be understood as two opposed categories as the digital culture is, to a great extent, an extension of the culture concept, where the virtual really suggests “another” experience and another analysis of the real that compels us to a better understanding of the bonds and cores that link the realities and the appearances, the illusions and the symptoms, the images and the models. The virtual does not replace the real but it represents it; it is a laboratory of ontological experimentation that compels us to give up the support of the appearances and turns us hunters of the real in forests of symbols (Quéau, 1995: 79).

Therefore, we consider that it is not possible to separate technology, culture and society as autonomous and independent actors, as this would mean to understand the human independently from the material environment and the signs and images that give sense to life and world. “Therefore, the material world and less its artificial part of the ideas cannot be separated through the ideas with which the technical objects are harbored and used, nor from the human beings that invent them, produce them and use them” (Lévy, 2007: 6). The line that divides the real worlds from the virtual realities tends to blur with the progress of the simulation capacities that offer us the technology and its corresponding appropriation by the individuals, provoking new ideas and offering spaces to new experiences that would not be possible without the technological progress. In this sense to define the so called “cyber-culture” implies to understand how certain practices have been naturalized in the popular culture through the symbolic representation and the new communication forms that the individuals experience through the “virtual communities”. Indeed and as Turkle points out, the computers by themselves would not have any value without the cultural representations and relationships which take place with the use the individuals make of them: “The computers
would not be turning into powerful cultural objects if the people would not fall in love with his machines and with the ideas that the machines entail” (Turkle, 1997: 63).

One of the features that define the new social and communicative relationships that take place in the cyberspace cyber-culture is the simulation and the anonymity. Not everything in the cyberspace is simulation; however, the interfaces have caused the anonymity adoption from the beginning and the possibilities of constructing fictional personalities. The level of anonymity has a very important influence on our behavior as it leads to the lack of inhibitions or relaxation of the normal limits that the society imposes on us. Likewise, the anonymity becomes vital at the moment of experiencing on Internet with our personality; the falseness sensation gets lost and the adventure and exploration sensation is acquired. Therefore, it is interested to know what one feels while playing with the identity, experience different roles and see how the others react. This process changes the traditional sense of “role”, “community” or “group” concepts defined by Durkheim, Weber or Mead in the classical sociology. In fact, the physical distance and the few social presence existing in the “virtual communities” make us feel less inhibited, safe from being discovered and less subdued to the command of our superego and the social structures.

Goffman referred to this process with the denomination “game information”. From this definition we could say that the relationships in the network constitute a potentially infinite cycle of occultations, discoveries, false disclosures and rediscoveries through which we devote great efforts to produce and sophisticate the image we want to give to others without them knowing how much effort it requires (Goffman, 1959). On the Internet, the game information is much more flexible due to the opacity of the environment and due to the possibility of changing the interface if the game does not run well. The chats and forums offered the first experimentation windows at the beginning of the Network. Nowadays, with the development of the web 2.0, the new MUD as Second Life became the benchmarks in the role games and, therefore, the anonymity in the cyberspace.

This game information that enables Internet generated a new communitarian social idea through the socialization processes that are produced in the “cyber-culture”. In fact, nowadays, the communitarian social idea is placed in the center of the theoretical debate: “The technological determinism is not any more a simple concept of intermittent appearance throughout the political thought of the XX century, to become, in fact, part of the communitarian idea about the technology. And it remains continuously corroborated when, curiously, both from technophobes and technophile positions; it is insisted on the inexorability of the technological development” (Aibar, 2002: 38).

The communitarian social idea of Internet, as a set of meanings and symbols, acts in the practice and in the everyday life contributing sense to the human behavior, to the social relationships and the human relationships with the objects, independently of its existence for the “conscious” of this society. According to Vayreda (2004), the technologies of the Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) are a component of the idea instituted of Internet that acquires sense in the daily practices of the individuals. The idea of the CMC is not a scheme of senses, even, without ruptures and fissures. On the contrary, its strength lies precisely in its capacity to adapt the diversity, and, even, the contradiction of the individual behavior of the persons who interact through these platforms (Vayreda, 2004). This is another example of the contradictions that characterize the liquid, individualized and globalized society referred to by Bauman, Beck and Giddens.

The new communication technologies offer us the possibility of connecting and disconnecting ourselves to the social relationships according to our will in the ontological need that the human
Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations

being has to find protection in the community, either a real or virtual community. But for the communitarian idea that Internet recreates, new contradictions and relational uncertainties are generated that the citizens are not always able to distinguish. It has to do with the dichotomy between the community and the freedom, two opposed forces and equally powerful, two essential values, apparently incompatible and subject to a strain difficult to be placated, according to Bauman (2003).

