



REVIEWS

Proenza, Francisco, J., ed. 2015. *Public Access ICT across Cultures: Diversifying Participation in the Network Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press and the International Development Research Centre. 475 pp.

As access to the Internet through mobile devices and personal computers gains greater global uptake, this volume comes with evidence and convincing argument for the continued importance of public access to information and communication technologies (ICTs)—through venues such as cybercafés and telecenters, for instance—in developing societies. Addressing concerns about the impact of ICTs, of which earlier studies offer mere anecdotal evidence, this volume responds with a set of methodologically rigorous research on the diverse impacts of public access to ICTs in ten countries (across three continents): Jordan, Rwanda, China, Cameroon, Argentina, Malaysia, Peru, India, Chile, and Thailand. The broad scope of the chapters and the range of conceptual and methodological approaches present rich data and opportunities for comparing the unique conditions and accompanying impact of ICT access across a number of cultures, shared access models, and settings (i.e., rural and urban). As the chapters in the volume were from studies funded by the Amy Mahan Research Fellowship Program that assess the relationship between public access ICTs and social inclusion, there is a slant toward papers situated in the global South. The impact is assessed not only in terms of access to physical infrastructure but in various aspects such as well-being, learning, social capital formation, employment, and empowerment of marginalized communities, among others.

The first set of chapters examines the impact of public access ICTs on personal achievement and well-being, presenting a view of the positive and adverse outcomes of ICT use. A commendable aspect of most papers in this section is the groundedness of the metrics for assessing impact that are based on user perceptions, self-motivations, and individual life goals—a significant departure from past studies that assess impact using top-down benchmarks that assume and prescribe homogenous goals for all users. The second section covers mostly qualitative research on the impact of public ICT access on social inclusion, connectedness, and organizing processes, seeing users as part of a broader network society. The last section addresses issues on the impact of public ICT access on women, presenting cross-cutting issues of exclusion from public access modalities and experiences of hostility and marginalization. The final two chapters in this section present encouraging outcomes of shared access for urban poor women (in Chile) and female migrant workers (in Thailand) who experience some form of empowerment through literacy training, maintaining and expanding social relationships, and access to cultural entertainment. The synthesis chapter is a crucial addition to the volume as it sheds light on the multiple intersectionalities of the findings from the ten studies, stimulating theoretical and practical insights and reflection. It addresses key questions foregrounding ICT for development research: how users and uses of public access ICTs across cultures are differentiated and similar in their characteristics, and the varying conditions of use and experiences.

Overall, depictions of positive implications of ICT access dominate the volume, although several chapters present some negative findings that highlight the “dark side” of access, implying that ICTs are not necessarily liberating. While certain users experience some significant benefits, there remain issues in terms of access inequality, hostility experienced by some users, and problematic use. This includes “excessive use” or “addictive tendencies” in Internet cafés, which was directly investigated in China (chapter 5) and observed in the Cameroon study (chapter 6) where long hours in Internet cafés were found to “thwart academic achievement” (192) for secondary school students. An interesting chapter on cybercafé use in Uttar Pradesh (chapter 10) found that although women benefit from useful information about education or employment from public ICTs, girls or housewives who visit cybercafés are exposed to an “unfavorable environment,” where male users watching pornographic materials make derogatory comments

toward women. Women also “become the subject of gossip” (309), especially when their presence in these public spaces is perceived to run against well-entrenched gender norms of staying at home or focusing on domestic responsibilities. Although not explicitly articulated as negative findings, several of the chapters noted issues on various kinds of access asymmetries, dwindling use, or inability to optimize services offered in public ICT access modalities and offered recommendations on how these may be addressed.

One limitation of the studies is the general reliance on self-reports of impact (394)—while this can be construed as a useful way of understanding impact from the lens of the users, questions about the reliability of self-reports have been raised in previous studies, especially as users may have difficulty discerning the direct impact of ICTs in facilitating the perceived benefit or problem. Further, there can be more situated analysis of the play of structures of power and politics in the locale and mechanisms of regulation and control that influence access asymmetries and experience across cultures and contexts—issues that are addressed in the synthesis and in some individual chapters but not too well in others. Analyses of the impact of public ICT access throughout the chapters can also be further situated within a more complex social ecology of Internet access (Horst et al. 2010) given the increasing availability of mobile Internet and personal computers in developing societies. This convergence of various access modalities, where different forms of shared access points cannot be separated from one another and with privately owned communication technologies in defining user experience, will provide the readers with more nuanced understanding of the impact of public access ICTs.

While definitely a solid achievement, the book also does not fully address the questions raised by more critical scholars about the neoliberal discourses of technology and whether or how it perpetuates the interests of dominant economic and political powers (Armitage 1999; Pieterse 2005; Wade 2002). Nonetheless, the volume emphasizes the need to democratize access to ICTs by marginalized communities and address power imbalances and social inequalities that some of these technologies also create or perpetuate.—**CHERYLL SORIANO**, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND GRADUATE PROGRAM COORDINATOR, DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY

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Claudio, Lisandro E. 2013. *Taming People's Power: The EDSA Revolutions and Their Contradictions*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press. 226 pp.

The 1986 EDSA People Power is widely perceived as a turning point in Philippine political history. Having resulted in the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos, it is often associated with ideas of change and democracy. Such a narrative has formed part of the tapestry of the Philippine imaginary. On the other hand, some scholars view EDSA—named after Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the national highway that was the main site of People Power—as a “lost revolution” (Coronel 1991), resulting in the restoration of the elite-dominated political system that existed prior to martial law (Anderson 1988). How must one make sense of these contradictions? It is within the context of these competing perspectives that Claudio makes his contribution. He differentiates between People Power “as empirical reality” and as “symbolic construction” (15), and his work focuses primarily on the latter. Making such a distinction highlights the political dimension of representation as a competition for meaning among different actors. Though reality may have its objective dimensions, its interpretation and significance can vary.

In this work, the author deconstructs what he calls the “national myth” (17) of People Power by looking at two different narratives of the event: on the one hand, there is the dominant triumphalist narrative that frames EDSA as a miracle and places the figure of Cory Aquino,