

**Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Institutionalized
Thinking on Development Communication:
A Case Study of Two UNDP and EP ICT4D Reports**

by
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Abstract

Although information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D) is situated in a globalized Information Age nominally marked by a shift away from the dominant paradigm of development, Cold War-era ideological fallout continue to linger in development communication literature describing ICT4D. A critical hermeneutic analysis of two ICT4D reports, one commissioned by the European Parliament (EP) and one by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), delineates the Cold War legacies in contemporary supranational organizations' institutionalized thinking on development communication.

Keywords: Capability approach; cold war; critical hermeneutics; development studies; dominant paradigm; EP; EU; ICT4D; modernization theory; UNDP

Dedication

*This paper is dedicated to all
those on the other side of the Digital Divide.*

Acknowledgements

This capstone paper marks the finale to a vibrant academic journey, of which bears the imprint of all those who accompanied me along the way. It was drafted at Simon Fraser University (SFU), which rests upon the unceded and occupied territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

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List of Acronyms

EP	European Parliament
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT(s)	Information and communications technology(ies)
ICT4D	Information and communications technologies for development
LMIC(s)	Low and middle-income country(ies)
STOA	Science and Technology Options Assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1. Introduction

The Cold War forms the geopolitical backdrop to the rise of development communication in the twentieth century. The post-WWII capitalist-communist struggle for control over the non-aligned bloc solidified the dominant paradigm of development (Rogers, 1976; Gilman, 2003, p. 155-156), during which communication was employed as a central instrument in the development process (Sparks, 2007, p. 20). Intellectual calls for paradigm shifts throughout the Cold War achieved scant influence on international development policymaking (Cullather, 2017, para. 3, 6), even as the Cold War nominally drew to a close with the dissolution of the USSR and European communist states and partial adoption of capitalist economic reform in Asian communist states¹.

In the decades following the nominal conclusion of the Cold War, technological innovations significantly enhanced living standards in the fortunate pockets of the world. Despite these improvements, the planet still houses “deep wells of poverty” where hundreds of millions live on less than a dollar a day, often without adequate access to basic amenities like clean water supply, electricity, healthcare and education (Sparks, p. 194). These pressing issues require urgent solutions, to which all iterations of development communication have been conceptualized to find (Sparks, p. 194). The onset of the Digital Revolution² in the latter half of the twentieth century ushered in a globalized technocratic Information Age³ in the new millennium, pushing information and communication technologies (ICTs) to the forefront of development communication. In particular, powerful supranational institutions are enthusiastically promoting information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D) as bearing potential to mitigate poverty, disease, illiteracy and political disenfranchisement (Heeks, 2009, p. 2; Hamel, 2010, p. 1-8; Delponte et al., 2015).

¹ Market-oriented economic reform occurred in the People’s Republic of China (1978), Lao People’s Democratic Republic (1979) and Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1986).

² Refers to the technological evolution from mechanical and analogue electronics to digital electronics.

³ Refers to the technological era in human history where traditional economies based on industrialization brought about by the Industrial Revolution evolves into information/digital economies.

The direction of ICT4D, as with previous forms of development communication, operates on the basis of ideological frameworks underpinning the path of progress. Did the dominant paradigm truly subside as repeatedly heralded, or perhaps merely hoped for, by leading communications scholars? In an allegedly globalized, pluralistic and participatory mediascape, do ideological remnants of Cold War animosities linger in development communication? To address these questions and delineate underlying ideological trends in contemporary development communication, I look to ICT4D literature produced for two of the world's dominant supranational organizations, the European Parliament (EP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The December 2015 EP-commissioned study "ICT in the developing world" and the September 2010 UNDP-commissioned study "ICT4D and the Human Development and Capabilities Approach: The Potentials of Information and Communication Technology" were published for powerful entities that were not only created amidst the backdrop of the Cold War, but actively contributed towards its progression and outcome.

Moreover, while these two studies do not seek to represent the entirety of contemporary ICT4D discourse worldwide, their capacity to be published for two powerful supranational organizations reveals the scope of their authority and influence. Their commissioned creation by and for dominant institutions reveals an ideological microcosm of dominant institutionalized thinking on development communication, which in turn influences real-world policy. Although technically reflective only of the findings of commissioned researchers and not of official EP or UNDP policy position, their creation for consumption by authoritative organization policymakers reflects the reports' ideological leverage and potential impact on EP and UNDP development initiatives. Thus, this paper will attempt to delineate and critique current theoretical trends in supranational organizations' understanding of ICT4D as affected by legacies of the Cold War by conducting a critical hermeneutic analysis of two EU and UN ICT4D reports.

1.1. Critical Hermeneutics

Drawing from the work of John B. Thompson (1981), this paper will employ the methodological approach of critical hermeneutics to analyze the two documents in question. Hermeneutics, as defined by Merriam-Webster, refers to "the study of the methodological principles of interpretation." Adding a critical layer to the classical

understanding of hermeneutics, Thompson attempts to synthesize the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Horkheimer, Adorno, Ricoeur and Habermas to provide “a critically and rationally justified theory for the interpretation of human action” (Thompson, 1981, p. 4). He argues that “critical theory must seek to unveil the ideological distortions of everyday speech, contrasting the latter with a presupposed ideal of communication free from constraint” (Thompson, p. 3). Thus, the critical hermeneutic methodology seeks to interpret institutional and structural conditions in a way that “understanding and explanation can be united with a moment of critique” (Thompson, p. 5).

To contextualize the larger picture in which the case study is situated, critical hermeneutical analysis begins with thorough examination of the research topic’s historical background. The hermeneutic researcher then proceeds to conduct analysis amalgating various analytic methods, which in this case includes critical discourse analysis and document analysis. Critical discourse analysis, as defined by Van Dijk (2001), refers to “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality” (p. 352). Document analysis is defined by Bowen (2009) as the “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic” (p. 27). Consistent with the hermeneutic approach, many aspects of document analysis require the hermeneutic interpretation of data to gain meaning and empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher finally returns to the bigger picture and draws conclusions from both the wider historical context and close-lens analysis of the specific case study.

Thus, the overarching critical hermeneutic approach was selected for its capacity to encompass a wide scope of delineation. Apart from identifying the normative frameworks of the two reports in comparison to existing ideological schools of development and their relevant critiques, this paper will also seek to reveal the varying positionalities of different actors pertaining to ICT4D in the reports, and the degree in which they are aware or oblivious of their own and others’ positionalities. This last component is useful in research as positionality explores and contextualizes knowledge producers’ subjectivities within their own social positions and disciplinary beliefs (England, 1994).

2. Development Paradigms

Development aid has long been a fixture in international relations. On one hand, it exemplifies the positive potential of humanity's cross-cultural cooperation; on the other, it highlights the unequal and interdependent power dynamics between core and peripheral nations (Wallerstein, 1974; 1992). Communication as a discipline of study and practice has played a central role in development efforts, in which communication processes have pushed the conceptualization, discussion and solution of issues along various theoretical lines. Development communication thus facilitates an ideological process of setting particular paths of development towards improving a community's way of living.

However, exactly what constitutes an improved way of living remains hotly debated. In the past century, development communication has been contested between different theories, largely arising out of the geopolitical struggle between the communist and capitalist camps during the Cold War.

2.1. One Planet, Multiple Worlds

In 1949, newly elected President of the United States Harry S. Truman announced to the world in his inauguration speech:

The United States and other like-minded nations find themselves directly opposed by a regime with contrary aims and a totally different concept of life. That regime adheres to a false philosophy which purports to offer freedom, security, and greater opportunity to mankind. Misled by this philosophy, many peoples have sacrificed their liberties only to learn to their sorrow that deceit and mockery, poverty and tyranny, are their reward. That false philosophy is communism.