The key to solve this contradiction is in what Castells calls “directed interconnection”; i.e., “the capacity of anyone to find the own destiny in the network, and in case of not finding it, create the own information arising the appearance of a new network” (Castells: 2001: 67). The electronic inter-connectivity, feature of the CMC technologies, becomes a customized connectivity, turns to be a self-management promise, of individual freedom. The only condition is not to switch off the computer, not to leave the network. According to Vayreda’s words (2004) the idea is to “change from forum, construct a new one, and invent an issue .... but never to switch off”. This process responds to a new form of socialization in which the individual decides freely when to connect himself and how to manage the interaction with another individual, without anything being predetermined and defined beforehand as in the traditional socialization forms.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY, “LIQUID SOCIETY” AND CONNECTED INDIVIDUALISM

The new context of a global society based on interactive communication favored by the information technologies boom is generating what we could call a “cyber cultural revolution”. In the XVIII century series of phenomena converged which came to be called “industrial revolution” which meant a transformation of the social and production relationships with the market boom as a way of global interchange of material and cultural goods. Today we can talk about the “cyber cultural revolution” as a transformation process in which the new information technologies are transforming the social structures, the relational forms as well as the own cultural context in which those new forms which individuals adopt to relate to one another and with the environment acquire sense. It has to do with the new “online” environment in which social relationships are separated from the traditional time and space categories. The question one must pose is in what way are the social structures changing? The contemporary sociology does not have any answers to these new phenomena. The time of solid modernity certainties is giving place to another liquid modernity of uncertainties. Solid becomes liquid and with regard to the enigma of “social reality effect” as the one of “network effect” or the “Crowds” (Negri) and “Smart Mobs” (Rheingold, 2004), we only know that they exist but at the moment there is no paradigm that has the key to seize them in its totality. The only thing we can do so far is to learn to coexist and to know how to be in this new “liquid” context full of uncertainties, until we rebuild the concepts of these two basic categories (time and space) for any type of society.

In this interpretation line, one of the greatest descriptions about this new technologized age is given by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who in Liquid Love (2005) talks about a society that moves at a great speed through “liquid” individuals; in other words, people without lasting bonds who have the need to develop and establish ephemeral contact types based on the Internet connection, from Bauman’s point of view, implies an exercise of continuous connection and disconnection; in a virtual relationships network which have an easy access and output. Any resemblance with cinematographic Matrix is not pure coincidence.

In the passage from the solid world to the liquid phase of modernity captured by Bauman there is
Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations

A fight between the globalizing power of Internet, based on the connection, and the local problematic of each individual or community. It is obvious that Internet is a global environment, but most of the investigators emphasize that the practices acquire a meaning in the local framework. The sites with most traffic in Europe and the United States are the search engines like Google, Yahoo or Windows Live, which are to access door to the navigation of individual and collective interests, big compartments of multififormat content (Fotolog and YouTube). Those are spaces of local information’s (digital newspapers) and spaces to buy and sell products (e-Bay) whose usefulness only acquires meaning in the products and services exchange of local scope. Many talk about the kingdom of the “glob quality” in other words global sites due to its scope but with local focus to capture the attention of a specific audience.

The Internet revolution does not limit itself exclusively to the cyber space. In the “network society” (a definition of the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells) converge the Web (the great generator of a paradigm change that allows, at least in papers, to overcome the temporal-space barriers of people who live in the planet), the globalization, and the institutions crisis in a new relational context that could be denominated as “connected individualism”. In this context of the contemporary society, people live in networks not in groups. The groups assume that all the participants know and trust each other, while the essence of the networks is a set of interactions and exchange of information. Of course, this does not mean that groups do not exist, but rather that the life of an individual cannot be reduced nor to a concrete group, nor a fixed place, many times it is the blending of both interaction ways.

The new possibilities that the online interaction technological systems offer are not the reason of the transformation on the ways we connect ourselves. The technologies mainly are developed as an answer to the needs that we have to interact with others. Therefore, the social organization type and the technology that we use influence each other and start giving form to a social contemporary life.

The relationships which we create do not belong to a specific place but are at the same time local and global, product of the communication technologies development. In general, the traditional communities based on a concrete unit lose importance due to the relationships that we maintain with people who are physically in different places and in that way we participate of multiple social networks. The characteristics of modern life, more and more privatized and customized, are reflected in our ways of generating relationships which are more selective and voluntary than in the past. Although our contacts are global; that is to say, scattered in different areas, we continue connecting ourselves from some place, could be our house or our work, which means that we have globalized our relational network always having as reference a local context. (Ninova, 2008).

