A capabilities framework for developing digital platform policy

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studying diversity calls for a diverse team
the argument

- Communicating is a basic human capacity and a fundamental human right.

- The change in the means of communicating only emphasizes how important communications are for each individual’s well-being.
intellectual background and development
the theoretical framework: the capabilities approach and social justice
digital divide studies

from an accessibility and user literacy binary to a diverse multidimensional matrix

digital diversity

first assumption
digital diversity

- diversity of connectivity levels
- diversity of skills
- diversity of outcomes
- diversity of needs and their definitions
- diversity of combinations of divide dimensions
Socio-economic differences do not explain the entire broadband adoption gap. For example, after accounting for socio-economic and geographic factors, Black and Hispanic households still lag White households in broadband adoption by 11 percentage points, though the gap between Asian and White households disappears.

After accounting for socio-economic and demographic factors, rural households still lag urban households in broadband adoption by five percentage points. ("exploring the digital nation" 2011)
information and communication technologies (ICTs)

from one-way message sending to multimedial interactive mobile communications

“new” media

second assumption
what’s new about new media

mobility  abundance  multi-mediality  interactivity
three theories of justice

utilitarianism

distributive justice

capabilities
The capabilities approach proposes the measurement of opportunities rather than that of primary goods, *by focusing on what a person is able to do or be rather than on what a person has.*

| Characteristics, are the properties of goods; | functionings, tell us what people want to do; | capabilities describe what a person *can* do; | conversion factors, are elements that enable the transition of potential rights to practiced rights. |

The relation between a good and the functionings to achieve certain beings and doings is influenced by personal, social, environmental, economic, educational, and technological conversion factors.
capabilities – basic, internal and combined

“basic capabilities refer to the real opportunity to avoid poverty”
Robeyns, 2005, p. 101

the term basic capabilities as originally used was “intended to separate out the ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to certain levels.”

“The term can, of course, be plausibly used in other ways as well, given the ambiguity of the concept of basicness”
Sen, 1992, p. 45
the role of public policy

**basic capabilities:** the innate equipment of individuals that is the necessary basis for developing the more advanced capability.

**internal capabilities:** states of the person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions

**combined capabilities:** internal capabilities combined with suitable external conditions for the exercise of the function.

"The aim of public policy is the production of combined capabilities" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 289-90)
Theoretical dilemma

Can the question of inequality and overcoming it be limited to inequality in a predetermined list put together by policymakers or philosophers?

What serve as constraints and what as enablers?

What are the conversion factors?

“equality in freedom”
the context: marginalized communities in Israel and the West Bank
a society of cleavages
Bedouin: Villagers, Journalists

Ultra-Orthodox Haredi Women

The Bnei Menashe Immigrant Community

Arab-Israelis: Media consumers, Teachers, Social networking

West Bank Palestinian Activists

Zera Beta Israel Immigrant Activists in Absorption Centers

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Arab-Israelis: Media consumers, Teachers, Social networking

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Asylum Seekers and Refugees
### Capabilities clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities/clusters</th>
<th>Arab-Israelis</th>
<th>Unrecognized villagers</th>
<th>Bedouin journalists</th>
<th>Zera Beta Israel activists</th>
<th>West Bank activists</th>
<th>Arab-Israeli teachers</th>
<th>Haredi women</th>
<th>Bnei Menashe</th>
<th>Asylum seekers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>To voice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>To be informed</td>
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<td>To identify and belong</td>
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<tr>
<td>To imitate</td>
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<tr>
<td>To participate in social change</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>To enjoy</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the communities through which we traveled want “more” of the freedom to communicate; however, “more” is subjective.

developing policies based on the capabilities approach dictates that policies should be focused on the actual opportunities made available to individuals.

insights and conclusions

Policymaking aimed at closing the adoption gap should address

1. internal capabilities (traits, skills, and qualities such as language fluency, digital literacy, and cultural beliefs)

2. conversion factors (such as access to electricity, employment circumstances, and living conditions) that characterize each of the unique marginalized communities in society.
thank you