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery... Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. (Harry S. Truman, 1949, Presidential Inaugural Address)

Truman's speech reflected the fear of poverty-induced communist revolutions, which threatened to upend the dominance of the Western capitalist elite. The geopolitical

realities emerging from the end of the Second World War that framed the discipline of international development left fascist hegemonies destroyed by the victorious Allied occupiers, while the old European empires lay crumbling as their colonies worldwide blossomed into independence one after another. From these war-torn ashes arose a new world order; in the West, a newly powerful America flexes her muscles at her old wartime ally in the East, an equally ambitious USSR. It became clear these two nations inherited the position of the global dominance from the age of colonial empires. Despite the idealistic creation of a United Nations (UN) to seek peace and consensus, the divergence of political ideology between the American-led capitalist camp and the Soviet-led communist camp quickly frosted into the Cold War.

The Cold War described the political, military and ideological animosity between the communist and capitalist blocs between 1945 and 1990. Cold War-era theorists attempted to understand and classify the new world order. Alfred Sauvy proposed the Three World Model: the wealthy capitalist First World, the powerful socialist Second World, and the non-aligned Third World. In 1974, Deng Xiaoping presented a variant of the model⁴ in his speech to the UN General Assembly, arguing that the socialist Second World no longer existed due to the emergence of Soviet socialist imperialism (para. 3). He reidentified the First World as the superpowers USA and USSR, the Second World as the developed middle powers, and the Third World as the dominated and exploited nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America (Deng, para. 3). In either classification, the Third World consisted mainly of traditional societies, or societies recently decolonized and seeking a place in the new world order.

The fear saturating Truman's speech revealed the West's universalist anxieties of Soviet-led communism as a form of modernity divergent from the liberal capitalist ideal, to the extent that communist modernity was portrayed as a "deviant" and "pathological" mutation in need of a cure to converge with the West's utopian secular materialism (Gilman, p. 14). Each side scrambled to carve out spheres of influence in the Third World, with development aid shaping geopolitical dynamics. For example, the American Foreign Assistance Act of 1948 allocated \$13 billion in development aid to Western Europe under

⁴ The variant model was first proposed by Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong in a conversation on the differentiation of the three worlds with Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda on 22 February 1974 (Singh, 2004).

the Marshall Plan⁵, effectively bringing the region under American influence. Throughout the Cold War, the US and USSR eschewed direct military confrontation and conducted a series of covert and proxy operations⁶, which apart from military and economic supplies included ideological dissemination in the form of development communication. Whether in a communist or capitalist regime, media was assigned a major role in development (Zhao, 2011, p. 151). This included the carryover of "psychological warfare" from the Second World War, as termed by Simpson (1994), for the application of mass communication to modern social conflict, which were "a group of strategies and tactics designed to achieve the ideological, political, or military objectives of the sponsoring organization, typically a government or political movement, through exploitation of a target audience's cultural psychological attributes and its communication system" (p. 11). In the US, psychological warfare expanded to become "a full arm of the US military, equal in status to the army, navy, and air force" (Simpson, p. 24) as outlined by William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Beyond the political and economic animosity towards communism, the Western cultural practice of Orientalism also laid the foundations to development ideology during the Cold War. A form of cultural essentialism defined by Edward Said (1978) as the exoticized construction of Eastern cultures in the Western imagination, Orientalism bears a longer historical process juxtaposing the West and the East as separate entities. Said argues that Orientalists define the East in what the West isn't, using Orientalist motifs to represent the East as mysterious and backward, positionally subordinate yet potentially threatening to Western "cultural hegemony" (p. 7). The Cold War added an additional anti-communist framework to this existing Orientalist othering of non-Western societies, whereby the West's perceived threat of the ethnocultural other is intensified by that other's possible adoption of the "deviant" and "pathological" modernity of communism. Thus, the combination of non-Western countries' Orientalist ethnocultural otherization

⁵ Officially the European Recovery Program (ERP), the development aid initiative was named after US General of the Army and Secretary of State George C. Marshall. The USSR strongly opposed the initiative and developed the rival Molotov Plan, which led to the creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1949.

⁶ The US invaded Korea (1950), ousted the left-wing government of Guatemala (1954), unsuccessfully invaded Cuba (1961), invaded the Dominican Republic (1965), Grenada (1983), and tried unsuccessfully to destroy communist rule in Vietnam (1964-75). The USSR unsuccessfully blockaded West Berlin (1948-49) and used military intervention to preserve communist rule in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979).

with Cold War-era anti-communist political-economic otherization strengthened the West vs. rest narrative framing the path of development communication.

It was against this historical and geopolitical backdrop, where worlds collided in a series of proxy wars and sphere-of-influence contests, that development communications emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. What became known as the dominant paradigm of development or modernization theory would monopolize policymaking for many years. Focusing on the economic and political prospects of the newly decolonized third world, proponents of the dominant paradigm of development communication tried to identify and alter the political, social and ideological factors seen as hindering postcolonial societies from progressing toward a certain ideal.

2.2. Dominant Paradigm: Modernization Theory

As Gilman (2003) argues, modernization theory and the Cold War seem inseparable, as the theory was the preeminent tool in which the Western capitalist camp used to battle the communist bloc for control of the decolonized world (p. 155). Early in the Cold War, modernization theory as the dominant paradigm of development advocated societal change from traditionalism to modernity through economic development (Hussain & Tribe, 1981). Characterized by a linear view of human development, proponents of modernization theory regarded traditional societies as burdened by primitive social, economic and political structures which should consequently change to match the structural norms of Western modernity through industrialization and capitalism (Kunst, 2014, p. 3; Linklater, 2008, p. 548; O'Brien & Williams, 2010, p. 316).

Confident that Western-style capitalism was the most desirable economic system, modernization forefather Walt Whitman Rostow (1960) argued in his theory on five stages of economic growth that nations must undergo various stages in order to reach modernity: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity and age of mass high consumption as the direction for development (Rostow, 1960, p. 12-16). While GDP per capita provided a dominant measure for progress targets (Bull, p. 30), modernization theorists did not approach economic growth as simply delivering material well-being, but also achieving political victory for the capitalist camp in the Cold War.

Thus, they focused not only on material development, but societal organization and cultural norms (Gilman, p. 6; Kunst, p. 3, 11).

Characteristic of the dominant paradigm, Seymour Lipset⁷ (1959) believed capitalism will trigger so-called modernization processes leading to the rise and stabilization of American-style political systems worldwide (p. 71-73), and that development communication as an important instiller of American-style political values “restrains them [people] from adhering to extremist and monistic doctrines, and increases their capacity to make rational electoral choices” (p. 79).

Lipset was not the only theorist who believed development communication played a significant role in the implementation of the modernization paradigm. In his seminal work *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), Daniel Lerner wrote of how mass media promoted empathy and mobility necessary for modernization. He argued that scarcity of mass media in poor countries prevented the intertwining goals of economic development, secularism and democracy. Wilbur Schramm (1964) described the media as magic multipliers facilitating modernization in his book *Mass Media and National Development*, particularly in industrial and agricultural development. The dominant paradigm’s belief that social change can be “intensified through transferring western knowledge and values via communication channels” (Sparks, p. 23) was perhaps most clearly evidenced by Everett M. Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovation Theory⁸ (1962), which presented the media’s central modernizing role of diffusing innovative ideas.

The dominant paradigm’s development efforts were largely universalist and did not seek to customize to the historical context and sociocultural conditions of the target nations, with a liberal capitalist way of life becoming the ultimate development goal for people in all nations (Bull, 2006, p. 31). As Grugel argues (2002), modernization theory’s equating of modernity with “the processes of change which had occurred in the nineteenth century in the Atlantic societies of Britain and the US and, to a lesser extent,

⁷ Hailed as the "leading theorist of democracy and American exceptionalism" (Guardian 2006) and "pre-eminent sociologist, political scientist and incisive theorist of American uniqueness" (New York Times), American political sociologist Seymour Lipset was a notable advocate of modernization theory.

⁸ The model’s four main elements include: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and a social system. This process relies on human capital, and the model holds that there is a point at which an innovation reaches critical mass. Adopters are categorized temporally into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 1962).

in Western Europe” (p. 47) drew criticisms of ideological ethnocentricity and cultural imperialism. More specifically in the field of development communication, critics of the dominant paradigm raised concerns of media imperialism, which Boyd-Barrett defined as “the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected” (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 117). Boyd-Barrett characterized media imperialism as possessing four distinct modes, which Sparks argues are “embedded in concrete mechanisms that together shaped the dependent nature of media systems” (Sparks, p. 98). In the first mode, mass media as a unidirectional communication technology is created and led by the developed West. The second mode showcases mass media’s organization into hegemonic Western institutions such as the state-owned BBC or commercially-owned American stations, and the power of these institutions to penetrate countries beyond their homelands. The third mode includes Western professional standards of media production, developed in the West and again exported beyond their borders. The fourth mode consists of the media’s content, such as media formats developed in and exported by the West, or copied by local media personnel trained by Western media standards (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 119–29).

