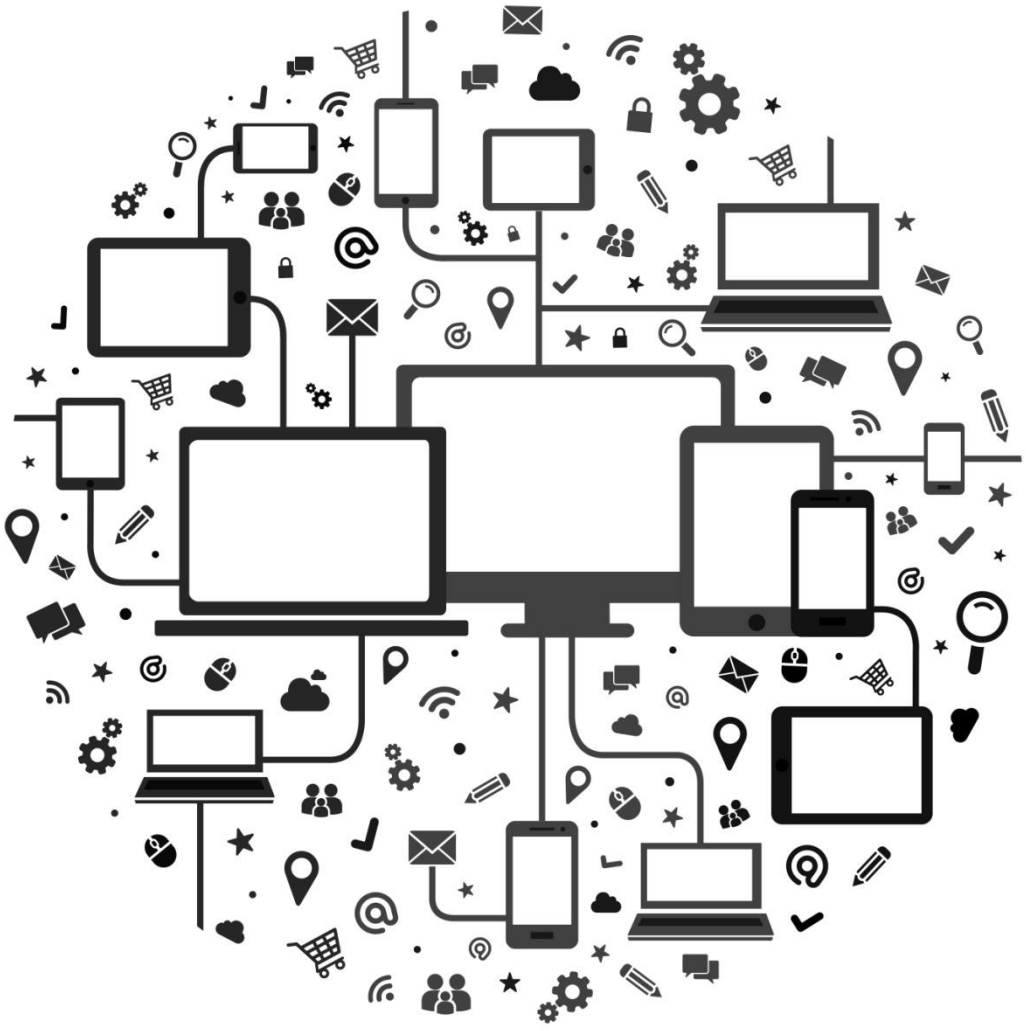
A CONNECTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF A FILE SHARING PRACTICE: THE BULGARIAN CASE



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PhD dissertation

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This PhD dissertation is dedicated to my family

Maya Georgieva Ninova 2015

Acknowledgments

The long journey is now at the end. I cannot believe that I made it, but I am excited that I have.

I could not have made it without my parents Dona and Georgi, and my brother Ivaylo and their unconditional love and support. Thank you for believe in me even though you probably do not really know what I have been doing all these years. Mum, thank you for your strength and encouraging me, your fearlessness is inspiring.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INGREDIENTS FOR THE STUDY

It was the summer of 2005 when I first encountered a Bulgarian torrent tracker. I was visiting my parents in Bulgaria. A couple of months prior to my arrival in Barcelona, my brother decided to give his computer to our mother - as he was moving to the US. The computer was old and slow but my mother, as an inexperienced user of technology, was nevertheless thrilled with the gift. In her fifties and with a long career as a high school teacher, it was her first time owning a computer. She had become a client of the local Internet provider and was eager to learn. Her main motivation for using the Internet was so to keep in touch with my brother and me, as we both lived outside Bulgaria. I remember talking to my mother about the use of computers and the benefits of the Internet when I discovered something new too – the existence of Bulgarian torrent trackers.

One day while I was showing her how to access her newly created email account, and she was taking notes of the steps to follow, I asked whether she had learned anything new since she got the computer. She replied how she could now play video games, and download movies and music from a website. This revelation left me speechless. She explained how my cousin had introduced her to a particular website. Now all she had to do was visit the page of her Internet provider and follow the links to download films, music, games etc.

I wondered how this was possible for a person who had barely used a computer or the Internet, to already know how to use a torrent file and manage a downloading

program? Because of my experience with peer-to-peer (P2P) networks, I thought my Internet and downloading knowledge was more than sufficient. Still, however, I was unfamiliar with torrents. These and other questions were running through my head and what struck me especially was the fact that the Local Internet Provider was offering such a service.

That summer, thanks to my mother - the technical novice - I had my first contact with this phenomenon and the idea for the study was born. From this moment onward, each time I returned to Bulgaria, I started collecting information about the existence of additional websites and the possibilities for file sharing. My friends, neighbors and relatives each had their own particular source – some were using local P2P and others were using torrents. What I found really surprising was how people considered this to be one of the most natural uses of the Internet.

I was living in Spain at the time and I found myself drawing comparisons between both cultural and technological environments. As my interest grew, I paid more attention to how this phenomenon was developing in Spain. I discovered that the Spanish context was completely different from the Bulgarian one. My curiosity to understand more about the technological situation in Bulgaria was increasing. For someone like me - a product of both Eastern and Western European frames of mind, these perceived differences in how technology is used raised a lot of questions: What was causing this phenomenon in Bulgaria? Why did I not see it in Spain? How was it possible to observe this happening, considering the difficult economic climate of my native country where almost half of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2013)?

Naturally, these questions lead me to think about my place in all this and how I could approach the issue in order to be better understood? On one hand, I was influenced but at the same time bothered by the persistent tendency among both scholars and policy-makers like the European union to name one, to assume that models of adoption, institutionalization and emerging uses in technologically developed societies are paradigmatic and will be reproduced sooner or later, in the rest of the world. In unison with this are statements like Barlow`s (1995), one of the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, opined that in a few years " ...every human on the planet would have an e-mail address... " (para.11).

Such utopian rhetoric about the power of "new technologies" and the "Internet" continue to be strongly voiced around the world. This discourse is especially notable in Eastern Europe whose postsocialist[1] present is defined by the urge to "catch up" with the "developed world", educationally, economically and culturally (Bakardjieva, 2005; Volčič & Erjavec, 2008). In the transition from socialist to capitalist economic organization verities about market, technology and democracy were imposed upon former socialist spaces and specific relations of work, property, kinship, and other organizational forms have been largely ignored (Chari, 2009; Verdery, 2002). These imported verities, including Internet technologies have been literally and metaphorically reconstructed by the local people according to their pre-existing culture, which is often interpreted from the "outsiders` point of view" as failure to adapt. In line with this, Eastern Europe is often treated simply as the Mecca for piracy and cybercrime (e.g. Cosovanu, 2006; Kshetri; 2013 Sáez, 2004) in his status of "periphery" and addressed as a plague that needs medicine

1 The term here is used simply as temporal designation

as Bakardjieva (2005) notices. If I followed this discourse I would miss a significant part of the social processes through which Internet technologies made their way in Bulgaria.

On the other hand, the Internet has never been a separated world from Society despite the fact that at some point of its history was treated as such[2] and now, the time for researching and analyzing generic Internet "impacts" on a uniform " society" is over. The realization that the impact of new technologies depends crucially on their local context has generated interest in disaggregating the populations of users and the circumstances in order to produce more adequate explanations of the interaction between the Internet and society[3].

This new research agenda is focused on the need for sustained research oriented to specific contexts and developed on the basis of social, economic and political forces that give shape to the Internet technologies, practices and institutions in different geographical and cultural environments.

I decided to approach the phenomenon of file sharing in Bulgaria from an ethnographic perspective that is historically grounded (i.e. placing the phenomenon in the context of the local technological development of that country). Describing a similar project focused on Trinidad, Miller and Slater write:

> Why should we do ethnography of the Internet in Trinidad, or of Trinidad on the Internet? Because – contrary to the first generation of Internet literature – the Internet is not a monolithic or placeless “cyberspace”; rather it is numerous new

2 See Hand and Sandywell (2002)

3 See Woolgar (2002)

> technologies used by diverse people in diverse real-world locations. Hence, there is everything to be gained by an ethnographic approach, by investigating how Internet technologies are being understood and assimilated somewhere in particular. (Miller & Slater, 2000, p.1)

1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The empirical research literature on file sharing in different disciplines to date has primarily focused on three aspects:

- Legal – related to the implications of copyright protection of downloaded material (e.g. Cesarini & Cesarini, 2008; Eivazi, 2012; Filby, 2013; Mansell & Steinmueller, 2013),
- Commercial – related to the economic impact of downloading (e.g. Andersen & Frenz, 2010; Asghari, van Eeten & Mueller, 2012; Fung & Lakhani, 2013; Giese, 2004), and
- Cultural – situating the phenomena as a component of cyberculture (e.g. Baym, 2011; Beekhuyzen, von Hellens & Nielsen 2011; Cenite, Wang, Peiwen & Chan, 2009; Condry, 2004; Haigh, 2009; Lessig, 2008; Newman, 2012; Steinmetz & Tunnell, 2013).

This dissertation is situated in the *cultural* classification, exploring the way that consumer's file sharing activities are part of everyday life. By taking a cultural perspective inherent in doing ethnography, it is possible to provide rich insights into a context not often visible to those outside of the file sharing subculture.

This research aims to provide an understanding about file sharing activities while considering the local context of a specific country. In doing so, it is possible to find out more about the characteristics of the phenomenon and the motivations of those who are part of it.

To fulfill this research aim, the following questions are formulated:

- *What are the distinctive features of the file sharing practice in the Bulgarian cultural context?*
- *What are the incentives for being part of this practice in Bulgaria?*
- *How could the file sharing practice in Bulgaria be understood considering the local context in which it occurs?*

The nature of the central questions is explorative and the related research objectives are descriptive and interpretative. Description refers to “making complicated things understandable by reducing them to their component parts” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 90). Interpretation is directed toward what certain phenomena or practices mean to the actors involved.

1.3 SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISSERTATION

If we take a look at the research body generated over the years on social and cultural aspects of the Internet, it is inevitable to notice that this was carried out mainly in Western Europe, North America and some parts of Asia. That comes as no surprise taking into account that technologies and Internet use have already been established in these regions for years now.

Often contexts associated with underdevelopment or considered "periphery" (Bakardjieva, 2005; Fernández, 1999; Haigh, 2009; Lockland, 1996; Pearce, 2011) remain outside the scientific interest. This research aims to contribute a better understanding of Internet adoption and *appropriation*, the ways in which people use information technologies, despite the economic and infrastructural difficulties in contexts like Bulgaria.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

The thesis is organized as follows: In Chapter 2 I will present the technological conditions from historical perspective necessary to contextualize the reader. In Chapter 3 I will identify necessary concepts to engage with the research topic. In Chapter 4 I will detail the method applied. Chapters 5 through 7 revolve around the ethnographic material of the study. Here the data gathered in the study is used to answer the research questions. In Chapter 5 I will expand the topic, presenting the main hubs in the network constructed during the fieldwork. Insights from interviews and observations are used to construct the ethnographic tale of the parts (rather than the whole). In this chapter a close look of the torrent tracker Zamunda.net is also presented as a point of intersection for the file sharing practice in the country. Chapter 6 presents the main incentives for participating in the file sharing practice, result of the interviews with key informants. Chapter seven I assume as a personal essay, in which based on my lecture and experience I encounter the last research question. Lastly, in Chapter 8 I make some final remarks.