The new information technologies are changing the way in which we connect ourselves, as we do not necessarily have to be in a place to communicate with others. In fact the physical context becomes less important. The connections are among individuals and not among places, in that way technology offers a change: connects individuals wherever they are. The people become portable; they can be located for interaction through technology in wherever. In this way, the communication person to person becomes central and it supports the defragmentation of the groups and the communities turning them into “liquids”. The individuals can “connect” and “disconnect” them to the social structures which even though they continue defining the social behaviors, they do so with more flexibility and liberty than in the past. They are the new “liquid times” the ones Bauman talks about, where the new technologies allow flexibility and fragmentation of the social relationships. Therefore the transition towards a customized world provides the connected individualism where each person changes fast among...
bonds and networks. It is the person who defines how to operate to obtain information, support or collaborate in some project. We become more flexible when interacting in different spaces.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter it has been pointed out how the new information technologies are changing the traditional ways of communication and of relating with the immediate social environment. In fact in the “network society” or also called “information society” new concepts arise like the “virtual community” or “cyber culture” associated with new social behaviors which are generated by the online communication programs. As a consequence of this, the traditional analytical categories used by the sociology to study the new social interaction systems generated in the information society are becoming obsolete. So, in this chapter the concepts used in sociology to explain the meaning and the scope of the new “online” communication cultural devices and its incidence in social relationships, in communication and definitely in the social and symbolic structure of the social groups have been checked and widened.

Definitely, the virtual mobility that is being practiced in the last decades and which already forms part of our daily life demands a change in our ideas about the influence which the new technologies have, and at the same time, they make us assume that the online/offline dichotomy is a myth. The communication mediated by the computer offers flexibility and autonomy, and in no case, does it substitute the face to face communication but it supplements it and enlarges it. The online relationships fill in the empty spaces in our lives many times. The proximity does not matter anymore; the communities and the groups are more disperse in time and space.

**REFERENCES**


Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations


Online Virtual Communities as a New Form of Social Relations


KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Connected Individualism:** It is about a term coined by Wellmann (2002) in which the individual operator of his/her network is important, rather than the household or work unit. It is called network individualism—where technology users are less tied to local groups and are increasingly part of more geographical scattered networks. From the sociology point of view it is an expression about the “new liquid and individualized society” referred to by Bauman and Beck, according to which the individuals are more and more determined for the great social structures and therefore they are more owners of their individual destinies thanks to the communication possibility and customized relationship that facilitates the new information technologies.

**Cyber Culture:** Is a new culture form (symbolic group of values, beliefs and rules that give sense to the social action) that is emerging, due to the use of the new communication technologies. Therefore, the cyber culture is an extension of the traditional concept of culture that brings together the set of human relationships mediated by the information control mechanisms through the different technological communication systems. This turns the communicative process into more fluid and flexible social relationships and in many cases distant from the traditional space-temporal categories.

**Cyber Cultural Revolution:** It is the social and cultural transformation process generated by the use of new communication technologies. The multimedia revolution has several ramifications in which Internet has a central place, but where other digital networks coexists. Under sociological terms it is about the coexistence and slow displacement of the Homo sapiens, product of the written culture, to the digital homo, who worships the new communication technologies. Definitely, it is about a transformation process of the social and communicative structures through which the daily consumption habits and the human relationships moved about gradually from the daily spaces of the social interaction to the virtual spaces of social relationships created by the new information technologies.

**Smart Mobs:** It is a collaborative social dynamics made up of persons able to act jointly in order to achieve common objectives when they even know each other. The persons who perform these strategies called Smart Mobs, collaborate in a new context and under circumstances where the collective action was not possible before, thanks to the use of new communication tools and data development.

**Society Network:** It is a sort of advanced social organization based on technological communication networks. The networks are made up of nodes and links that use a plurality of paths to distribute the information from one link to another. This society auto regulates itself through even governance hierarchies and power distribution. In this sense, Castells states that “we are passing from the information society to the networks society”, where each one of the users is a node of different networks that exchange by means of the use of the information technology.

**Online Socialization:** It is the process through which the individuals internalize and learn the rules and values of a specific social and cultural context through the virtual relational spaces that are created on the online network. This concept is displacing the former socialization concept, as the new technologies create new virtual socialization spaces beyond the family, the educational system and the labor market. These new online socializa-
tion contexts do not refer to a specific space and time but in many cases they are created spontaneously and overlapped on the network arising virtual learning and socialization communities.

Virtual Communities: Virtual community is a community whose bonds, interactions and social relationships are not produced in a physical space but in a virtual one as Internet. Investigators like Rheingold define the virtual communities as social groups that emerge from the Network [Internet] when sufficient people establish social communication and interchange networks characterized by the relative space stay and based in a feeling of belonging to a group, to form links of personal relationships in the cyberspace. Three main elements of the social and communication relationships converge under this definition: the reciprocity, the relational affective component and the interactivity time.

ENDNOTES

1 See: www.geocities.com
2 See: www.well.com. The experience of this Virtual Community is gathered in Rheingold’s book. The author describes in a practical way, how this VC was formed, which was its development, etc., becoming one more member of it. We can point out a fragment in which it is described what the persons can do both on this VC and on others: “people who form part the VCs use the words that appear on the screen to interchange courtesies and to discuss, carry out commercial transactions, interchange information, supply emotional support, plan, have great ideas, fall in love, meet friends, etc.
3 “networked individualism” (Wellman, 2002)