Sparks argued that the practice of media imperialism disseminated attractive representations of the developed world to the elites of the developing world, who would either leave for the developed world in a costly brain drain, or try to recreate the luxuries of the developed world and detach themselves both physically and psychologically from the masses (Sparks, p. 94). The mechanics of capitalist media imperialism also creates an influential comprador class of communications workers – journalists, producers, market researchers etc. – who wields the power of media structures to promote the capitalist modernization process (Sparks, p. 94).

Environmental degradation and overpopulation⁹ in developed countries soon cast doubt on the desirability and appropriateness of capitalist industrial growth (Rogers, p. 12). Rogers, who previously created the diffusion of innovation theory, would come to publish his work “The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm” in 1976. Diffusion theorists later acknowledged that the model underestimated the influence of individuals’ social

⁹ Seminal works include Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968), Donella Meadows's *The Limits to Growth* (1972) E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (1973).

circles, and that both media exposure and idea receptivity were unequal, thus incorporated interpersonal communication into a revised model with the notion that mass media allowed for distributing new ideas while interpersonal communication led the implementation of ideas into action. Moreover, the stabilizing political effect of capitalist development was called into question when social unrest engulfed the United States throughout the 1960s¹⁰. These doubts were further reproduced with the fall of South Vietnam (Cullather, para. 1) and of Pahlavi's Iran. Theorists of the era felt "there was a sort of automatic stabilizing factor in economic development, which has turned out to be clearly wrong" (Cullather, para. 1).

2.3. Dissenting Structuralism: Dependency Theory

In the academic setting, modernization theory was injured by new dissenting structuralism from Latin America in the form of dependency theory, which argues that underdevelopment was not caused by "the absence of modern values" but instead "the direct consequence of economic exploitation" (O'Brien & Williams, 2010, p. 316). Dependency theorists proposed that the developed Global North and underdeveloped Global South are locked in an unequal structural relationship with one another (Brown & Ainley, 2009, p. 164), and that the capitalist system of the North, with its creation of elite class alliances and neo-imperialist economic models, led to the underdevelopment of the South (Woods, 2010, p. 249). Inverting the Rostovian perspective, dependency theorists rejected the linear path model of modernization and advocated developing outward from the periphery rather than inward from the core (Cullather, para. 4). The proposed solution to the problem of unequal modernity entailed mass popular movements worldwide to sever developing nations' ties to hegemonic corporations and international capitalist organizations (Cullather, para. 3).

As Servaes observed, "while the modernization paradigm legitimates the interests of Western political and economic interests groups and their bridgeheads in the Third World, the dependency theory meets the economic and political needs of those Third World elites who want to play an autonomous role" (1996, p. 39). Sparks is also quite

¹⁰ Exemplified by the 1963 Kennedy assassination, the 1965 Watts uprising in Los Angeles, and uprisings in 40 cities across the US in 1967.

correct in pointing out that conflicts of interest are the norm in domestic politics, and that while the dominant paradigm operates within national frameworks of internal diversity, international relations operate in a way in which states are singular entities confronting other singular entities through the representatives of national governments. Thus, when dependency theorists critique the dominant paradigm on the basis of state-to-state imperialism, they overlook the hegemonic marginalization of internal dissenting voices, who have no voice aside from selective representation from the recognized state (Sparks, p. 107). As Beltrán (1988) reveals, national elites in the Third World often promoted communication and cultural isolation to preserve the status quo, which enhances their own power at the cost of the subjugation and exploitation of the masses (p. 2). In doing so, they ended up serving their own oligarchic interests of preserving political, cultural and economic dominance.

In the stream of supranational organizations, development policy continued to flow in favour of the dominant paradigm. Former US Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara echoed Truman and declared that poverty was a security threat to the rich nations upon his appointment as President of the World Bank (WB). The WB Structural Adjustment Programs would later pressure developing countries to privatize state-owned enterprises, and deregulate markets in order to fulfill the criteria for loans (Bull, p. 40). Hence, supported by SAPs, in the twenty years leading up to the new millennium many low and middle-income countries (LMICs) deemphasized state-owned companies and state-funded programs (Friedmann, 1993, p. 5) in favour of commercialized privatization. As Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev's reforms weakened the European communist bloc to the point of collapse, the marginalization of the state in nations worldwide led to decreased development initiatives and increased inequality.

2.4. Dominant Alternative: Capability Approach

Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen first proposed the capability approach in the 1980s as an alternative theory in human development, which aims to evaluate "social change in terms of the richness of human life resulting from it" (Sen, p. 43). The theory critiques money-centric evaluations of development, pointing out that societies with similar levels of GDPs per capita often experience widely divergent living standards, distribution (in)equality, health and literacy (Sen, p. 42). Development in this context was

interpreted as the capability for an individual to live a healthy desirable life in the way he or she chooses. More specifically, the term “capability” was used to refer to the freedom to pursue well-being, which Sen characterized as “well-being freedom” (Sen, 1992, p. 40).

The theory emphasized a balance between the universal and the local by abstracting capability in a way that can be localized into divergent communities. Diversity is a strong concept in capability approach, which criticizes other normative approaches such as theories of distributive justice that overlook disabled or marginalized peoples (Khader, 2008; Terzi, 2010). Thus, the evaluation of capability is necessarily context-specific; for example, the capability of ensuring individuals are not subjected to humiliation depended on the diverging expressions and understandings of shame in different societies.

Capability terminology has changed over time, without universal standardization. Martha Nussbaum¹¹ (2000, p. 84), for example, used the term “basic capabilities” to describe “the innate equipment of individuals that is necessary for developing the more advanced capabilities,” whereas Amartya Sen characterized basic capability as “the ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to certain levels” (Sen, 1992, p. 45).

In relation to development communication, capability theorists advocate moving away from economic and political-centered models, instead stressing the importance of non-material capacities such as health, education and most importantly individual freedom of choice. This approach attempts to be a customizable operation that respects the cultural diversity and varying interests between different societies, groups, and individuals as opposed to the previous one size fits all Western and liberal-centric universalism of the modernization paradigm. The capability approach’s adoption by the UN also formed the basis of the Human Development Index¹² (HDI) as a way of measuring the well-being of any given human population group.

¹¹ Nussbaum (2000) expanded upon Sen’s theory to outline her version of ten central capabilities: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one’s environment. (See appendix)

¹² Developed by Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq in the 1990s, the Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure of human development which categorizes human development into four levels, using the composite statistics of life expectancy, education and GDP per capita

Since its introduction, capability theory has been used in the context of development studies, in particular by supranational organizations such as the UNDP, to counter money-centric measures such as GDP per capita, which Sen criticizes as “utilitarian calculus versus objective deprivation” (Sen, 2003, p. 44). However, the problem arises when Sen’s frequent equating of capabilities with freedoms lacks the delineation as to what these freedoms specifically entail. Granted that the term “freedom” harbors divergent definitions to different people with varying positionalities, freedom as equivalent to capability can produce little meaningful systemic change to the conditions fueling disenfranchisement if the concept remains strictly embedded in the individual level as articulated by Sen. In a paradoxical example, the individual freedom to produce, buy, and sell in markets will produce minimal economic and social changes when not elevated or standardized to the systemic level. Yet if there is a systemization of such freedoms into the promotion of the free market, the approach will simply perpetuate the problematics of enforcing capitalism on a societal scale in the manner of the dominant paradigm. Thus, while capability theory is generally regarded as a post-Cold War framework and alternative to modernization theory, the approach cannot fully depart from the Cold War-era dominant paradigm when practiced on a wide scale owing to the impossibility of maintaining individualism in systemic group development, thereby remaining trapped in the old Cold War-era framework.