2 CHAPTER TWO: SOME NECESSARY BACKGROUND NOTES

This chapter is intended to give a bold outline of the technological conditions in Bulgaria from a historical perspective. It is necessary in order to contextualize the reader unfamiliar with the local climate of the country for better understanding of the current situation.

It contributes overall to the study of the phenomenon by placing it in a particular context. The role of the Communist regime in the computerization of the country, the transition to a market based economy and the current economic situation are discussed. Finally some quantitative “hard” demographic data about Internet penetration and access are also taken into consideration.

2.1 PATIENT ZERO

The first Bulgarian viruses were seen in the West in 1989. Over time they became more sophisticated and virulent, progressing in about a year from the relatively harmless Old Yankee[4] to the more destructive Eddie[5] and then to the Nomenklatura[6] , which was deadly. While few of the viruses had been seen "alive" – i.e. infecting computers, the reports received from Bulgaria suggested that in the country two new viruses were discovered every week (Mungo & Clough, 1992).

How was that possible for an insignificantly small country as Bulgaria? In 1997, Bennahum asked the same question: "A small destitute nation on the fringes of

4 It first appeared in 1989 and although there were different versions of the bug they all were limited to cause the computer to interpret the Old Yankee folk song

5 This virus attached itself to executable files

6 Virus corrupting hard drive data by changing the FAT (File Allocation Table). It was the virus that attacked the library of the House of Commons in 1990 at the Westminster Palace

Southern Europe, a nation that, a generation earlier, had been largely agricultural - how was it possible that this land produced such fecund viruses?" (p. 2). Perhaps East Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary or even Russia - industrialized countries with traditions of producing world class mathematicians and scientists - were the most likely candidates; however, compared to Bulgaria, these countries were insignificant sources. The confusion was understandable.

In the 1980's Bulgaria invested in a series of Five Year Plans approved by Politburo[7], creating the centrally planned communist industry for home computers. In this sense Todor Zhivkov[8] has survived the great Eastern European communist dictators largely due to some aspects of his legacy that the Bulgarians still admire, specifically his desire to create a modern nation. His idea was to turn the country into a high-tech power with computers driving the economy and so the industry was concentrated in manufacturing hardware to compete with the West.

Zhivkov was the one who among the communist dictators from the Eastern Bloc[9] won a special place for his country as a provider of high technology to the countries of COMECON[10] (currently nonexistent), trading computers for cheap raw materials from the Soviet Union and essential imports from the other communist countries. In its heyday Bulgaria supplied 40% of all computers within the Eastern Bloc. The electronic industry employed 300,000 employees and generated 8 billion rubles per year (about $ 13.3 billion) (Bennahum, 1997, http://www.pravetz.info/).

7 The executive committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party

8 Bulgarian communist dictator from 1971 until 1989

9 Term used by the Western democracies to refer to communist states from Central and Eastern Europe

10 Eastern Europe's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance

In the strange ecology of the communist industry where companies competed for government grants and licenses to control market segments, competition existed along with a rare form of entrepreneurism. A small company seeking funding in the Five Year Plan, decided to get involved in the microcomputer business. Pravetz Company, named after the small town where Todor Zhivkov was born, received the support of the Ministry of Education, which agreed to buy thousands of these computers and put them in schools.

Thus, the Bulgarian computer hardware industry was born, specializing in providing large numbers of PCs for educational purposes. The assembly lines created tens of thousands of these microcomputers beginning in 1982. The machines were simple, poorly manufactured clones which used the same operating systems and computer language of the genuine IBM and Apple.

The mass production of computers fueled the need for thousands of skilled scientists and engineers. Researchers were trained to take the system apart, discover its internal design and reproduce them. Bulgaria had the human potential, but the many young and well-prepared electronic engineers lacked the software needed to make significant progress.

While factories were busy producing personal computers, the most fundamental requirement - the programs so the machines can work - had to be hacked. Thus, the Bulgarians began copying Western programs, breaking all copy protection schemes that showed in their path and became increasingly skilled in the task of hacking, in the classic sense of the word. In their effort to keep running their poorly manufactured computers, they became skilled computer technicians.

At the same time, these machines starting with the Model Pravetz 82 reached schools throughout Bulgaria and the Eastern Bloc. Thus, new computers began to appear in state organizations, schools, universities, and clubs for computer enthusiasts, and informatics was a commonly studied subject in school. This helped foster a certain attitude towards computers among the youngest generation.

As Bulgarian students had access to more computers than their peers in other Eastern Bloc countries, they did what young people do when they encounter machines for the first time- play, explore, program. They were busy creating a digital culture in their own way, celebrating the fruits of Marxism- Leninism.

A good example of that digital culture of the Bulgarian communist youth is the development of computer viruses in the 1980s and the early 90s. The first Bulgarian virus Vacsina[11], written by the 27-year-old engineer Teodor Prevalsky, saw the world as a result of an intellectual hobby and a challenge regarding an article about viruses, published in the magazine *Komputer za vas*[12] (Clough & Mungo, 1992). Prevalsky developed both virus and antivirus software and his toy was the first Eastern European virus that jumped the Iron Curtain into the West, although it was never the intention of the author. Along with him there were many other engineers who developed viruses but Dark Avenger is undoubtedly the author of the most destructive and ingenious Bulgarian virus of them all.

In 1988, with a computer-phone connection, Todor Todorov opened the first virus exchange Bulletin Board System (BBS) in the world (Belogusheva & Toms, 2000;

11 Vaccine in Bulgarian

12 Computer for you in Bulgarian

Clough & Mungo, 1992) and the circulation began. Both antivirus and resources for active viruses and codes were uploaded and downloaded at the BBS. Called "Virus Exchange BBS" it was described as a place for free virus exchange, where everything was permitted. The membership fee was to upload a new virus to the collection and the easiest way was to do one. Once your virus was uploaded, access to download other viruses was open. The BBS allowed the use of nicknames and online conferences about how to create a virus were very common. The bulletin board was used not only for circulation of live viruses but also for circulation of virus source code and thus, giving hackers the possibility to learn and exchange knowledge with others in the development of viruses. Dark Avenger was one of its members and it was on this BBS where Sarah Gordon conducted the only documented interview with him.[13]

Nobody knows the exact number of viruses produced in Bulgaria but there is evidence of the free existence of one hundred and sixty Bulgarian viruses and about 10% of all infections in the United States came from Bulgaria, most commonly by Dark Avenger (Bennahum, 1997). Anecdotal stories of companies losing millions of dollars in sales and production due to virus attacks became commonplace. It became quite common in the United States to come across newspaper headlines such as "Bulgarians Linked to Computer Virus" (Sudetic, 1990).

Dark Avenger and a few more viruses - Michelangelo, Jerusalem, Pakistani Brain, and Frodo - changed the way people experienced computers. These plagues

13 See at http://vx.netlux.org/lib/static/vdat/ivdarkav.htm

prompted a new lucrative industry - the antivirus business, and left users with the palpable fear that every file, no matter how harmless, could contain an infection. Although the Bulgarian virus phenomenon disappeared a while ago, Bulgaria continues to be seen as some kind of cybernetic bogeyman and the birthplace of the computer virus (Bennahum, 1997; Clough & Mungo, 1992).

2.2 "TRANSITOLOGY"

Major changes were observed in Bulgaria after 1990s when socialism dramatically collapsed. These changes rippled not only through Bulgaria, but all over the Eastern Bloc. The end of the socialist era was not only epistemic, but also a social and economic crisis. The "transition", as it is known in the popular language in Bulgaria, refers to the switch from non-capitalist to capitalist economic organization and comes with the promise for freedom, democracy and economic wealth.

If the socialist era was characterized by the intent of the communist parties to separate themselves from "western imperialism" and build socialist states on that premise, the transition is defined by the urge to "catch up" with the West and the impose of neoliberal understandings of transition, market and democracy upon the former socialist states (Chari & Verdery, 2009; Verdery, 2002).

New communication technologies were widely believed to be "magical" in the process of "democratization" of the society. They were seen as tools central to "progress", required to become part of the global world economy. Ironically, this newly imported political rhetoric concerning technology is very similar to the socialist one as associated with progress and changes in society. The main

difference remains in the values. Socialist rhetoric is socio-economic equality for all and capitalism seems to revolve around democracy and free market values. As advocates of the *technophilic* view argue (Gates, 1995; Nergroponte, 1996), technology is intertwined with the promises associated with democratization, freedom, capitalism and, generally, with an economically strong nation-state. Today, the content of this language of democratization (and technological development) is a highly ideological one that justifies free-market liberal democratic models for the states of Eastern Europe (Boyd,1999; Mohammadi, 2002; Preoteasa, 2002).

Since 1989, Bulgaria embraced the neoliberal "revolution" in order to form a new socio-economic system with the hope to reach the promised rewards of a democratic and wealthy free-market society. This new system is characterized by a quasi market economy focused mainly on the consumption of decreasing resources and incapable of securing the material and cultural reproduction of Bulgarian people, demolition of the state and its reduction to a bureaucratic superstructure of civil servants in the fields of finance, justice and education, and vast privatization of the state property which have been criticized by EU to be slow and not extended enough. Today, over 90% of the bank capital and the remaining Bulgarian industry is in foreign hands [14].

Thus, the development of the free-market model instead of independency and economic growth, resulted in dependency from neoliberal polices dictated by foreign capital and international organizations such as the World Bank and the

14 See Minev, (2005)

European Union. Today, 48% of Bulgaria`s citizens are living on the edge of poverty and the country is now officially considered (Eurostat, 2013) the poorest in the EU. What Ali argues (2000) for Eastern Europe in general, is valid for Bulgaria in particular too, and that is that its historical status of "periphery" of Western "Europe" has been relegated with the capitalist "colonization".

2.3 E-ACCESS

In this complex climate, the Internet adoption is characterized by the transitional state of the industrial infrastructure which inherited from the socialist state a respectable penetration rate, but a low technological capacity of the telecommunications network.

For example, in 2004 the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria surveyed the impact of Internet technologies in Bulgarian society and determined that only 15% of households owned personal computers with approximately 10% having Internet access, compared with data from Eurostat showing an average of 42% of households with home Internet access in European Union countries. Most households in Bulgaria were connected via modem, followed by a broadband connection of different types - cable, ADSL or LAN. Important factors for connectivity were education and age. The percentage of university students using the Internet every day was higher than in other categories (3.8%), along with high school students on second position with 3.0%.

In her qualitative study conducted the same year, Bakardjieva (2005/2006) found that the primary users of home-based Internet were people between 20 - 40 years of age and professionals with university degrees. The study showed that the

incomes of respondents were double the average national household income. Most of them said their first encounter with the Internet had been at work. Their motivation to transfer the connection to their houses, had been the desire to continue working while having more flexible communication and access to information, related to personal needs. Additionally, respondents needed to use several languages in their online activities, owing to poor presentation of the Bulgarian language in the virtual world. An interesting detail emerged from the interviews conducted by Bakardjieva: the mention of Russian as a language used on the Internet. To summarize, the Internet penetration was restricted to certain social groups such as professionals, entrepreneurs, bilingual young people, relatives of immigrants and a few others. The author suggested that the gradual increase of language skills among the population, especially the younger generations, and the intensive development of content in Bulgarian language, could be the key factors for long-term increase in Internet usage.

Two years later, the annual survey E-Bulgaria Report (ARC Fund, 2006) found key new group of users in households - children. The availability of computers at home was growing, replacing the workplace as the most popular place to have Internet access. Lower prices for Internet access coupled with growing content diversity and services have been cited as key factors for growth. It was also noticed the tendency of homogenization between different regions in Bulgaria and the growth in connectivity and affordability advancing the actual penetration of technologies in society. The leading providers of Internet access remained the same - cable televisions with 40% and LAN providers with approximately 30%.

Going forward in time, data from the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria for 2009 shows a somewhat different picture. The penetration of information and communication technologies has increased dramatically in the recent years and study results confirm that Internet service has become increasingly popular and used by more and more households in the country. There is a significant growth of 4.3% over the previous year in Internet access from home.

