

Giuseppe LUGANO

***Reconciling Social and Economic Development
The Role of Virtual Currency in Mobile Social Applications***

Mobile and ubiquitous technologies can provide a valuable contribution to face the challenges of globalization. In the context of ICT, social development has often been a side effect of policies aiming at economic growth. In order to realize a sustainable society, there is a need for reconciling the social and economic dimensions through an interdisciplinary approach to the design of ICT. The focus of this paper is on mobile communication and services based on the paradigm of mobile social networking.

Both trends in the mobile market and society have to be considered in the design phase; among them, the decreasing revenues generated by traditional mobile services, the lack of viable business models of the Web2.0; the increasing fragmentation of individual identities and the individualization of society (Beck, 2002; Bauman, 2001); and the shift in consumer values emphasizing the need for environmental friendliness. In order to address such challenges, we present an approach to mobile business based on the concept of social capital. More precisely, rather than conducting marketing or consumer research, we suggest an approach to evaluate the economic potential of mobile social networks. This concept is related to individual social capital, regarded as the access and use of resources embedded in a social network (Lin, 2001). The network theory of social capital is the starting point for the implementation of a virtual credit system similar to the ones in use in MMORPG; however, the basic difference is that the former is influenced by everyday actions and social interactions in real or virtual environments. Revenues can be generated by services supporting private or public investment strategies for returns at individual and collective level. At wider level, such capital could be employed to assess collective social capital (Putnam, 2000) and complement the GNP as measure of growth of an Information Society.

REFERENCES

- Bauman, Z. (2001) *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage.
Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*, NY: Cambridge University Press .
Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Giuseppe LUGANO received a Master's degree from the University of Bologna (Italy) in 2003 with the thesis "Finnish and Italian technology in the global environment of EU: a comparison of ICT strategies in education". He has been member of the Cosco-Edutech research group at the Helsinki Institute of Information Technology (HIIT) in 2003/2005. Since September 2004, he is member of the Corporate R&D of TeliaSonera Finland, leading mobile operator of the nordic countries. In 2005 he began a PhD in Cognitive Science at the University of Jyväskylä. His areas of interest include educational technology, social network analysis, computer and mobile mediated communication. In 2007 he published his first book, *Comunicazione Mobile*, with the Italian Edizioni Cierre. E-mail: giuseppe.lugano@gmail.com.