2.4.1. ICT4D & Capability Approach

The debate surrounding technological determinist effects of media tools is perhaps most aptly reflected by the work of Marshall McLuhan (1964), who proposed in his seminal book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that “the medium is the message” (p. 8). McLuhan believed that the tools through which information is conveyed affected the way that information is processed and understood. Thus, a central component to the discussion of development paradigms in this paper is ICT, the contemporary digital technology in which development communication manifests itself in the 21st century.

ICT refers to “information and communications technology” (Blurton, 1999, p.1; Rouse, 2005, para. 1), or alternatively, “information, communication and technology¹³” (Giles, 2017, para. 3). The term derives from the earlier term IT or “information technology,” which Daintith defines as “the study, design, development, application, implementation, support or management of computer-based information systems” (Daintith, 2009, para. 1). The added C (communication) in ICT is an expansion from IT to specifically address communications issues.

Definitions of ICT are as divergent as the wide range of ICT’s uses (Birdsall, 2011, p. 96). In the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1999 World Communication and Information Report, Blurton defines ICT as “a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information” (p.1). Tech writer Margaret Rouse (2005) expands the definition to specify “all devices, networking components, applications and systems that combined allow people and organizations (i.e., businesses, nonprofit agencies, governments and criminal enterprises) to interact in the digital world” (para. 2), which encompasses both the antiquated technologies of landline telephones, radio and television broadcast, as well as cutting-edge pieces like smartphones, artificial intelligence and robotics (para. 3, 5).

According to Heeks (2009), prior to the mid-1990s, ICTs and development communication were conceptualized separately (p. 3). Although digital ICTs became increasingly available by the early 1990s, they were initially not explicitly considered as a development option by supranational organizations, even when they entered into use in developing countries. The concept ICT4D came into being with the creation of the 1998 World Development Report by the World Bank, the Digital Opportunities Task Force in 2000 by the G8¹⁴, and the World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS)¹⁵ by the UN

¹³ While ICT is most commonly cited as an abbreviation for “information and communications technology,” legal analyst John Giles argues that ICT in fact refers to “information, communications and technology,” as the latter definition encompasses the information/communication produced in addition to the information technology and communications technology engaged in the production (Giles, 2017).

¹⁴ Refers to the Group of Eight, an intergovernmental forum of industrialized countries consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK, and US, with the EU represented as an “unenumerated” participant. The group was renamed G7 following the suspension of Russia in 2014.

¹⁵ Refers to the two-part UN-sponsored summit on communication and information society held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005, with the mission of bridging the digital divide between rich and poor countries. It established 17 May as World Information Society Day.

(Heeks, p. 4). When ICT entered the realm of development communication as ICT4D, the underlying ideological paradigm “still reflected the model of communication conceived with regard to telephony signal transmission” (Birdsall, p. 96).

The development paradigm for ICTs saw the simultaneous rise of the Internet and the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals¹⁶. Heeks characterized these two intertwining subjects as “a tool in search of purposes” finding “a purpose in search of tools.” In other words, ICTs needed a purpose to serve, while development communication needed new technological tools to operate. The meeting of the two created excitement in the early twenty-first century as an innovative tool to carry out human development.

In 21st century development communication discourse, there is a close connection between capability theory and development of communication rights (Nussbaum, 2007; Sen, 2012). The prevalence of applying the capability approach to ICT4D have prompted reexaminations of structural constraints impeding the process. The widespread economic and social inequality barring marginalized populations from access to the information world guts a deep digital divide in ICT4D efforts. Raboy and Shtern argue that people “have drastically different communication means at their disposal, and the realization of freedom of expression is stratified” (2010, p. 252). Birdsall (2011) notes that “while the potential application of ICT to capabilities appears so seemingly unlimited, there is the challenge of ascertaining a constructive framework within which to carry out such a dialogue” (p. 94). Top-down dissemination and unidirectional information flows entailed that “freedom of expression, even where fully protected to the highest standards, is simply incapable, in the context of today’s media and communication structures, of guaranteeing that everyone’s voice can be heard in society” (O Siochru, 2010, p. 50, as cited in Birdsall, p. 97). Corporate media concentration along with narrow legal definitions of freedom of expression show “multiple structures and forces that in practice limit freedom of expression for most people while

¹⁶ Refers to eight goals established at the UN Millennium Summit: 1) to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) to achieve universal primary education, 3) to promote gender equality and empower women, 4) to reduce child mortality, 5) to improve maternal health, 6) to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, 7) to ensure environmental sustainability, and 8) to develop a global partnership for development.

augmenting it disproportionately for a powerful minority” (O Siochru, p. 50 as cited in Birdsall, p. 97).

The empowering capability of ICT4D has been called into question as Ritzer points to the rise of corporate concentration of new media monopolies such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and Apple (Ritzer, 2010, p. 286, as cited in Birdsall, p. 97), a “Googlearchy” of unparalleled size which Hindman argues will render “the inability of any citizen, no matter how sophisticated and civic-minded, to cover it all” (2009, p. 57, as cited in Birdsall, p. 97). Hindman goes on to assert that the equalizing power of the Internet may merely be a delusional mirage, describing the Internet’s potential to provide the individual an audience of billions akin to the “vanishingly small” potential of winning the lottery (Hindman 2009, p. 101, as cited in Birdsall, p. 97).

Coleman and Blumler (2009) remain unconvinced that ICT4D will boost citizenship so long as commerce is the “driving seat of Internet development” (p. 67). They pessimistically conclude that “the short history of e-democracy is littered with failed projects, dead web sites, earnest intentions that were never taken up and thoughtful dialogues that led nowhere” (p. 195).

3. ICT4D Documents Case Study

3.1. Background

As discussed in the previous section, having been conceptualized as a development tool in the mid-1990s, ICTs drew attention from national and supranational development agencies alike. As Birdsall points out:

Because of the global nature of contemporary electronic communication individual states cannot always achieve this goal alone, action at the international level is also necessary between nations and international bodies with regard to such issues as telecommunications regulation, access to information, Internet governance, cultural policy, censorship, and addressing the digital divide among nations. Thus, such concerns are addressed in international bodies and documents. (Birdsall, p. 103)

The ICT4D documents of supranational organizations, as iterated in the beginning of the paper, reflect an ideological microcosm of dominant institutionalized thinking on development communication, which in turn leads to the creation of real-world policies impacting the world's marginalized population. In this section, I will attempt to delineate and critique current theoretical trends in supranational organizations' understanding of ICT4D as affected by legacies of the Cold War by conducting a critical hermeneutic analysis of two EU and UN ICT4D reports.

3.1.1. ICT in the developing world (EP)

The December 2015 study "ICT in the developing world" was written by members of the EP's Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) panel: Laura Delponte (lead author); Matteo Grigolini, Andrea Moroni and Silvia Vignetti (Centre for Industrial Studies, Milan, Italy); Massimiliano Claps and Nino Giguashvili (International Data Corporation, Milan, Italy). It was managed by STOA's Scientific Foresight Unit within the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services (DG EPRS) of EP.

STOA was established on the advice of then EP member Rolf Linkhor in September 1988 following a pilot period in March 1987. Harbouring the core belief that "scientific and technological advances lie at the heart of economic growth" (STOA), the

committee was created on the EP's wishes to weigh the benefits and risks of new technologies. According to Article 1 of the STOA Rules, STOA's mission is to produce high-quality studies and forums for new technology adoption, and provide independent advice on the best options for policy adoption.

The aim of the particular study is to “examine the nature and extent of impact of ICT on poverty reduction in LMICs” with a specific focus on the health sector [...] the report also assesses present EU actions in the area of improving ICT4D diffusion” (Delponte et al, 2015, p.1).

The study begins by offering an executive summary of ICT in LMICs, and the potential for ICT4D to solve social and economic issues. It establishes the main areas of EU involvement in promoting ICTs in LMICs: “i) support to the development of ICT infrastructure, ii) harmonisation and alignment of ICT relevant policy and regulatory frameworks, iii) establishing national research and education networks of EU and LMICs, and iv) ICT capacity building initiatives” (Delponte et al, p.77). The report specifically mentions poverty reduction and health systems as two major goals of ICT4D.