The share of individuals using Internet regularly is 39.7% in 2009 and the average rate of growth for the period 2004-09 is 6.5 points. If 41, 5% of Internet users surfed from home in the last three months in 2004, this part in 2009 is 89.0%. The most active group among the population using the Internet regularly in 2009 is between 16 and 24 years old and the proportion of individuals in this group who spent time on the Internet had increased by 41.7% over the past 5 years, reaching 75.1 % in 2009. Alpha Research (2009) shows almost identical data to the NSI with 39.2% of users having Internet access and 80, 5% of them having access from home.

In terms of quality of the broadband, Bulgaria, along with Lithuania and Latvia, in 2009 are positioned behind Sweden due to recent extension and improvement of the fiber optic cables. However the country still lags behind in the category of Internet penetration according to a study by the Said Business School Oxford University and Department of Applied Economics at Oviedo University. Similarly, Bulgaria is in a group of nine countries from the 66 studied that support the needed broadband quality for emerging web applications such as HDTV and high-quality video communications forecast to be dominant in the next 3-5 years. By

comparison, in 2008 only Japan met these criteria for high capacity broadband quality. Among the cities covered in the study, Sofia, the country`s capital is mentioned as one of the places with the highest quality broadband. In 2013, amongst EU countries, Bulgaria was ranked ninth and sixth in download and upload speed (using Speedtest.net). Among EU countries ranked by quality of the broadband in 2013, Bulgaria is in second position after Lithuania.

In the last 10 years, Internet penetration has grown significantly from 10 % access from home in 2004 to 53% in 2013 (NSI, 2013) but Bulgaria is still at the bottom of the EU ranking along with Romania and Greece (Digital Agenda, 2013) in terms of penetration. The reason for the equipment of Bulgarian households with Internet are LAN providers (discussed in Chapter V) which are still leaders in 2013 with 93% and high quality of the broadband connection, which situates the country up in the list of quality connection.

2.4 THE BULGARIAN "PIRATE BAY"

While governments in Bulgaria merely spoke about economy and investments after 1989, areas such as culture and education remained in second place for a long time.

According to Aleksiev (2003) the piracy phenomenon has its foundation in countries that possess three specific characteristics: (a) weak and inadequate copyright laws or slow judicial system, (b) an increasing need for computers and Internet technology, and (c) low income of the population.

Bulgaria, has all three: an EU - compatible legislation but corrupt judicial system, computers swiftly pervading homes and businesses and an average monthly income per person of around 250 euros in 2013.

There is a widespread attitude in Bulgarian culture holding that Western intellectual property and copyright laws do not apply to "us" - who make much less money and cannot afford to pay the prices of intellectual products. To take that logic a bit further, are the people of this nation to wait until their standard of living and disposable income come into line with Western standards so they can afford software, movies, games, music, etc? Nobody seems prepared to suggest that alternative. Thus, piracy has emerged as a reasonable solution to that dilemma and the Bulgarian user goes for it without any moral remorse.

In the 1990`s, Bulgaria was the second largest exporter of software, music and movie-piracy - second only to China, a country with a population many times larger. Also, 90% of the music and business software in 1998 in Bulgaria had been used illegally. At that time it was easy to buy anything pirated at very low prices and in broad daylight. Likewise, video rental stores proliferated while none of the movies offered were original.

Citizens were taking their lives in their hands, while international agencies were threating the government with fines and inclusion on the U.S. Special 301 Priority Foreign Country Watch List. As a result of these actions, Bulgarian authorities galvanized themselves to fight piracy. They confiscated material from Slaveikov

book market[15] in Sofia, where one could find almost everything, and other stores in the area. Despite the crack down, those that were penalized received very low fines (Aleksiev, 2003).

In the period between 1998 and 2003, there was a decrease in the practice of pirating. Many of the video rental stores offering pirated content closed down and those who chose to continue in the video rental business were forced to provide legally acquired material.

Today it is still easy to find illegal material at the Sofia book market, although there are fewer customers than before, as new player has appeared on the scene i.e. the Internet. Despite law attempts to fight the crime in public spaces, the situation at home is different, as home users in Bulgaria are not yet threatened by legal sanctions on copyright infringement.

15 The most famous book market in Bulgaria situated in the very center of Sofia

3 CHAPTER THREE: SOME USEFUL CONCEPTS AT HAND

To address the phenomenon of file sharing in Bulgaria, I consider it necessary to take into account several concepts that are presented in this chapter as a background overview.

These concepts are interrelated and although they are handled quite separately in literature, they have a common thread – the Internet user, who enables their very existence. By Internet User I mean an “ordinary man” (de Certeau, 1984) who is not a professional (engineer, programmer, designer, etc.) or decision-maker, or involved in the industrial, commercial or service sectors developing computer-networking technology.

Firstly, this chapter addresses the phenomenon of file sharing and its alleged impact on the industry. The chapter continues with presenting the piracy debate in research literature. Motivations for file sharing and similarities with hacker`s ideology are also discussed. A historical review of the online community debate is presented and connections are made to file sharing community. Finally, the user agency and its relevance for the file sharing phenomenon is introduced.

3.1 THE PHENOMENON OF FILE SHARING

In order to share content, a copy is made. The widespread access to Internet technology enables sharing to be easier than ever before and most people acknowledge that they have at some point either taped music from the radio or movie from the cinema, made a mixed CD for a friend, or shared a friend’s playlist

on their iPod. So has technology just caught up with something that we have always done and always wanted to do by allowing us to do it quicker and easier than ever before? Sharing our work and sharing the work of others through technology, such as the Internet is unprecedented in human history and is becoming more and more widely preferred way of circulating culture.

File sharing, often referred as piracy, has been a much-discussed topic in contemporary society (Andersen& Frenz, 2007; Johnson, Mcguire & Willey, 2009) basically because it is questioning notions of intellectual property and control over the cultural flow.

The music/movie/software industry is the term used to refer to individuals and organizations involved in creating, recording and distributing authorized music/movies/software. Often they are considered the “mainstream” in relation to those deviant from the mainstream (e.g. file sharing). The industry dictates when, where and how you will access the “knowledge”. Two decades ago these relations changed with Napster[16] which provided consumers more choices in accessing music at their convenience and according to the price they were willing to pay (Poblocki, 2001). Although the website was closed as an unauthorized file sharing service, the increasing download speed and invention of BitTorrent allowed file sharing to expand to other sectors and Napster`s progeny lives as do new habits developed by Internet users.

The new more bottom-up model of circulation (Hirsch & Gruber, 2013) altered the "traditional ways" of industry that existed for a number of decades, establishing the

16 Napster is the name of the pioneer in the P2P file sharing service for audio files in MP3 format. It was founded in 1999 and operated until 2001.

rules of distribution, access and use of cultural artifacts. These changes have resulted in many of the traditional players being removed, a process called "disintermediation". File sharing activities are also a serious challenge to power relations and hierarchy through unseen forms of participation (Vandresen, 2012).

Intellectual property rights, which are the application of legal rights previously associated with physical property, with property "of the mind", were developed by and for the industry and are widely referred to as copyright. With the Internet on the scene, the frightened industry lobbied for more and more restrictive copyright terms which are often viewed as an inadequate application of the law in the Internet space (Cammaerts & Meng, 2011; Sag, 2006). It is suggested that new ways to manage creative rights online are needed (Howard-Spink, 2005).

As a critique to the *property* and restrictive copyright laws, the free culture movement[17] rises to promote the freedom to distribute and modify creative work in the form of free content available on the Web. The idea of the transition from copyright called within the movement “permission culture” to a “free culture” is discussed by Lessig (2004) and Brown (2008), among others. In a "permission culture" innovators must request "permission" from past creator in order to build or modify.

A free culture would not mean that cultural products cost nothing, but rather cultural producers and consumers could make use of the Web’s millions of texts without having to worry about being sued (Brown, 2008). Sensitized into a few basic principles, free culture means:

17 The term stands for many other movements as hacker computing, copyleft movement and access to knowledge movement

1. Artists can use each others` work without asking permission.
2. People can receive and transmit art by whatever physical means are available to them.
3. The distinction between audience and artist is fluid, and should remain so because culture is participatory. Free culture means anyone can engage with art and other works of the mind, however they want, without hiring a lawyer first.
4. Artists are paid for what they do, not for what other people do. Artists should be paid up front for the work they do. But charging again for music every time a copy is exchanged, for example, is silly. The musicians didn't do extra work to make more copies, and the copies are transactions between third parties. In the long run, making it harder to share art hurts artists as much as audiences.
5. Monopolies hurt everyone except the monopolist. Permission cultures tend to concentrate control in the hands of people who specialize in accumulating control, without doing much to help artists.

Free culture is not about "giving away products" but keeping culture open and creativity flowing. File sharing in some form, could be referred to as "free culture", although currently it is called an act of "piracy" and a threat.

3.1.1 PIRACY DEBATE

Peer-to-peer file sharing technology is a big advance technologically speaking but the debate around it was only concerning its copyright infringing uses because of

the economic harms claimed by the industry, while ignoring its social and economic benefits.

Thus, "piracy" as defined by Yar (2005) refers to an infringement of copyright manifested through the unauthorized copying and distribution (often for commercial gain) of copyrighted content; an act deemed malicious to the creators of the content. However, there is little evidence that those who participate in file sharing do so for a commercial gain and in this dissertation, the term “file sharing” is used to refer to sharing and copying files for strictly personal use.

On the other hand, Lessig (2004) argues that piracy, though used as a pejorative when describing file sharing networks, is the basis of all creative work: "If 'piracy' means using the creative property of others without their permission . . . then the history of the content industry is a history of piracy. Every important sector of 'big media' today–film, records, radio, and cable TV–was born of a kind of piracy so defined." (p. 53).

There is little agreement in that debate and the "war against piracy" is still ongoing because of the difficulty in regulating creative property.

Copyright infringement was previously a civil legal matter, but it has now become a criminal act in many jurisdictions, even when it is strictly for personal use. However, the fight against file sharing, which in the majority of instances is the unauthorized downloading and file sharing of music/movies/software, is fundamentally a fight against the infrastructure of the Internet. The Internet was originally designed as part of the United States Government’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) as a way to share files without reliance on

one centralized computer. The result could be considered a “copying machine without master”. Tim Berners-Lee makes it clear that his original design of the World Wide Web did not account for commerce or security of any kind (Berners-Lee, Fishchetti & Foreword By-Dertouzos, 2000). Therefore, it is important to note that the act of sharing digital artifacts and other cultural works uses the Internet and the World Wide Web as they were originally and precisely intended to be used.

The industry, however, is fighting the very cooperative origin of the Internet blaming file sharing for the decrease if not in present, in future sales. There are results reported in the literature that indicate access to file sharing networks may reduce the probability of legal purchases by up to 30% (Zentner, 2006). The symposium on *Piracy and File Sharing* (2006) published in the Journal of Law and Economics presented a number of articles that supported this perspective. In a survey of US college students by Rob and Waldfogel (2004), they argue that downloading reduces purchases.

Later, IFPI (2009) claims that the music sector is still overshadowed by the huge amount of unlicensed music distributed online. On collating separate studies in 16 countries over a three-year period, IFPI estimates that over 40 billion files were illegally file shared in 2008, giving a piracy rate of around 95 per cent (2009). However there is little agreement about the accuracy of such piracy statistics put forth by the industry.

In line with such discourse, often arguments that external factors may have contributed also to the decline as downturn in the global economy, changing

tastes, more competition from new media including the Internet, DVDs and video games, as well as a general decline in the quality, variety and value for money (Cammaerts & Meng, 2011; Sag, 2006) are believed to have little or no support for such claims (Liebowitz, 2006).

However, this discourse needs to be balanced by other empirical studies which have found that consumers are willing to pay if they are offered something of value that they cannot get for free (Dufft, 2005; Nettamo, Nirhamo & Häkkilä 2006). Theoretical and empirical studies indicate that consumers want interoperability (Heileman & Jamkhedkar, 2005) and value for money (Fetscherin, 2005).