The study goes on to identify development obstacles as currently experienced by ICT4D initiatives in LMICs. This portion of the study provides comparisons of ICT usage between LMICs and developed countries, as well as delineating the roles of ICT4D for poverty reduction and its relevant constraints. A similar analysis is then provided for the healthcare sector.

The report then analyses the role of the EP in ICT4D, its current effectiveness (and lack thereof) and possible improvements. It overviews the voices of various stakeholders involved, which includes donors, EP officials and local agents.

The next section covers the survey results of 145 ICT4D experts, of which 10 are interviewed closely. Finally, the report offers four different policy options and presents conclusions. The four policy options are: 1) reduction of ICT4D altogether, 2) top-down approach, 3) bottom-up approach, 4) combination of top-down and bottom-up (Delponte et al, p.110).

The reduction of ICT4D altogether option cites inadequacies in ICT initiatives as meriting their removal. Of the experts surveyed, this was the least favorable option, at

only 3%. Next, 7% percent of surveyed experts believed the EP should focus exclusively on a top-down approach. The top-down approach entails the authoritative construction of large-scale infrastructure for top-down ICT dissemination. This has been the existing EP ICT4D policy, and criticized by the report for failing to allow ICT benefits trickle down to the bottom rungs of LMICs. The bottom-up approach gained 26% of the vote, which entails “identifying local change agents” (Delponte et al, p.110) and enlisting local support and decision making for programs. This idea is relatively new, hastened by the development of relevant technologies. Lastly, 52% of surveyed experts believed the EP should combine top-down and bottom-up methods. This was by far the most popular choice.

3.1.2. ICT4D and the Human Development and Capabilities Approach: The Potentials of Information and Communication Technology (UNDP)

The September 2010 study “ICT4D and the Human Development and Capabilities Approach: The Potentials of Information and Communication Technology” was written by Jean-Yves Hamel as part of the UNDP’s Human Development Research Paper (HDRP) series, which seeks to be a “quick-disseminating, informal publication whose titles could subsequently be revised for publication as articles in professional journals or chapters in books” (Hamel, p. 1).

The establishment of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was marked by controversy and compromise. Initially, proposals of a Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) was opposed by US, who preferred development funds to operate under the umbrella of the American-led World Bank (WB). SUNFED was remodeled into the Special Fund, which focused only on creating conditions of private investment as consistent with the dominant paradigm. With the mandate of achieving the “eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion” (UNDP), the UNDP was founded in 22 November 1965 with the merging of the Special Fund and the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA). Since 1990, the UNDP has published the annual Human Development Report based on evaluations of HDI.

This particular study approaches ICT4D from the theoretical paradigm of the human capability approach. The aim of the study is to explore “whether or not ICTs have demonstrated positive outcomes for these dimensions of human development [capabilities approach] and more broadly to the practice of its approach,” “whether or not the use of ICTs is pertinent to the human development of the poor,” (Hamel, p. 2) and identify “the role of government policy and investment in ICTs as keys to their success in development” (Hamel, p. 3).

The UNDP paper begins by introducing human development and the capabilities approach while demonstrating its link to ICT4D in order to explain how ICTs have the potential of being capability enhancers. Using statistical data on the availability and use of ICTs across HDI groupings since 1990, the report discusses the impacts of ICT4D in the realms of participation and empowerment, health, education and income. The paper concludes that ICTs have the potential of providing capabilities for human development when applied with “foresight, clear objectives, a firm understanding of the obstacles that exist in each context and proper policies that establish an institutional framework that promote the use and benefits of ICTs for the poor” (Hamel, p. 3).

3.2. Ideological Delineation

As Rogers (1976) argues, the contribution of mass communication to development is often limited by social structures and lack of available resources (p. 24). The two documents examined in this paper both cite issues such as lack of connectivity, interoperability, financing durability, infrastructure and local laws as major obstacles to effective ICT4D implementation. The reports outline in detail various examples of ICT4D challenges, and the technological, social and economic policies that could alleviate obstacles in these areas. The operational and infrastructural analysis of ICT4D is presented in a straightforward, quantitative manner, relying on statistics and other empirical evidence.

The two reports’ ideological orientations are more varied, although in rhetoric both studies highlight the capability approach as the prevailing, ideal framework in contemporary ICT4D. As reflected in the title of the report, the UNDP document in particular is entirely structured around how ICT4D should most effectively be implemented along the lines of the capability approach, proclaiming that “the human

development and capability approach in particular sees development as a multidimensional and multidisciplinary process of enlarging people's choices and freedoms" (Hamel, p.1).

The UNDP report proclaims:

Synthesizing the various views on the capability approach, which are largely defined by Amartya Sen's work and by the global human development reports, we can understand that the aim of human development is: "to expand people's freedoms – the worthwhile capabilities people value – and to empower people to engage actively in development processes, on a shared planet. As Sen states, "Capability reflects a person's freedom to choose between different ways of living." The approach is commonly seen as today's most relevant approach to development and the embodiment of the United Nations' founding principles (Hamel, p. 4).

This rhetoric is echoed by the EP report, which claims that in development studies, two frameworks are mostly used: "the capability framework that looks at how ICTs can contribute to freedom and empowerment, and the livelihoods model that investigates the impact of ICTs on individuals and communities" (Delponte et al, p. 28).

Having framed capability approach as moving away from the Cold War dominant paradigm, the discourse reflected in the two documents casts into doubt the supposed adherence to capability theory in development communication practice, if not altogether questions capability theory's departure from the dominant paradigm in core rhetoric. In either case, the UNDP study in particular showcases heavy bias towards the old dominant paradigm.

Deducing the positive economic effects of ICT4D as well as other forms of development communication initiatives remain difficult and controversial, due to the diverse range of goals, definitions and methodologies employed in the process. The quantity of literature on both the optimists' and pessimists' side is huge. The challenges of quantifying causal relationships between ICT4D and growth aside, any concrete development aid-based economic achievements would furthermore need to overcome the sustainability hurdle. The EP report acknowledges failings of ICT4D in poverty alleviation amongst marginalized populations, while the UNDP report presents a rosier picture, emphasizing that a "growing body of research suggests that the positive impacts of ICTs on economic growth can now be observed at the macroeconomic level despite

difficulties at identifying evidence of their spill-over effects” (Hamel, p. 41). However, the optimism on positive macroeconomic impact may prove to be dubious, as the UNDP study’s claim bears striking similarity to the oversold hypodermic-needle model¹⁷ of media effects in the US, which Rogers characterized as “an overly enthusiastic position which eventually succumbed to empirically oriented communication research” (Rogers, p. 22).

In instances of recognizing failure of past ICT4D initiatives, the direction of critique is aimed mostly at the social, cultural and political systems of the target populations, instead of re-evaluating how the technology should be refitted to better localize into the target populations. The UNDP study in particular gives a scathing critique to the media regulation systems of various countries, which operate largely against what is desirable to Western development goals.

3.2.1. West vs. the rest

When discussing the policy ramifications of ICT4D, the UNDP study exhibits evident dominant paradigm bias in the categorization of nation-states:

Liberty, or the lack of it, has repeatedly been an obstacle to the accessibility of information in societies that are undemocratic or repressive. The policies of Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam make them the most repressive states for Internet use in the world today.

The ECHELON¹⁸ system, managed by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, also comes to mind for those who are familiar with global digital monitoring and surveillance systems. (Hamel, p. 18)

¹⁷ Refers to a behaviorist model of communications arising from the US in the 1930s, which suggested that intended messages are directly received and wholly accepted by the receiver.

¹⁸ ECHELON, also known as the Five Eyes, refers to the government code name for the signals intelligence collection and analysis network operated by the US with the support of the four other signatory nations to the UKUSA Security Agreement (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK). The surveillance program was created in the late 1960s to monitor the communications of the USSR and communist camp. By the end of the last century had expanded to monitor communications worldwide.