There are substantial research projects reporting that sales actually increase as a result of sampling (try before you buy), and that the money "lost" through substitution would never have existed (those who file share would not have purchased anyway) (Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf, 2007). This conceptualization of the impact of file sharing on the industry is characterized as "sampling" and "substitution" (Andersen & Frenz, 2007; Gran & Molde, 2009; Quiring, von Walter & Atterer, 2008; Steinmetz &Tunnell, 2013).

A study of Danaher, Dhanasobhon, Smith and Telang (2010) uses the removal of NBC content from Apple ITunes store to document both piracy and DVD sales for NBC content respectively at mininova.org[18] and Amazon.com. They found out that removal of the NBC`s content is casually associated with 11 % increase in the demand for NBC`s pirate content, but at the same time no change in the demand

18 torrent tracker

on Amazon.com is noticed. They also discovered decrease in piracy for the same content when it was restored on iTunes.

The results of the large scale US-based Pew Internet Project survey reported that 36 million Americans, or 27% of Internet users are downloading music or video files over the Internet; and they found that sharing music is not uncommon (Pew Research Institute, 2005).

Yang, Zhou, Qin and Koong (2013) studied the software piracy for a period of 10 years (2003 -2010) and found out a mere 6% increase in the global piracy rate and actual decrease in three regions - Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America.

These were some examples of pros and cons arguments in the existing debate about file sharing/piracy and in no case was intended as an exhaustive list of statistics. It serves also as a demonstration of the effort of many researchers to measure, but also to predict user behavior online using diverse set of methods. Lessig (2004) among other authors, believes that the exact impact of file sharing is difficult to ascertain, he argues it is “certainly much more difficult than the current rhetoric around the issue suggests” (p.53).

In order to discern what is “the real effect of P2P”, Swedish professor and expert in the field of online music studies, Roger Wallis and fellow researcher George Klimis (Klimis & Wallis, 2009) give a list of issues for consideration:

1. *There is a considerable evidence of growth in concert revenues as the result of Internet activity.* Based on his review of concerts performed,

Krueger (2005) states that from 1996 to 2003, the average concert price increased by 82%, while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 17%.

2. *Consumer trends become apparent within the P2P environment*. This environment brings new opportunities to measure consumer behavior, and to bring them together via social networking.
3. *Delay in established industry providing legal online variants has encouraged growth of P2P*. Not being able to access desired content from a "long tail" catalogue – access to unlimited content (Anderson, 2006) can encourage file sharing to find the desired material. Discussed in terms of *Scarcity* in Chapter Six.
4. *New business models developing outside major media firms*. MySpace is one of the most successful examples of this, which Rupert Murdoch bought for USD$580 million in 2005. Such social media sites have been responsible for highly successful artists, such as Lily Allen (Sawyer, 2006) and the Arctic Monkeys (Mellins, 2008).
5. *Bargaining power shifts vertically*. Technology can empower the artist, enabling them to communicate and distribute directly to their fans (disintermediation).
6. *The shift in consumers' behavior to more anonymous networks/darknets, and a shift in consumer ethics resulting in downloading music for free.* Darknets are the term used to refer to a "collection of networks and technologies used to share digital content" – essentially file sharing (Biddle, England, Peinado & Willman, 2002).

3.1.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR FILE SHARING

Since the activity of online file sharing is extending across the world, including many different countries and contexts, is the file sharing to be approached as a global phenomenon – as sometimes stated in the public debate? I argue that the answer to this question is no. There are many different arguments and motivations for downloading and/or uploading music, movies and software and scholars from variety of disciplines have been busy discussing them over the years mostly on theoretical level. More sustained empirical research is necessary in order to extend our understanding about how and why users in different contexts participate in such activities.

Often, the research literature about file sharing is focused on music or software (e.g. Beekhuyzen, 2011; Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf, 2007). It is important to notice here, that the movie industry is not so easy to be approached because of the various revenues streams generated such as theatrical exhibition, DVD, cable and satellite, and so forth as many analysts claim (e.g. Liebovitz, 2011). This dissertation is taking into account all kind of files and thus, including music, movies but also software, books and other material available online for the Bulgarian user.

Having said that, useful insights are provided by scholars regarding possible incentives for file sharing on both theoretical and empirical level.

Lessig (2004, p.68) argues that people use file sharing networks for four primary reasons:

- As substitutes for purchasing content: users who download instead of purchasing;
- To sample music before purchasing it: sharing could increase the quantity of music purchased;
- To get access to copyrighted content that is no longer sold or that they would not have purchased because the transaction costs off the Net are too high;
- To get access to content that is not copyrighted or that the copyright owner wants to give away.

Sag (2006) explores the cost dimension on a theoretical level by breaking it down into: (a) monetary cost of obtaining music, (b) the time and effort or search costs, (c) expected costs associated with computer viruses, and (d) the expected costs of sanctions. Gurman (2009) points (a) high cost of purchasing music, (b) the unfair treatment of artists, and (c) the lack of availability of desired content as arguments for file sharing and these arguments are with unison at some level with Sag`s discussion about the motivations that influence actions for acquiring music.

Empirical research conducted by Beekhuyzen (2011) among Australian file sharers shows that in that country (a) sampling, (b) cost, and (c) lack of availability of desired content are motivators for sharing music. Sampling and substitution are also pointed out by others as motivators (Andersen & Frenz, 2007; Gran & Molde, 2009; Quiring, von Walter & Atterer, 2008; Steinmetz & Tunnell, 2013). There are more scholarly studies that have examined why Internet users, especially college students, engage in file sharing (Cronan & Al-Rafee, 2008; Li & Nergadze, 2009;

Phau & Ng, 2010; Taylor, Ishida, & Wallace, 2009) focusing on the economic precursors.

An ethnography of Internet-relay chat music file sharers details an emerging file sharing subculture, its social organization and its values of file sharing and altruism—admittedly freely engaged in (Cooper & Harrison 2001). Steinmetz and Tunnel (2013) have found besides economic arguments as sampling, substitution and inability to afford content, another motivators for file sharing such as (a) to share culture/content and (b) to undermine the current copyright regime. They find out that online file sharing activities are associated with neither political dimensions, nor legal ones. Online file sharing is seen as everyday culture and it is build upon a behavior taken for granted and made possible by technology that is an integral part of their everyday lives. This part of everyday life is, for some of the people interviewed by them, not necessarily associated with moral aspects.

On the other hand, researchers like Wang and McClung (2011) explore the emotions as motivators for file sharing and find that individuals would engage in more mental processing based on the previous behavior when they encounter a negative emotion, and would consciously reject it, whereas individuals would easily go along with the positive emotions.

There is little doubt that technology is pushing changes quicker than the industry responds. In order for those in the creation and distribution value chain to still be relevant in this “new” online participatory culture, it is necessary for them to rethink their role and adjust their commercial activities accordingly. There is no way to stop file sharing; as von Lohmann (2004) states, it is impossible to put the genie

back in the bottle, so it is important for the industry to understand and consider alternative ideologies and revenue streams. In order to do this, it is necessary to have an understanding of the activities consumers engage in to access and use online material, which are discussed in this dissertation.

3.1.3 SIMILARITIES WITH HACKING IDEOLOGY

The term “hacking” has a wide range of meanings. To hack can mean to roughly force a program to work, generally inelegantly. A hack can be a clever (generally small) program or program modification that displays unusual insight into a programming language or operating system. In a more malicious nature, a hack can be a scam or clever manipulation (Forester & Morrison, 1994, p.77).

In a similar vein, the widely cited Sherry Turkle (1984, p.232) defines three tenets of hacking:

- Simplicity - the act must be simple but impressive;
- Mastery – the act must derive from a sophisticated technical expertise;
- Illicit – the act must be against some legal, institutional or even just perceived rules.

It is an act that can be carried out with a variety of goals, all of which are not necessarily aimed at harming others, although these are the stories often reported in the media. One excellent example of this was at the time of the Chernobyl disaster, when hackers from the West German Chaos Computer Club regularly released information to the public about developments, because the West German

government would not. The information was gained by illegal break-ins carried out in government computer installations (Forester & Morrison, 1994).

This goal of disseminating information appears to be similar to the 2009 Twitter trend #IranElection and the example is somewhat similar to the reporting of the protests against the government in Iran.

Based on his book presenting an in-depth history of hacking, Thomas (2002) argues that hacker subculture has a tendency to exploit cultural attitudes toward technology and the hacking subculture is largely built upon a culture of secrecy, playing a lead role in making hacking possible. According to Thomas, this culture of secrecy "has produced a climate in which contemporary hackers feel both alienated and advantaged. Although hackers philosophically oppose secrecy, they also self consciously exploit it as their modus operandi, further complicating their ambivalent status in relation to technology and contemporary culture" (2002, p.21).

Hacking consists of two processes: free labor and copyleft. Free labor is the term given to the unpaid production of information, and copyleft purports that "all information should be free" and this is the mantra of the hacker ethic (Grinsted, 2005, p.1). General principles of hacker ethic include sharing, openness, decentralization, free access and world improvement (Levy, 2001). According to Himmanen (2001), hacker is someone who achieve social acknowledgement for hard working with passion of his own free will and not for money. Thus, hacker as a term can be extrapolated to areas outside the technological one while the principles remain the same - money is not valued anymore, but the benefit is focused on social aspects, such as free access and transparency.

In his Masters dissertation, Grinstead refers to the P2P phenomena as adopting the Hacker ethic, but interestingly he comments that there is a need to be “careful not to equate the sharing idolized by the Hacker movement with the theft perpetrated using the same technology” (2005, p.12). He refers to what he calls the “theft of music” and how this illegal act is beginning to become a social norm and to be no longer seen as immoral.

Grinstead proposes the analogy of file sharers and hackers. It may be argued that file sharers are not necessarily malicious, and they operate in a “gift economy” as proposed by Barbrook (1998), in a similar way to hackers.

3.2 ONLINE COMMUNITIES

When we talk about file sharing activities usually researchers refer to the people involved in the practice as community (Olivera, Goodman & Tan, 2008; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). That desire for community can be found in the origin of the Internet described as an idyllic scenario of groups of people who help each other and thus build the Net. It seems now out of place questioning the existence of online communities. Although by the time the first online communities emerged, the difficulties of recognizing and defining them was a complicated issue to address.

Howard Rheingold was the first to use the word *virtual community* and Usenet groups are generally identified as the first communities on the Internet describing them as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry out these public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling to form networks of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1996, p.20).

Since then there has been a rapid spread and growth of online communities and their users. These communities and computer-mediated communication have been studied by social researchers (e.g. Baym, 1995; Galvez 2005; Hine, 2000; Howard & Jones, 2004; Jones 2003; Negroponte, 1996; Rheingold, 1996; Smith & Kollock, 2003) sparking some debate about their influence.

The first generation studies (e.g. Brook & Boal, 1995; Heim, 1993; Peck, 1987; Rheingold 1996; Schmitz, 1997; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1996) about online communities were dealing basically with their status and the very possibility of community in cyberspace assuming the existence of a universal and consistent definition of community.

If we take a look at different definitions given by researchers over time, we will notice that most of them share the same aspects that we can find in definitions of offline community, the difference relies on the fact that the shared area and interaction are computer mediated. However, in some definitions there are additional aspects taken into account beyond the computer-mediated shared area and interaction:

- commitment among members (Jones, 2003);
- shared system of language, culture and beliefs (Mitra, 1997);
- intimacy between members (Rheingold, 1996);
- existence of limits that define who belongs and who doesn't to the community (Watson, 1997);
- set of standards or rules of conduct to govern the online community (Mclaughlin, Osborne & Smith 1995; Smith & Kollock, 2003; Watson, 1997);

- self-identification as a community group (Maclaughlin, Osborne & Smith, 1995; Watson, 1997).

Even so, as Jones (2003) has noted in different key studies about online communities, often the emphasis is on geographic and spatial aspects of the community in order to avoid the complexity of overlapping groups in the contemporary world. The immediate consequence of such strategy is an online community image of something fixed and delimited spatially, while in practice it is observed that groups are more complex and often the lines between them are blurred and not so clear as they are usually presented in studies about online communities. That is the case of the current study which encountered during the field work overlapping groups involved in the file sharing practice in Bulgaria and which are crucial in understanding the phenomenon.