In critiquing hegemonic media systems and corresponding regulation policies of various nation-states, the author of the UNDP report organizes his argument along an Orientalist West vs. the rest narrative that had contributed to the Cold War construction of modernization theory in the first place. As established earlier in the paper, the historical relationship between Orientalism and the Cold War is intertwined, though one never completely overlaps or replaces the other. As the anti-communist framework can no longer be snugly applied following the dissolution of the USSR and European communist states and partial adoption of capitalist economic reform in Asian communist states, Orientalism reemerges as a substitute for the West's fear of non-Western nations pursuing "deviant modernities" once dominated by communist ideology, hitherto exemplified by varying examples of illiberal authoritarianism. Whether consciously or subconsciously, Hamel groups two separate sets of countries when analyzing the same pattern of problematic power dynamics, one consisting of illiberal non-Western nations and the second of liberal Western nations. Whereas the grouping of the latter may be justified as partaking in membership of the Five Eyes, the former group consists of countries with wildly divergent cultures, politics, and levels of economic and social development, with no point of capability unison other than their lack of membership to the liberal West. Given that both sets of countries share the same problematics of elites blocking informational access to maintain political and social dominance, there can be no justification to the presentation other than a lingering Cold War-style West vs. rest mentality.

The systemic differentiation between countries Eastern and Western, democratic and undemocratic blur when confronted with the reality of elitist neoliberal politics in both. Take the following excerpt as an example:

They have experienced firsthand the extent to which democratic governments are ready to dismantle and even attack independent news outlets when they consider the censorship of information a political necessity. This was the case in Seattle (United States), Québec (Canada), and Genoa (Italy) during massive anti-globalization protests occurring between 1999 and 2001. Police raided the sites of online broadcasting, seized computer equipment, and arrested civilians for their roles in disseminating first person accounts of the protests and the police repression that ensued (Kidd, 2003). It is therefore important to consider the safety of users in using ICTs for political mobilisation and information dissemination, especially when they are located in undemocratic societies where state

violence, repression and censorship are common. (Hamel, p. 22-23)

Overlooking the lack of discussion on the divergent definitions of democracy, the paragraph stresses the dangers of using ICTs for political empowerment, whereby democratic governments are prepared to violently crack down on dissenters and undemocratic governments even more so. This begs the question: if attacks on users of ICT4D for political empowerment occur both in democratic and undemocratic systems, what is the common variant spurring the political necessity of oppression in both? Perhaps the answer may be found within the neoliberal social structures overlooked by the Cold War framework of categorization, whereby the dominant binary of the West vs. the rest brings about a false dichotomy of democratic Western liberty vs. backward non-Western oppression that fogs the real power and class dynamics fueling political violence and social marginalization.

3.2.2. The Singaporean Paradox

Even through an Orientalist lens, the categorization of the above-mentioned states is self-contradictory. For example, the report cannot coherently categorize Singapore, which the author describes as "a country known for its successful economic development policies but otherwise an author of repressive Internet legislation" (Hamel, p. 19). Singapore's development path is incongruent with the dominant paradigm's Cold War-era assumptions; that is, economically developed societies will inevitably shy away from authoritarian values and embrace Western-style liberalism. Singapore's leaders are noted for snubbing Western attempts of ideological universalism, with former Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng proclaiming "universal recognition of the ideal of human rights can be harmful if universalism is used to deny or mask the reality of diversity." Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew famously dismissed Western-led advocacy organizations Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, saying that he did not care for them or their ratings.

From the perspective of the capability approach, Singapore may very well be the poster child for ICT4D, as it boasts the most affluent population in Southeast Asia as measured by GDP per capita, enjoys an extremely high HDI with world-class education and healthcare systems, and promotes one of the most developed technology sectors in

terms of ICT diffusion. However, since the political and cultural system of Singapore is deemed by Hamel as authoritarian and not in line with Western modernity, the UNDP report does not laud Singapore as the information hub of the Asia-Pacific.

Discourse surrounding communication rights evolved from focusing solely on negative rights (rights to freedom from government intrusion and oppression) to inclusion of positive rights (rights to capability of access provided by the government such as the right to education or healthcare). The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 embodies both types of rights, while Raboy and Shtern argues the subsequent ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) oversimplifies the nature of rights by presenting a distinct binary (2010, p. 36–39). The report downplays Singapore’s positive rights and dwells upon the lack of negative rights, denouncing Singapore as “strongly undermining the civic potential of ICTs” and also negatively influencing the region because the Singapore ICT development was emulated by all the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Singapore’s leadership in presenting a model of ICT4D policy alternative to the liberal model familiar to Western powers elicited disapproval from the UNDP study, contradicting the capability approach’s reverence for choice and diversity. Hamel does not discuss whether or not ASEAN member states’ Southeast Asian cultures shared more similarities with Singaporean authoritarianism than Western liberalism, which may have contributed to their choice in the Singapore model rather than the Western liberal model. The dismissal of alternative models weakens the UNDP study’s rhetoric of pursuing a capability approach on ICT4D, and leans more in the direction of the Cold War dominant paradigm, where the Western struggle for ideological dominance over Asia reasserts itself.

3.2.3. The Chinese Conundrum

As Zhao notes, “partly because of the conventional press and broadcast media’s highly controlled nature and partly because of the very success of the Chinese state in promoting information technologies – the Internet and the mobile phone have experienced explosive growth in China” (2011, p. 160). The UNDP report characterizes China as a country that “positions itself as a firm obstacle to online freedom of expression” (Hamel, p. 20). Similar to the case of Singapore, China’s authoritarian

government is open to market economics, foreign investment and technological innovation, but remains illiberal in the field of governing style and cultural sphere. Thus, the country has risen exponentially in terms of economic capability, but has not materialized the liberal sense of modernization preferred by the West politically or socially. If one is to adopt the Cold War dominant paradigm position that modernization necessarily entails political liberalization, an unexplainable paradox occurs: the wealthier China progresses economically, and the more successful its industrialization process, the less “modern” it becomes socially and politically (Karbon, 2008). Xing argues that “it is problematic to make sense of China’s media transformation from a linear logic linking commercialization with the expansion of freedom of expression” (Xing, 2012, p. 64). He goes on to iterate that while the academic world has given attention to the development of the private sector and middle class as the potential harbinger of democratic and social reform, “their conceptual framework either neglects or fails to account for the working masses and their conflicts with both arbitrary state power and the seemingly liberating, but exploitative, power of capital” (Xing, p. 66). China’s development phenomenon remains paradoxical insofar as the ideological prevalence of modernization theory lingers in mainstream development discourse, whereas moving beyond the hegemonic Cold War assumptions of development would significantly clarify understandings of China’s development outlook. Yet precisely because of the continued Cold War paradigm, China attracts criticisms from the West for its “deviant modernity,” a concept once reserved for discussions of the USSR (Gilman, p. 14).

The report encourages Chinese activists to access “barred websites of organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Amnesty International, and countless more” (Hamel, p. 12):

Despite the threat of imprisonment, local Chinese activists are continuing to compile email lists, authoring websites, finding ways to circumvent barred access to websites of organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Amnesty International, and countless more, and adapting peer-to-peer networking software for the sharing of political documents. This is truly “Internet guerrilla warfare” against silence, propaganda, and control of citizens’ voices. (Hamel, p. 21)

The three institutions singled out by name as the beacons of hope against suppression in the paragraph above are all, without exception, Western or Western-led.

While it is well-documented that posing resistance to state oppression produces empowerment for the masses, the question remains as to what extent the absorption and adoption of ideas disseminated by authoritative Western organizations count as resistance and empowerment. As Kunst points out:

By being exposed to an abundance of western content in the digital world, it might be feared that developing countries would experience a form of cultural imperialism. In regard to the logical consistency of modernization theory, it could, however, be argued that this is exactly what modernization scholars aim to achieve. (Kunst, p. 17)

The perceived reputability and desirability of information by virtue of their origins in the developed West leads to the deeply monopolistic thinking that any and all activism in developing countries is and should be geared towards Westernization. Along this line of thought and practice, ICTs would come to facilitate the expansion of a local comprador class in favour of the Westernization process. Yet the history of imperialism and colonialism shows that the problem of internal marginalization of disenfranchised groups by local hegemonies cannot be solved by inviting the entry of foreign hegemonies, which pose an equal if not greater threat to justice and empowerment.