Opposite to the traditional studies that identify the community as a particularly residential unit in which many understandings of the online community are based, it seems more adequate to study the contemporary community as a network of relationships and not as spatially defined unit even if that space is online. As Wellman (2002) notes: "If community is defined socially rather than spatially, then it is clear that contemporary communities rarely are limited to neighborhoods" (p.4). Such understanding of the neighborhood community and third places[19] Wellman (2002) sees as myth reflecting the nostalgia to the past. In this study, I draw from his work to understand the community not like "place" but as a network

19 See Oldenburg 1997

of relationships which do not necessarily belong to the same spatial unit but rather are dispersed geographically.

There are two classic studies that have special meaning regarding the idea of the community as a network: "To Dwell Among Friends" by Fischer (1982) and "Networks as Personal Communities" (Barry Wellman, Carrington & Hall,1988). Fisher analyzes the effects of urbanization in California and finds out that significant social relationships providing privacy and personal security are often very dispersed geographically. Wellman conducted a study to analyze the structure of personal networks and interviewed several people about their personal relationships. He discovers that most community ties are not relations of neighborhood, but one that extends beyond the local reality of the neighborhood and defines the concept of personal network as a "personal community".

Thus, the community becomes more private and less fixed in the location. Wellman (1995) calls this process: domestication and privatization of the community and writes that today:

> Telephones, automobiles, and airplanes, and electronic mail have enabled people to maintain active relationships over long distances with friends and relatives. Yet these technologies are essentially privatizing, with telephones and electronic mail usually being between two persons only and most automobiles carrying one or two persons on trips between private garages. (p.1)

The characteristics of modern life, increasingly privatized, are reflected in the way we build relationships which are more selective and voluntary than in the past. Neighborhoods and communities in general based on a particular unit become

less important in exchange to relationships we maintain with geographically dispersed people and thus, we participate in multiple social networks. We become more flexible and our relations are both local and global.

At the same time, cyberspace gives the opportunity to people not only to maintain contact asynchronously with geographically dispersed others but also diminish their difficulties to act and create online relationships which could be later incorporated in their offline social life. In a "face to face" communication the non-familiar or weak relationships can be an obstacle, but in a computer-mediated environment these weak ties can be "mobilized" (Kakihara & Sorensen, 2006).

Thus, the artificial dichotomy of online/offline is eliminated and the Internet is no longer a separate reality but one of the many ways of human interaction (Bakardjieva, 2003; Hamman, 1998; Wellman, 1999). The observed phenomena in the Internet cannot be studied and characterized exclusively by what occurs online as the cultures operating there have their origins in existing forms of "real life". The online interaction cannot be reduced either to these offline existing forms. We would miss then the fact that from the use of Internet technology new forms of being and acting together are coming out.

3.2.1 SOCIAL SOFTWARE AND ONLINE INTERACTION

The emergence of new forms of acting could be predicted, taking into account how Internet has appeared. Recently, the online social interaction causes the materialization of the "social software" concept that attempts to label this online social phenomenon.

But where does the term come from? According to Danah Boyd (2007), Clay Shirky was the first one to use it in order to cover all types of software that supports group interaction even if it occurs offline. Shirky (2003) introduced the term intentionally because he felt that the already existing ones (computer-mediated communication, social computing, software for group work) were not exactly appropriate to refer to certain types of new technologies. Although his idea was to name with it any software that encourages social interaction, in the computing area some discussion was generated regarding what to consider social software or not. Some users of the term are applying it only to certain social technologies like blogs and wikis. Others consider it is better to use *social software* term to refer to the use of two or more modes of computer-mediated communication rather than a specific type of software. According to this point of view, people form online communities by combining "one-to-one" (e-mail, instant messaging), “one-to-many” (social networking sites as Facebook, micro blogging as Twitter, and blogs) and “many-to-many" (wikis) communication modes (Shirky, 2003; Tepper, 2003).

The essence of the term is the possibility of relationships between users and users’ control over these relationships. The tools provided by the software are social because the person and their need for contact with others is the center of it. Thus, the development of groups where people participate voluntarily is allowed, and the reputation and the objectives of these groups are defined by their members.

Reducing the use of the term only to two types of technologies (blogs and wikis) as proposed by some engineers is leaving out a wide range of tools that also can facilitate the knowledge exchange and learning from others.

For the purposes of the present study, I shall use Farka's definition for whom social software is a tool that needs to have at least two of the following conditions:

> 1) It allows people to communicate, collaborate, and build community online, 2) It can be syndicated, shared, reused, or remixed, or it facilitates syndication, 3) It lets people learn easily from and capitalize on the behavior or knowledge of others. (2007, p.1)

This definition seems the most concise of the existing ones covering all possibilities for online interaction and its consequences for collaboration, creation, learning and sharing with others.

It is understood, then, that any tool supporting online social interaction can be defined as social software. The list of examples is extensive: (a) the mailing lists facilitate communication between people subscribed to these; (b) Internet forums allow an immediate contact with others, through the publication of topics open to comments from other users; (c) instant messaging (Skype, Whatsapp, Viber, Line) permits to chat privately in real time; (d) blogs as some kind of online personal journals tolerate comments from other users and often have links to other blogs, thus allowing the creation of communities around any of them; (e) the wikis whose content can be edited by its visitors (Wikipedia); (f) social networking services (Facebook, hi5, Linkedin) letting people create profiles and connect with others in their own terms; and (g) online worlds (Second Life, The Sims Online) where the

interaction with others is performed by the use of avatars and communication via chat.

Although the list doesn't pretend to be complete, we see that the Internet supports wide ways of communication. While some tools (including mailing lists and forums) designed to find people with similar interests have existed for a long time, most social software tools developed recently are designed to connect people and see what interests emerge.

Social software is a matter of movement too and not a simple category for technologies as it introduces three major changes:

1. *The way technology is designed*: traditional technological systems are designed and tested many times before exiting the market and this makes sense when the software is shipped to stores for sale. It is thought first from the project (Boyd, S., 2006) or topic (Boyd, D., 2007) and then the individuals. It is definitely a deductive process. The people behind social software projects have a different approach. Instead of developing closed versions, designers provide systems that are constantly transformed by people's uses. They are designed to connect people and see what interests emerge. They are not defined in topics, but people are connecting in networks by affiliations. These new tools help to create and benefit at the same time from new ideas to write/read sites that promote collaboration, sharing and community building from the bottom-up (Boyd, S., 2006; Farkas, 2007) where there is no central authority either to define the uses or to establish the rules of behavior and where the boundaries are blurred.

2. *The way participation is spread*: Most social software has been used first by the friends of the designers and thus, expand to different populations. Therefore, people are the heart of this software. There are very popular social systems already in possession of Internet giants, such is the case of Instagram bought by Facebook. However, the purchase is not the reason for the popularity of these systems. In fact, the purchase is the result of the great impact among the population. People use these systems not because they are influenced by advertising but because they have some friends who use them.
3. *The way people behave*: In different social contexts the behavior in one or another social system changes. For example, when Orkut[20] was created, it had users of different nationalities. Curiously, over time, the platform was populated mainly by Brazilians and lately by Indians. Another example is Whatsapp, a very popular mobile instant chat system in Spain, unlike Viber, designed more for Internet calls which is mostly used as mobile instant messaging in Bulgaria.

In addition, each social software tool supports different contexts. People start using different sites (networking sites, discussion groups, forums, etc.) in order to maintain the contexts separated. In some networks we are actively involved, in others occasionally and finally, in some others we are just silent readers.

Thus, social software allows the existence of new community forms that doesn't necessarily require any forums, newsletters or email lists. The conversations can

[20] Orkut was dissolved in September, 2014

take place at the wiki, at the comments section of the blog, at the social networking sites (Facebook, hi5) or at sites for file sharing.

In summary, the social software development reflects the consequences of people's interaction. It is not a term referring to control but to co-evolution: people who can connect with each other and find their ideas. This makes the circulation of new tools and ideas easier and at the same time leads to more collaboration, cooperation and online participation. The project is not clear but emerges and is defined from the produced relations, it is inductive: from the individual to the group.

3.3 USER AGENCY

The technological development put in the focus the role of users. What users do with technology has led to a boom in research and creation of concepts, some of which were addressed above. Interests turn both to how users "consume" technology and what technology does to users.

Particularly relevant for the file sharing practice in question is the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) about practices in everyday life that has been used widely in cultural and media studies, especially in debates about audiences and productive consumption. The focus of his work is on the practice of ordinary people and the ways in which they use or in De Certeau`s terminology "consume" social representations and normative modes of social behavior.

These practices of consumption are equivalent to doing things and they should not be considered as passive forms of social activity. Rather, in "using" and "consuming" culture, ordinary people are engaged, at the most basic level on

which life is lived, in a “making” a poiesis, but a “ hidden one, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order” (de Certeau, 1984, p.31).

To “consume” or use culture is, therefore, also to engage in its production, although this production takes place in normative schemes of action. In their practices ordinary people adopt strategies and tactics that enable them to reclaim autonomy from the all-pervasive forces of economics, politics and culture in general. Strategies are a carefully devised plan of action to achieve a goal. Strategies demand locations of power, require competition, define legitimate modes of research, and establish the boundaries of acceptable practice. Strategies are the institutional processes that set norms (rules/laws) and conventions. Strategies harvest finite ideas that become concrete, and essentially remain conclusive – mode of practice – making the consumers to firmly understand what the place is like to be.

On the opposite side of strategies is tactics**:** a course of action followed in order to achieve an immediate or short-term aim. Tactics lack a specific location, survive through improvisation, and use the advantages of the weak against the strong. De Certeau states “tactic is the art of weak”. Tactics are the modes of creative opportunity that operate within the gaps and slips of conventional thought and the patterns of everyday life - “do” and “use” what is available to us.

In other words, culture consumers quietly re-appropriate the objects, images, and ideas fashioned by professionals and experts, re-negotiate this material in light of

memory and the chance contingencies of circumstance, and produce a constantly changing bricolage of practices that shape daily life.

The notion of consumption as a status and identity project was elaborated further by Jean Baudrillard (1988), who criticizes the view that the needs of consumers are dictated, manipulated, and fully controlled by the modern capitalist marketplace and by producers. Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School had argued that the expansion of the production of consumer goods throughout the twentieth century had resulted in an increase in ideological control and manipulation by the “culture industries” (Adorno 1991; Horkheimer & Adorno 1979; Marcuse 1964). In contrast, Baudrillard emphasized the mutual dependencies between production and consumption and suggested that consumers are not passive victims but active agents in shaping consumption, social relations, and identities.

Cultural and media studies also emphasize the creative freedom of users to “make culture” in the practice of consumption, as well as their dependence on the cultural industries, not because they control consumers but because they provide the means and the conditions of cultural creativity (Storey, 1999). This scholarship portrays consumers as “cultural experts” who appropriate consumer goods to perform identities, which may transgress established social divisions (Chambers 1985; du Gay, Hall, Janes, Madsen, Mackay & Negus, 2013).

A perspective on user-technology relations that emphasizes the role of technological objects in creating and shaping social identities, social life and culture at large is articulated. Hall (1990) introduced the “encoding/decoding”

model from the semiotic approach to the media consumption which aims to capture both the structuring role of the media in “setting agendas and providing cultural categories and frameworks” and the notion of the “active viewer, who makes meaning from signs and symbols that the media provide” (Morley, 1995, p.300).

On the other hand, domestication is defined as a dual process in which both technological objects and people may change. Domestication process includes: (a) symbolic work: people create symbolic meanings of artifacts and adopt or transform the meanings inscribed in the technology, (b) practical work: users develop artifacts into their daily routines, and (c) cognitive work: learning about artifacts (Sørensen, Aune & Hatling, 2000). The use of technological objects may change the form and the practical and symbolic functions of artifacts, and it may enable or constrain performances of identities and negotiations of status and social positions (Lie & Sørensen, 1996; Silverstone, Morley, Dahlberg & Livingstone, 1989). The notion of domestication also reflects a preference for studying the use of technology in a specific location: the home. More recently, Norwegian scholars have extended the scope of research to other domains. Lie and Sørensen (1996) argue that the domestication of technological objects has been too easily associated with the “private sector” (meaning the home). These authors have shown how similar processes are taking place in work, in leisure, and within subcultures.

In *Consuming technologies*, Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) specify there are 4 phases of domestication of the consuming technologies:

1. Appropriation: technological product or service is sold and individuals or households become its owners.
2. Objectification: norms and principles to the household's sense of itself and its place in the World.
3. Incorporation: technological objects are used and incorporated into the routines of the daily life.
4. Conversion: describe the processes in which the use of technological objects shapes relationships between users and people outside the household.

Although at first sight "domestication" and "decoding" or "de-inscription" may seem synonymous, there is an important difference. By specifying the processes involved in the diffusion and the use of technology, domestication approaches take the dynamics of the world of users as their point of departure. The concepts of decoding and de-inscription, on the other hand, give priority to the design context in order to understand the emergence of user-technology relations. Domestication approaches thus emphasize the complex cultural dynamics in which users appropriate technologies. This contrasts with semiotic approaches that tend to define the user as an isolated individual, whose relationship to technology is restricted to technical interactions with artifacts.

Most importantly, cultural and media studies inspire us to transcend the artificial division between design and use. This scholarship has drastically reconceptualized the traditional distinction between production and consumption by re-introducing Karl Marx's claim that the process of production is not complete

until users have defined the uses, meanings, and significance of the technology: “Consumption is production.” They describe design and domestication as “the two sides of the innovation coin” (Lie & Sorensen 1996, p.10).

4 CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

To understand the file sharing phenomenon in Bulgaria I have conducted an ethnographic study. Traditionally, “ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures – or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave – that are situated in local time and space” (LeComte &Schensul, 1999, p.8). So while I had as a field site a geographic space, my study examined virtual spaces which articulated but did not necessarily fit the properties of that geographic location. Because computer-mediated communication is both located in local time and space and occurs across time and space in accordance with Hine (2000), a revision of the traditional concept of ethnography is needed. Such a connective or mobile ethnography extends the notion of context with the idea of connectivity and integrates the various degrees of translation of the virtual community idea.

I conceptualized the field site as a network of relations in which a cluster of specific hubs was constructed during the inquiry. In this chapter I will start with summarizing the main characteristics of the traditional ethnographic study and comment briefly how ethnography was moved to online environments. I will consider also some of the main problems and dilemmas researchers have faced in doing research on the Internet and which were part of the dilemmas of my study too. I will take a look specifically at notions of mobile or multi-sited ethnography and the construction of the field site describing my own field site. Finally, I will summarize my research activities and some problems I have faced during the inquiry.

4.1 INTRODUCING ETHNOGRAPHY

What is understood as ethnography seems prone to many interpretations. As Kozinets (2010) points out, it is a method of adaptation or bricolage and it is constantly redesigned in order to fit into particular areas of research questions, sites and times, preferences and skills, cultural groups and methodological innovations. Ethnography is an anthropological approach that has gained popularity in cultural studies, sociology and social psychology, marketing and consumer research and many other areas in social sciences. But what is ethnography, exactly? My aim here is to highlight some of the main characteristics of the ethnographic study and it is by necessity limited and intended as orientation.

Despite the many different flavors, which are emphasized to different degrees by each author who writes in the ethnographic tradition, one common feature appears to be that the ethnographer become embroiled in the setting (Atkinson, 1990). The combination of participative and observational approaches lies at the center of the ethnographic initiative.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) usefully describe ethnography in terms of what researchers actually do, explaining that ethnography usually involves “the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artifacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (p.3).This type of ethnography may be labeled as conventional and gives center stage to the human factors and the

sense which people make of the world. The role of the ethnographer is to observe, document, and analyze these practices, to present them in a new light.

Secondly, the ethnographic study is grounded in the context; it is infused with local knowledge of particular and specific kind. This refers to the fact that ethnography situates people and phenomena in the context of their natural habitat rather than isolates them. Only in the context in which they naturally occur can behavior and artifacts be understood.

Thirdly, ethnography requires an inductive examination of facts, long-term engagement or “immersion” in the field and a reflexive stand in order to understand the “other” from the point of view of the other. It is expected from the ethnographer to enter the field without any preconceived ideas and to stay open to new data; not to depart from collective structures but to take the bottom-up perspective.

He or she depends on personal contact with informants and therefore needs to be present “physically” in the specific “field”, the natural environment of the other that is limited in time and space. This sharing of time and place with informants is referred to as “being there”. It allows the researcher to experience what is to be a member of the group or society studied.

Acknowledgment of the own reflexivity as a researcher is needed since the fieldworker is conceived as a research instrument (Sherry, 1991). Such a reflexive stand furthermore entails that the “researcher needs to be clear about his\her objectives and the limitations he or she is working under” (Hirsch & Gellner, 2001, p.8).

4.2 ETHNOGRAPHY MOVES ONLINE

The idea of applying ethnography in order to study the Internet interactions became popular in the mid -1990s and today we can state that it is a well-established practice. Even so, these new developments of the method still maintain a dialogue with the principles of the ethnographic study exposed in the previous section.

If we take a quick look on the first studies which call themselves ethnographies of online communities, we will see that the immersion as a form of learning and more systematic forms of enquiry was common to all of these approaches (Baym, 1995; Correll, 1995; Reid, 1995). For example, Nancy Baym (1995, 1999) was a participant observer in the discussion group about soap opera she studied for a period of over three years. She collected messages and subjected them to a textual analysis and also conducted interviews and surveys with members of the group. In line with the ethnographic tradition, she describes her approach as evolving over time, as her understanding of the group developed. Baym used participant observation to understand important aspects of the social life there, such as specific language and the emergency of social hierarchies. It was possible for her to claim a deep understanding because of the length of time she had spent there and the different means that she used to see issues through the eyes of the members and to step back to interpret observations. There is a lot in common between her approach and the standard model of ethnography described by Hammersley and Atkinson in the previous section.

As Hine (2000) points out, in virtual ethnography the travel to a field site is itself virtual and is “experiential rather than physical displacement” (p.45). The key ethnographic principle of participation and progressive collection of data and enquiry in order to develop understanding remains consistent with more traditional approaches.

Then, Markham (1998) added to the development of online ethnography a particular focus on reflexivity, by examining what it means to go online. The major part of her methodology was using her own reflections on what is meant to be online but also interviewing people she encountered in different online settings. The analysis stressed the multiple nature of online experience, such that the Internet can constitute a place, but it can also be used as a tool or experienced as a way of being.

Early work on computer-mediated communication and media studies used to emphasize the uniqueness of the Internet as a site; the Internet was a place where one could shape relationships, identities, and social projects in a world apart from the material world. Pioneer ethnographic studies of online settings used to stress the importance to understand online social life in its own way. This was a reaction against models which spoke about the impoverishment of online interactions as compared to those in face-to-face settings (Heim, 1993, Kroker & Weistein, 1994).

The idea of an ethnographic understanding of online interaction was initially developed in settings based on text but lately it has been applied to many other forms of virtual interaction. Online games as World of Warcraft have become popular for ethnographic study or worlds as Second Life (Boellstorff, 2008; Nardi,

2010). The emergence of social networking sites as Facebook and MySpace provided the occasion to adapt the ethnographic enquiry to suit and make evident the emergent social formations (Boyd, 2007). New forms of textual communication such as blogging and micro blogging (Twitter), offer challenges and opportunities for ethnographers, as they present new forms of social interaction to explore. Ethnography has become embedded in academic culture as an appropriate way to explore how people make sense of the possibilities that the Internet offers to them.

4.3 PRACTICES AND DILEMMAS OF ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHY

When the location of the ethnographic study goes online, what happens to the meanings and uses of spatial constructs of the ethnographic research such as "place" and participant observation?

4.3.1 PLACE

Where to go and where the data collection starts are two basic questions for the ethnographic enquiry. According to Spradley (1980) "place" is one of the three aspects of the "social situation". The other two are "actors" and "activities". In Spradley`s view, any physical location can be the basis for a social situation as long as the other two elements are present.

Imagining where the ethnographer would go in case of Internet-based research suggests a revision of the social situation to include locations that are not physical settings that we were used to seeing them as such.

In the earliest online ethnographies this problem was solved by focusing on a particular online setting and using that as a field site to which the ethnographer is

travelling virtually. This mode of research, in which the ethnographer found a virtual field site and made it the focus of sustained study, became popular with the first cyber culture studies in the 1990s and has tended to endure even in the "critical cyber culture studies" more attuned to social, political and economic contextualization of the Internet (Silver, 2000).

When I started my own study I wasn`t actually defining any particular website as a field site, although I ended up in a specific online setting thanks to my informants at that time and start observing it. Later, I realized that the phenomenon at hand was not located only there and I needed to move in order to understand it. Despite the fact that I am a big defender of the notion "network", the situation was unexpected for me. Somehow in the beginning I had this idea in my head that I will go to the place and do the job despite all the theories and notions I was defending by the moment. It was an unconscious act. I guess we all share at some level the prejudices about the Internet and some concepts are changing so fast that we are unable to catch up in practice. On the other hand, I was excited that I can finally witness some real networking but also worried how I will defend that academically. I wasn`t doing social networking analysis but an ethnographic inquiry and since "The Internet" was seen as a unified phenomenon in a lot of online studies (Slater, 2002) this might be a problem for my inquiry.

Even making the claim that one studies "The Internet" as if it were a static phenomenon is problematic (Slater, 2002) since, in reality, "the" Internet is a mix of software; hardware; already-built infrastructures; as well as social, cultural, political

and legal practices which combine, become stabilized, and are articulated in different places and under different contexts.

Going back to the revision of social situation, one definition that allows this broader concept of place or setting has been offered by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), who have described the place as "constituted and maintained through cultural definition and social strategies" (p. 41) with boundaries that are "not fixed but shift across occasions, to one degree or another, through processes of redefinition and negotiation" (p. 41). Olwig and Hastrup (1997) suggest that:

> A new sensitivity to the ways in which place is performed and practiced is required. This might involve viewing the field (place), rather than as a site, as being a 'field of relations'. In this sense, rather than focusing on specific research locations as they are defined physically, focus would shift to the connections between multiple locations where the actors engage in activity. In this view, ethnographers might still start from a particular place, but would be encouraged to follow connections which were made meaningful from that setting. Ethnography in this strategy becomes as much a process of following connections as it is a period of inhabitance. (p. 8)

Moving from traditional research sites to online spaces compels a shift to fields of relations rather than bounded physical sites.

4.3.2 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The purposes of the participant observation in traditional settings are well-known – to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities,

people and physical aspects of the situation. These actions are necessary in order to obtain a first-hand experience of the society they are observing. It is also necessary to step out from time to time and reflecting upon it. How do online settings challenge the researcher in the role of participant observer? What do the characteristics of online settings imply for the researcher attempting to conduct participant observation, when researchers are told to “do what others do, but also watch their own actions, the behavior of others, and everything they could see in this social situation and maintain explicit awareness of everything that is going on” (Spradley, 1980, p.54)? I will focus on two aspects of the online settings that are key to that question: how does the existence of “lurkers” affect the observation and how do online settings affect the researcher`s knowledge of those sites?

In an online setting, a lurker (someone who reads but does not post) or a large number of lurkers could be present. If the job of the ethnographer is to maintain an explicit awareness of what is going on at that site, what are the implications of the presence of the invisible lurkers for the reporting of events? Hine (2000) argues that “from a discursive point of view, the silent are difficult to incorporate into the analysis…they leave no observable traces”(p.25). In this manner, the ethnographer mirrors the activity and awareness of other active members; while lurkers may be present online, their identities are not present in any meaningful way.

A second question regarding participant observation involves the researcher’s own participation. As Hine (2008) points out online ethnographers "are by definition participants to some extent, since they employ computer mediation to observe and

interact with the research subjects" (p.262). The online ethnography she said earlier "is ethnography in, of, and through the virtual" (Hine, 2000, p. 65).