Moreover, the report characterizes the accessing of Western media outlets by Chinese activists as “truly “Internet guerrilla warfare” against silence, propaganda, and control of citizens’ voices” (Hamel, p. 21). The conceptualization of the communication sphere as a battlefield is by no means a new phenomenon, with the author’s choice of the term “warfare” to characterize contesting communication narratives echoing the “psychological warfare” of the Cold War. Particularly paradoxical is the way the BBC is characterized as a solution to hegemony and propaganda, even though itself is a hegemonic corporate media institution of the British state. The uneven power dynamics between information networks of the core versus peripheral countries is reflected in O Siochru’s argument that contemporary commercial-driven media and communication structures mute marginalized voices despite the utmost legal protection and personal exercise of the freedom of expression (p. 50). If the UNDP report believes an institution like the BBC can be counted as the guerrilla warfare for freedom, the report is implicitly condoning the use of ICT4D to further the points of view of hegemonic media institutions. Again, we are reminded that the Cold War legacy continues, even if rhetoric claims

otherwise. As such, it remains doubtful whether or not ICT4D can really empower marginalized masses in the way claimed by the human capability approach.

It is evident that it is not a lack of capabilities along the lines of capability theory inducing Hamel to frame ICT4D in the Asian nations of Singapore and China unfavorably, but rather the old modernization framework that enforces the ethnocentric view of development in line with the Western liberal political system. Moreover, the report's usage of the term "warfare" in terms of communication echoes of the psychological warfare tactics as outlined by Simpson (1994), heralding to all that Cold War practices are far from over.

3.2.4. Iran, India and beyond

The overthrow of the pro-Western, modernizing Iranian shah in 1979 contributed to the injury of modernization theory as a stabilizing force. Post-revolutionary, contemporary Iran, as a country with a highly illiberal religious, political and social system, continues to draw the ire of Western liberal proponents for its opposition to hegemonic Western modernity. The way the UNDP report characterizes the social unrest following the Iranian elections of 2009 is as follows:

The potential of ICTs to empower social movements, promote participation and assist in the mobilization of people as agents of change was made evident countless times around the world, the most recent example being in Iran following the elections of 2009. As a response to the outcome of the vote, masses of demonstrators defiantly took to the streets in protest. During these violently repressed demonstrations, Twitter users with mobile phones were able to keep a window open into the events of Tehran despite the government's efforts to the contrary (Poniewozik, 2009). International news outlets consequently found on the Internet a collection of live feeds of the events on the streets. The result was live broadcasting around the world of repression and shooting of unarmed civilians. These images shocked the world and their repercussions are still being felt in the press since they have severely affected the image of the political leadership in Iran. (Hamel, p. 21)

In this case, the situation in Iran is framed in a way that presents ICT as a justifiable tool to challenge, if not overthrow, illiberal anti-Western leaders, even if they were elected into power. So-called democratic electoral processes, which are normally

praised by Western democratic countries, are called into question only when the outcome produces an anti-Western leader. The Iranian election protests were framed as legitimate, just and worthy of praise not because they supported electoral democracy, but because they opposed the conservative Islamic leaders in favour of dominant Western modernity. Social unrest is only framed as justifiable and desirable to support regime change in illiberal, non-Western societies. Had the Iranian protests been against pro-Western liberals, the framing of the event by the UNDP report would likely be different, or not mentioned at all. As with the case of China, the UNDP report endorses the diffusion of hegemonic Western communications tools such as Twitter to influence the means by which the government and populace process information to make decisions, and adjust them to the reigns of Western liberal capitalism.

These examples continue incessantly in the report, and it goes on to praise the use of ICTs for the East Timorese separatist movement from Indonesia while criticizing former Indonesian leader Suharto, who poses another palpable threat to Western hegemony. Quietly omitted from ICT4D critique in the UNDP report is the world's largest democracy, India, whereas literature elsewhere paints a more critical scene. Kunst argues that although ICTs play a vital role in the Indian economy, "no trickle-down effect has ensured that economic progress will be to the benefit of all," (p. 18) and that "the expectation that economic growth through vital ICT-industries would generate a diamond-shaped society has not so far been met" (p. 12). Warschauer (2003) finds that the ICT industry in India created a handful of millionaire tycoons, a small technical class of software engineers and computer programmers, while the majority of the population continue to live in poverty (p. 23). The South Asian giant has been a constitutional democracy since its partition, albeit some scholars believe that it has become less democratic as it has so-called modernized. Zakaria argues that while India's economic trade with the western liberal countries has increased, its politics have become "less tolerant, less secular, less law-abiding, less liberal" (Zakaria, 2003, p. 30). However, rhetorically India remains the poster child for the largest democracy in the world, and the frequently paraded example of how large complex "other" countries can successfully operate within the framework of Western capitalist democracy. Thus, no mention is given to its relationship with ICT4D, the failures of which cannot be coherently addressed by the Cold War dominant paradigm. The relative economic, educational and health successes of ICT4D in the de facto authoritarian one-party states of China and

Singapore and the corresponding lack of success in Western-style multiparty India points to the deeper class and structural issues affecting development, occurring beyond the simplistic Cold War political framework of capitalism vs. communism and liberalism vs. authoritarianism.

1.1.1. Methodological Inconsistency

While the UNDP report is explicit in its theoretical bias, the EP report focuses primarily on operational critique and is thus more difficult to extrapolate ideologically. On the one hand, both the content and discourse of the EP report exemplify the problematics identified by critiques of modernization theory, which highlights current ICT4D policies' bias towards growth-based capitalist economic models. The EP report cites "a general consensus on the relevant and positive role of ICTs in underpinning economic progress" (Delponte et al, p.10), hereby presenting a normalized view of capitalist economic progress and development as the solution to humanity's problems. This is precisely the structural foundation of the dominant paradigm of modernization theory. On the other hand, while critics of the dependency framework both directly accuse and indirectly imply current ICT4D projects of turning a blind eye to inequality, it is evident that the EP report does not wholly accept the equality principle of distributive justice¹⁹. The EP report cites "unequal provision for access to information" (Delponte et al, p.10) and its corresponding inequality as a serious issue in itself, regardless of whether or not the current ICT programs make the most severely deprived objectively better off. The report writes:

While some benefits of ICTs uptake have already materialized in LMICs and succeeded in changing the life of people, most of the ICT potential remains to be fully exploited, especially for the lowest income groups. The use of ICTs is far from being common in schools, business, government and health systems. The availability of ICT services reaches first the urban, better off and educated groups, while the urban poor and rural areas are less involved and their capacity to fully benefit from ICTs is limited. (Delponte et al, p.10)

¹⁹ The Rawlsian equality principle holds that inequality is acceptable insofar as it improves the worse off; in other words, the wealth gap between rich and poor can widen insofar as the poor becomes objectively richer (Rawls, 1958).

This shows that the critique offered by the EP report do not fundamentally differ from notions of justice as presented by the dependency framework. While the structural foundations of economic growth narratives are normalized as in modernization theory, the notion of inequality is not.

However, there can be two interpretations to this evidence. One, the EP's self-critical evidence strengthens critics' argument of ICT4D being a perpetuator of inequality for the most marginalized and oppressed; or two, undermines the dependency framework's argument that ICT4D continues to be a dominant paradigm tool of media imperialism subjugating developing countries. These two interpretations differ in terms of whether the researcher places more emphasis on the current status of unequal distribution as evidenced by the EP report, or the report's authors' self-critical awareness that is crucial for moving beyond the dominant paradigm and implementing equal and just initiatives in the future.

Extrapolating from the EP report's discourse, the STOA panel did not recognize the extension of Western capitalist economic and cultural influence as problematic or even as a conceptualization of the dominant paradigm. Indeed, cultural aspects of hegemony go unmentioned in the same fashion as the UNDP report, although the EP report does stress the importance of incorporating local agents into the ICT projects. Of the four policy options given, the balance of top-down/bottom-up approach and solely bottom-up approach are the favorite and second favorite as voted by ICT experts in the EP report, outpacing the top-down approach by a large margin (Delponte et al, p. 110-111). This is the same counterhegemonic perspective of critics of the dominant paradigm; for example, Geray & Ozdemir writes: "when participatory approaches in the real sense were applied a unique discourse not dependent on hegemonic ones can emerge [...] on the other hand local documents produced under hegemonic discourses of the World Bank and European Union the opposite is true" (Geray & Ozdemir, 2011, p. 62).