In contrast with offline settings, the researcher is able to go to some online venues and not have their existence known. The researcher then participates as a lurker. Despite some concerns about it as lack of engagement and ability to develop an understanding from the inside (Beaulieu, 2004), lurking, however is a useful part of the online ethnographer`s tools when the practices of the regular members are observed and where it allows a cultural familiarization in order to entry into participation (Hine, 2008).

The online space is both social interaction and text and it refers to the distinction between gaining direct experience of participation and using the Internet as a recording tool (Hine, 2000). The online space as social interaction asks for participation, while online space as text permits an observation in retrospect, that is to say lurking. That lurking practice of the researcher entails the observation of the members ("who"); what kind of information is being shared online (who is posting what information) and to which purposes. Above all, "a textual focus places emphasis on the ways in which contributions are justified and rendered authoritative, and on the identities which authors construct and perform through their posting" (Hine, 2000, p. 53).

The convenience of the virtual text is that the medium records all texts and interaction that pass through the medium. Research can therefore be done independent of the informants' time (Hine, 2000, p.8). Yet, online content analysis does not act like a substitute of the actual participation.

The question here is not to juxtapose lurking and participating as they are both necessary, but to stress that the very nature of the Internet venue allows researchers to observe in retrospective, something impossible in an offline setting.

Besides, as Genzuk is pointing out "the extent to which it is possible for a researcher to become a full participant in an experience will depend partly on the nature of the setting being observed" (2003, p.3). The extent of participation is seen more like a continuum which varies from complete immersion in the program as full participant to complete separation from the activities observed, taking on a role as a spectator and there is a great deal of variation along the continuum between these two extremes.

4.4 TOWARD A CONNECTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Some of the convenient fictions of the traditional ethnographic approach have been less applicable to the new online issues undertaken by researchers. One of the primary and ongoing challenges facing the contemporary online ethnographic research is the question of how to construct the location of a project when the sites, technologically-mediated practices, and people we study exist and flow through a wider information ecology that is neither fixed, nor can easily be located as “online” or “offline.”

There is a developing body of internet-related ethnographic literature which is attempting to take into account the fluid nature of the information ecology arguing for the necessity for both movement and placed-ness (e.g. Burrell, 2009; Hine, 2007; Leander & McKim, 2003; Walker, 2010).

Multi-sited ethnography was first conceptualized in cultural anthropology and is a response to several decades of methodological reflection by ethnographers who questioned the notion that a field site was a bounded geographic space that contained whole, intact, and knowable cultures (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Marcus, 1995).

Marcus (1995) argued that the culture was not necessarily spatially fixed, but it was constituted by global flows made up “in/of the world system”. As such, ethnographic methods must account for those flows, writing that this mode of research:

> Moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation”. (Marcus,1995, p.96)

Marcus forwards “tracking strategies” as a way to provide a coherent research project, including: “follow the people;” “follow the thing” (material object); “follow the metaphor;” “follow the plot;” “follow the biography;” and “follow the conflict.” The argument for such a mobile approach highlights the centrality of movement and connectedness in social practice. It foregrounds the notion that social processes take place across distance—connecting any range of distinct entities (Burrell, 2009).

Researchers of Internet practices have made various attempts to configure field sites so as to account for movement and connectedness. Beaulieu and Simakova

(2006), for example, used hyperlinks within a large database (the functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Data Center) as an ethnographic object – constituting the field site by following hyperlink traces and also reflecting on how those links were both functionally created and symbolically understood. In her study of the scientific discipline of biological systematics, Hine (2007) employed what she calls a "connective ethnography", and explored the connections between different activities including group message exchange, institutional observation, interviews, and hyperlink paths. For Hine, a key starting or entry point was a mailing list which she used as a source of data and complement to interviews. In her study of teens´ use of social networking sites for identity creation and management, Boyd (2008) uses a form of networked ethnography in which she analyzes the MySpace profiles of teens throughout the United States and interviews teens as to their mediated practices.

In each one of these approaches, connection and movement are critical methodological concerns of the project with the boundaries of the field site being constructed by: an infrastructure of knowledge production (e.g. functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Data Center), discipline (e.g. biological systematics), or social media application (e.g. Facebook and MySpace).

From the traditional perspective of ethnography conceptualized as a geographically bounded project, ethnographic methods are oddly matched to the research spaces of the Internet which have blurry geographic boundaries: site contributors in one location, readers in another, servers and site designers in a third. A focus on movement, tracings and flows is provocative for thinking about

studies of Internet-enabled practices, precisely because it allows the conduct of fieldwork on social phenomena that take place across time and distance.

Extending fieldwork in this way raises some interesting questions. Should we define the field site by the movement and dwelling of the fieldworker or, alternately, as the space in which a social phenomenon takes place? These are no longer considered one and the same. As Marcus (1998) notes, contemporary ethnography is often a study of parts rather than wholes. Researchers cycle in and out of the field, skip certain areas entirely, and may rely on the recollections of participants in interviews to map out the space.

4.4.1 MAKING THE "FIELD": LESSON LEARNED

As Burrell points out "the term *field site* refers to the spatial characteristics of research project where the social processes under study take place" (2009, p.10). For ethnographers, defining that place is a very important activity that traditionally is prior to the research activities and in early stage of fieldwork. It consists of identifying where the researcher should be located as a participant observer. Once the fieldwork is concluded, the ethnographic reports cannot be written without defining this spatial stage. It has both exclusive and inclusive function; it indicates what the research does and does not cover. A realization that the field site is in certain ways constructed rather than discovered is crucial to contemporary practice.

Amit describes that construction as follows: "the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all

the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred" (Amit, 2000, p. 6).

The realization that the field site is constructed rather than discovered (Amit, 2000) or is the outcome rather than precursor of research (Hine, 2008) is a crucial theoretical aspect of ethnographic work in digital contexts.

For the purposes of my study, the challenge since the begging has been to configure a field site that can make the project coherent, manageable and defensible. On a more general level, this project posed challenges similar to those faced by many researchers nowadays who do field-based studies. It included an examination of non-Cartesian virtual spaces. It was concerned with the relationship between global processes and situated experiences. The difficulty of drawing a boundary around such a social phenomenon arose from two conditions. First, the Internet is a global network of machines, information, and people; yet the Internet is too vast to be studied as a whole and was never the point of the study. Second, it was a study of file sharing practice in a particular country which is lived in a broader social and cultural context.

Thus, the field is not something that I decided at the start of the project, but instead decisions about inclusion and exclusion were made continuously throughout the study as the file sharing practice as such was taking place in interconnected and overlapping mediated contexts. I was forced by the very nature of the phenomenon under study to move myself often from one site to another, skipping certain areas which were available on sites, and filling the gaps relying on informants in order to complete the map.

The outcome of such strategy was the construction of a network of points including spaces, people and objects. The network as a concept is quite compatible with the aim of ethnographic work to escape the concepts, categories, hierarchies. Hannerz (1992b) comments that “networks . . . can be seen to cut across more conventional units of analysis” (p. 40). Therefore, networks provide a way for developing an unconventional understanding of social processes. It is a structure that can be constructed from the observable connections performed by participants. Another advantage of defining the field site as a network is that it is produced as a continuous space that does not presume proximity or even spatiality in a physical sense. Continuity does not imply homogeneity or unity; it implies connection. The continuity of a network is evident in the way that one point can (through one or more steps) connect to any other point.

In a “field site as network,” the point of origin, the destination(s), the space between, and what moves or is carried along these paths is of interest. It is an approach, “designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography” (Marcus 1998, p. 90).

Some practical recommendations from Burrell (2009) were of great help while I was doing the fieldwork. These strategies are well established in ethnographic research but in defining the field site as a network they are reframed and connected to some novel techniques:

1. *Seek entry points rather than sites.* Hine (2000) similarly suggests that ethnographers “might still start from a particular place, but would be encouraged to follow connections made meaningful from that setting” (p. 60). In this study, I sought to trace out a field site using a Bulgarian torrent site property of a local Internet Provider as a starting point. One way I did this was by tracing paths through the Bulgarian Internet Space defined by users to get a sense of their everyday lives online. For example, I followed users from the local torrent site where they were chatting about another Bulgarian torrent website (Zamunda.net) which was appearing continuously in conversations. This approach provided a rich sense of the interconnections. A well-selected entry point can generate a broad spatial mapping that maintains a concentrated engagement with the research topic.
2. *Consider multiple networks.* Marcus encourages fieldworkers to follow people, objects, and stories but does not describe the pathways that are traversed. There are existing infrastructures that are already understood as networks like the telecommunications networks (such as the Internet), the phone networks or the social networks. By considering this multitude of networks up front, the many possible directions that could be followed are laid out for the researcher to consider. In traversing these networks, the field site becomes a heterogeneous network. The field site as heterogeneous network incorporates mapping out the social relations of research participants and their connections to material and digital objects and physical sites. As Burrell (2009) suggests: “accepting heterogeneity

preserves the possibility that the social phenomenon under study may be defined not only by social networks, but by material flows and other modes of connection" (p.191). Thus, this study considered heterogeneous network of social and material relations across the Bulgarian Internet Space.[21]

3. *Follow but also intercept.* As Burrell (2009) argues based on Marcus (1998) an approach to study a single site with an awareness of its multisite context is possible. So I interpret this to mean that the most visited Bulgarian torrent site (Zamunda.net) could be treated as a point of intersection where an understanding of the file sharing practice was produced in part by the conversations and circulation of data. Doing this from a stationary position was a way to avoid the unwieldiness of expanding the field site into multiple locations.
4. *Attend to what is indexed in interviews.* Language can be instrumental in providing clues about things to follow and sites to visit. In terms of methodological practice, distinguishing and attending to what is indexed in speech is generally treated as part of a later analysis phase (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). However, paying close attention to references to space and place in speech (or texts) earlier on can also be a guide to the further movement of the researcher. For example, in the course of interviews, I heard stories about other online settings where users where discussing their online practices. References to sites also served as suggestions for new settings to visit virtually.

21 Understood as it is known in Bulgarian as a space of business, government, culture and civic dialogue that expands with every new site and online initiative that uses the Bulgarian language and reflects Bulgarian experiences, issues and concerns

5. *Know when and where to stop.* The potentially infinite size of the network and the lack of natural stopping point present problems for researchers (Strathern, 1996). Practically speaking, one simple way of determining when to stop is when time runs out. As Hine (2000) points out, if one embraces the notion that ethnographic work is no longer about studying cultural wholes, then the question of completeness becomes unproblematic; one stops when one must. The dilemma becomes how to strategically construct the selected part in a way that produces something coherent. Meaning saturation is one well-established approach that does not rely on spatial boundaries to define the ending point of research. When interviews with new people and observations in new locals yield a repetition of themes, this may indicate that the research process has come to a natural conclusion. Additionally, research that follows connections may move into a site where there are less and less frequent encounters with the topics of interest. This may not mean stopping the research entirely but rather that the researcher ought to return to the field site's starting point to pursue another set of connections and move in another direction.

4.4.2 GATHERING AND ANALYZING ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

Ethnography is a multi-data approach compatible with the social construction view of society and it was chosen as this dissertation is concerned with investigating culture, and the researcher is immersed in the research setting. The field work lasted several months distributed in time. My first contact with this phenomenon was in 2005 and that was when I made some initial observations of the accessible

to me at that moment local torrent site[22] along with some informal conversations from the area with people who were practicing file sharing. In 2009 I started mapping the Bulgarian Internet Space and observing and analyzing different venues as forums, torrent trackers and Internet Providers websites. In 2010 I did most of the participant observation at Zamunda.net and interviews for a total period of 4 months. Finally, in 2012 I made some additional interviews and observations in order to refresh the study for a total period of 2 months.

Doing fieldwork entailed: (a) informal offline conversations, (b) observing online locations and participating in some of them, (c) interviews (both online and offline) with people involved in the file sharing practice as downloaders/ uploaders and translators, (d) interviews with local experts - business people and Internet providers, and (e) document analysis of Internet-related publications in the mass media and Internet selected Bulgarian Internet sites as some statistical data.

At the beginning of the study informants accessible to me were people from my personal network who partake in file sharing activities. They were source for (informal) consultation and convenient help over the course of the study. Some of them helped me contact with Internet Providers. Being recommended by people who know me and have their trust too, was the only way to reach Internet Providers for interviews as they are very suspicious and avoid talking about file sharing. As I was entering more in the field, I increasingly developed relationships not only with more downloaders, but also with translators and uploaders.