Thus, at least on paper, the EP report advocate for power dissemination towards local LMICs, reducing the hegemonic power of implementing institutions. Whether this can translate into meaningful action is subject for another research project. In any case, the EP report's lack of favoritism towards the top-down approach calls into question the document's lingering of the Cold War dominant paradigm as expressed through media imperialist tactics; namely, exclusion of Global South local actors in decision making.

However, the rhetorical attributes for decentralization of power do not translate into the methodology of the report itself. The reports discuss possible policy reform due to past failed initiatives which may not have benefited the most marginalized communities, and the most prominent of which is transferring the existing top-down approach to a more inclusive and localized bottom-up approach in line with capability theory.

Even though the findings of the report favor an integrated top-down and bottom-up approach, if one is to look at the methodology used for the study, it in itself still remains a top-down approach. In the EP study, 145 representatives are surveyed to give their advice on top-down and bottom-up integration policy.

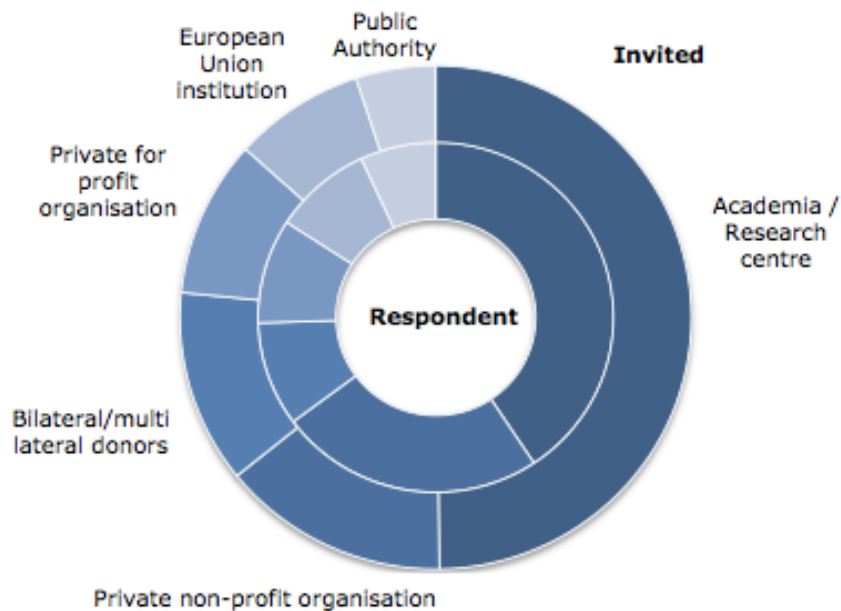


Figure 1 – Breakdown of 145 respondents invited to EP survey and survey participants by type of ICT4D affiliation (EP report)

Of the 145 representatives surveyed, only a tiny proportion can be regarded as the local agents, as reflected in the public authority section of Figure 1, which are the receiving institutions such as the developing nations’ ICT4D commissions and government ministries. The remainder comprise of EU bureaucrats, prominent technology companies, academics, corporate donors and other powerful elite

stakeholders. As reflected upon by Heeks, “due to the marginalization of the state in liberalized telecommunication markets, private – frequently foreign – actors have become important players” (p.17). The marginalization of the state in this methodology leaves ICT4D initiatives vulnerable to commercial motives antithetical to the development of the most impoverished communities. As such, even in the marginal public authority section, the agents mentioned are national power institutions and not the end users. It is questionable how successful can the EP truly implement an integrated approach, if the EP was not even able to incorporate an integrated approach to a study on integrated approach.

Interestingly, while the EP is searching for an integrated top-down and bottom-up approach, such a method has already been introduced in communist communications during the Cold War in the form of Mao’s mass line model of political communication. Pat Howard (1988) recognizes the roots of the mass line from Lenin, but concurs that Mao provided the most detailed model (p. 20). As Zhao writes:

Mao’s mass line model of political communication in which the Party as the revolutionary vanguard articulates the inspirations of the masses and turns them into systemic party programs and policies, which are in turn propagated, implemented, and modified through the praxis of the masses. In theory, this model contains both vertical and horizontal dimensions and combines both elitist and popular participatory tendencies... At the same time, beyond the Western-media-constructed image of the Chinese state as the world’s most notorious Internet controller, the CCP has been proactively incorporating the Internet into its system of communication, thus carrying the Maoist tradition of “mass line” communication into the digital age. (Zhao, p. 156, 160)

However, any Maoist model of communication will likely be disregarded by the EP and other Western-led supranational institution due to hegemonic aversion of communism as perpetuated by the lingering bias of Cold War rhetoric, even if a variant of the model is used under a different name. As Gilman argues, although modernization theory was openly anti-communist politically, it replicated many communist intellectual structures (Gilman, p. 14).

4. Conclusion

This critical hermeneutic analysis has shown that the nominal conclusion of the Cold War, coupled with far-reaching technological transformation in the form of ICTs, did little to prevent lingering Cold War mentalities from hindering realistic recognition and solution of human development issues. The dominance of the American-led capitalist camp over waning socialism saw an overall shift away from development aid to military interventionism as the means to preserve geopolitical hegemony, as the US no longer faced a rival strong enough to pose meaningful military, economic and ideological opposition. The resurgence of modernization theory in the 1990s and 2000s prompted scholars to critique the returning dominant paradigm within the post-Cold War context of neoliberalism. As, Bichier and Gaderer writes,

Modernization theories reflect the ethnocentric self-approval and the political and economical superiority of Western (post)-industrialised countries. Such approaches are focusing solely on economic development based on free, deregulated markets. Following such an understanding, the Western world acts as a role model for developing countries through which hegemonic politics with the goal to introduce a neoliberal economic system on a global scale in favour of Western companies are justified. (Bichier & Gaderer, 2009, p. 412)

Current ICT4D discourse as exemplified by this critical hermeneutic analysis of the December 2015 EP-commissioned study “ICT in the developing world” and the September 2010 UNDP-commissioned study “ICT4D and the Human Development and Capabilities Approach: The Potentials of Information and Communication Technology” shows the rhetorical dominance of the capability approach as the ideal alternative to the Cold War-era dominant paradigm of modernization theory. This is explicitly exemplified by the rhetorical self-description of both documented studies. However, closer inspection reveals that the Cold War-era dominant paradigm continues to play a pressing role in the institutionalized language of development communication, as manifested both in appropriations and misappropriations of capability theory.

At the policy level, the capability approach is frequently interpreted by Western and liberal-centric researchers and powerbrokers who transform, either consciously or subconsciously, the supposedly alternative theory into an extension of the old modernization paradigm in practice. Moreover, this paper has shown that capability

theory cannot solve inequalities arising from global capitalist exploitation, as its individualistic orientation prevents systemic economic and ideological change. The guise of capability theory is thwarted by the inconsistencies of both rhetoric and methodology that masks a modernization theory core. As a result, far from disseminating meaningful empowerment, ICT4D under this ideological framework often serves the purpose of connecting “other” nations with capitalism and Western political and cultural values, in ideological diffusions no different from the psychological warfare tactics of the Cold War.

Having established that the dominant paradigm of modernization as inseparable from the Cold War (Gilman, p. 155), the paradigm’s lingering presence shows the unmistakable Cold War legacies in contemporary supranational organizations’ institutionalized thinking on development communication. In an increasingly volatile world in which the sustainability of neoliberal hegemony can no longer be guaranteed, reexamination of the Cold War’s lasting ideological impact on development communication allows for clarification to better mitigate the pressing issues of global poverty, disease, illiteracy and political disenfranchisement.

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Appendix

Nussbaum's central human capabilities (as cited in Birdsall, 2011)

1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. *Bodily Health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. *Bodily Integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and to reason—and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.
5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
6. *Practical Reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
7. *Affiliation*. A) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

B) Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.
8. *Other Species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. *Control over One's Environment.* A) *Political.* Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation and protections of free speech and association.

B) *Material.* Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.