22 By local here I mean operating in a municipality between customers of the same Internet provider

In order to mentally map the file sharing in the Bulgarian Internet Space I had to navigate and observe different online locations simultaneously: different private torrent trackers, subtitling websites, official Internet Providers websites, forums.

Zamunda.net and Subsunacs.net were chosen for more sustained observation and participation at the possible extent. They were identified as references in the Bulgarian file sharing practice. Zamunda gives a closer look at the daily routine of Bulgarians involved in private file sharing communities specialized in making available online content for download; usually the use and distribution of the content is not authorized by the copyright owner and it is free of charge. The focus of the participant observation was on gaining insights about the diversity of roles, the community norms and rituals for navigating the community, browsing and sharing content. Subsunacs, on the other hand, was used to provide useful information about the online behavior of both people looking for subtitles and those who are involved in making them out.[23] The website offers free of registration access to big data base of subtitles in Bulgarian language constituted of volunteers who upload them on site free of charge. The participant observation here was also useful for a better understanding of what it means to make subtitles.

There are a number of definitions of participant observation in the literature. Gold (1958) presents a classification of the researchers' role as a typology of participant observer roles. He distinguishes between what he classifies as:

- The *complete participant* – taking an insider role, fully part of the setting and often observes covertly;

23 By making subtitles I mean firstly, translating the text into Bulgarian and then converting it into actual subtitles

- The *participant as observer* – part of the group being studied, gain access to a setting by having a non-research reason for being part of the setting;
- The *observer as participant* – minimal involvement in the social setting being studied, not normally part of the social setting;
- The *complete observer* – not partaking in the social setting at all.

My role as a researcher in Zamunda can be classified as a complete participant as characterized by Gold (1958), however there are some aspects that fit more into the participant as observer category. In reference to the latter, my access to Zamunda.net was initially for non-research reasons. A friend invited me back in 2004 at the time that the idea of researching file sharing in Bulgaria was still non-existing. It wasn`t until late when I started using it as research site for participant observation.

Immersion and my level of participation in the observations in terms of downloading and sharing files back within the community was minimal. As it is a requirement for members to actively participate on a regular basis, I did download some items and made them available so others could download (or share) them back from me. However, as much of the content available through the community was unauthorised, I chose content to download that was the least likely to be unauthorised. There were no clear indicators in the community as to the authorisation of such files, however I used common sense to make decisions about which content to download.

Even though my role as a researcher in Zamunda can be classified as somewhere between a *complete participant* and *participant as observer,* I engaged in minimal

interaction with other members. I did become fully part of the setting in order to gain insights, however because of the covert nature of the participant observation, interactions with other members were not encouraged.

On the other hand, I accessed Subsunacs presenting myself since the begging as researcher and interacted with other members openly. I engaged as a subtitle user in order to gain insight on how the website is navigated by them. Also, I contacted one of the teams in order to express my interest in making subtitles too. I have more than 10 years experience as a freelance translator (pair Bulgarian - Spanish, sometimes Bulgarian-English too) and I really enjoy translating and I thought I can contribute to the team making some subtitles and also gaining firsthand experience of the process. Because it was time consuming and it was necessary to gain new technical abilities in order to make the actual subtitles after translating the text, I never managed to finish the two required subtitles in order to be accepted in the team. Although I never finished the subtitles, I gained experience of what price one must pay in order to make subtitles.

In the research period 22 formal interviews were conducted in various locations. All were semi-structured interviews and conducted both online and offline.

Five of those interviews concerned experts (two Internet business people and three Internet Providers). These interviews conducted offline revolved around the Internet services in Bulgaria including, more specifically questions about the torrent site as service. As it was mentioned before, the contact with experts was mediated by a third party. Once presented, my first contact with them was via phone and consisted of outlining the research and the aim of the data collection.

Interested parties were offered an opportunity to participate, however no remuneration or reward was awarded for participation.

In a total of eight interviews users (downloading and uploading material) of Zamunda.net participated. These interviews were mainly about the motives, purposes, meanings and functionality of the practice of file sharing and hence were revealing the technological biography, as well as aspects of the technological chain around that practice. Downloaders were easy to access in personal network as Zamunda is the most popular Bulgarian torrent tracker. Face to face and Skype were the primary method of communication. The first contact consisted of an outline of the project, and the aims of the data collection. Interested parties were offered an opportunity to participate, however no remuneration or reward was awarded for participation.

Uploaders were more difficult to reach in personal network so I used a snowball sampling. This type of sampling is especially useful in sensitive research and when it is necessary to locate a specific population inaccessible in any other way. These interviews were conducted online in Skype via chat and no remuneration was offered for participation.

The rest of nine interviews concerned translators from the most popular Bulgarian site for subtitles (Subsunacs.net). They were directed toward the motives and meaning of subtitling. As the fieldwork progressed, interviews held contained at least the following two themes: (a) purposes of participation and value of use, and (b) connections with torrents sites. They were sourced directly from the website. I

had the permission of the global moderator to present myself and posted an announcement in their forum. Thus, volunteer sample was used again.

Despite the fact that I distinguish here different groups of people (expert, downloader, uploader and translator), it is necessary to accentuate that the division is merely artificial as in all cases resulted that they were downloading from Zamunda.net and other smaller Bulgarian torrent trackers and could be all considered downloaders, too. During the interviews with translators it also turned out that some of them were moderators and/or uploaders at Zamunda.net.

Users' names were not recorded and only nick names selected by participants are used in the text with their permission. No further details about location nor full interview texts are available as part of the agreement with research subjects for this study. The following Table 1 summarises the intervieewes:

Interviewee	Role
Evo	Internet Provider / Downloader
Dimitar	Internet Provider / Downloader
Snejana	Area manager at Orbitel / Downloader
Mitco	Internet Provider / Downloader
Miro	Internet entrepreneur / Downloader
Lachko	Downloader
Dima	Downloader
Svetoslav	Downloader
Heat	Downloader/ Uploader
Ivo	Downloader /Uploader
Mihaela	Downloader
Niki	Downloader/ Uploader

Petur	Downloader/ Uploader
Badgirl	Translator/ Downloader
BadNick	Translator/ Downloader
Katia D	Translator/ Downloader
Yavor	Translator/ Downloader
Damian	Translator/ Uploader
Mitko	Translator/ Downloader
Petar	Translator/ Downloader
PlayHard	Translator/ Downloader
Lora	Translator/ Downloader

Table. 1 List of participants

Besides interviews, observations and informal talks, I also made use of diversity of documents in the research process, such as Internet Providers websites and brochures, internet-related publications about Bulgarian Internet Space, as well as some statistics to throw light on the issues that were emerging during the inquiry. To paraphrase Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), while doing ethnography, the researcher is using whatever data is available and helpful for the research.

As ethnography involved a combination of techniques, this made possible to assess the validity of inferences between indicators and concepts by examining data relating to the same concept from participant observation, interviewing, and documents (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Themes that have been identified during the analysis of the recollected data have enabled the production of "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of the file sharing

practice in Bulgaria, giving insights into actors involved, roles, rules, rituals, norms and incentives for file sharing.

An inductive approach to thematic analysis have been adopted, although not purely inductive as implied by scholars, such as Glaser and Strauss (1967). Theoretical ideas, commonsense expectations and stereotypes often play a key role in the process of analysis. To paraphrase Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) ethnographic analysis rarely starts from a well-defined theory but it is impossible not to rely on the existing ideas of the ethnographer and those they can access in the literature. Thus, it is important to consider them in order to make sense of the data paying attention to not converting them into prejudgments.

In what follows I will briefly reflect on the kind of problems I encountered in doing that kind of fieldwork. Moving back and forth between the various locations in order to follow the chain did not always allow me to spend a long time on site so as to get a proper experience of participation. This can be referred to as the problem of " being there" of "multi-sited ethnography".

A second problem is described by Hakken (1999) as follows: “the extent to which one must/should master and/or identify with the professional field(s) relevant to her research” (p.57). As I found out in my research more than once, being a social researcher, getting people to talk sometimes needs a bit more convincing. This problem I frequently come across when talking to people with technical expertise as here in particular I experienced being in a position of less authority than the informant. This is also described as the problem of “studying up” (Beaulieu, 2010; Dirksen, 2007). Studying up refers to the power differences between the

researcher and the researched. The researcher and the informants are educated in the same system and live in the same society. In studying up, the informant is more capable of judging the skills and expertise of the ethnographer (Forsythe, 2001). This is in contrast with the traditional fieldwork situation in which the ethnographer came literally from different world.

4.4.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When dealing with Internet research ethics (IRE), definitive "answers" are often elusive[24]. The topic has been debated since the 1990s and some ethical guidelines have been articulated (e.g. Ess & AoIR ethics working committee, 2002; NESH, 2003; Markham & Buchanan, 2012) but continues to be an unsolved issue for researchers (Buchanan, 2010; Sanders, 2005). The discussion around IRE is inscribed in a wilder framework of research ethics, which as a strict discipline has a relatively brief history. In ethical theory there have been concerns about basic rights of the participants such as respect, privacy and self-determination. Ethnographic research as other disciplines have the responsibility to protect from harm and take into account the participants` rights too. However, as Murphy and Dingwall (2007) write, "these obligations are complex and will not be fulfilled by the simple adherence to a prescriptive list of requirements. Indeed, given the diversity and flexibility of ethnographies, and the indeterminacy of potential harm, a prescriptive approach may be positively unhelpful " (p.347).

Harm in ethnography is impossible to predict up front as it depends more on the participants` response to the interaction rather than the researcher`s intention and

24 See Burnet, Consalvo & Ess (2010)

many times it is indirect in forms of anxiety, stress, embarrassment and may reverse later, being that way invisible to the researcher. Respecting the rights is neither guaranteed by simply signing an informal consent (which actually can harm the confidentiality of the participants (Price, 1996) like in the present study). As Murphy and Dingwall (2007) argue, researchers must rely more on their moral sense and the ability to make decisions in the field.

Being conducted mostly online the concern of public/private becomes central for that study. Sanders (in line with Rutter and Smith (2005)) argues that even though “the web is a public domain and those who post information realize that it is not private in the traditional sense of a personal conversation but accessible for anyone to read” (2005, p.71). Participant observation as a method to understand social interactions may not be as ethically controversial as actually taking data (that is, quotations) from computer-mediated communications without any permission from the individual. All quotations in this dissertation are made after the expressed authorization of their author.

In the case of use of public online documents and venues their ownership is recognized by references in the text. Following Lawson (2004) suggestion, the consent and further identification of the participants in the interviews was more a "negotiation" than a static item as suggested by classical research models. Because of the nature of the sensitive data being collected in interviews (in some cases relating to illegal activities) from the participants, it was necessary not only to be very clear about how the research subject’s personal information would be treated but negotiated with each one of them. Most of the participants consented

to have their nicknames and be quoted in the academic work, others to be used for data analysis only (no publication of text). I considered also essential that no identifying information will be kept about research subjects, either in hard copy or electronic form.

In the case of Zamunda.net where my participation was covert it was impossible to negotiate a consent as I would reveal my identity as a researcher and this would harm both the research and the members. To treat the online observation data sensitively from that site, only data about traffic, rules and roles of users are recorded. Individual online forum posts are not collected. In line with Sanders' approach where "no information can be personally identified" (2005), using online observation data for research without direct permission meets Marx's (1998) criteria of protecting individuals from harm. It is in no way deceptive to other members during my presence, as reference to personal communications on that site are kept to a minimum in this dissertation, and every attempt possible to hide the identity of its members is taken. The observations of Zamunda were conducted covertly for one more reason: if members of the community were aware they were being watched by someone other than "one of their own" they would have revoked my membership to the community.

On the other hand, creating a positive interview experience for both the participant and the researcher could be a challenge in this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the interview discussions referred to illegal conduct so the topic has to be dealt with carefully. It was important to create an environment where participants feel comfortable in discussing their online behaviour. Järvinen (2001) warns of the

danger of lies and deceptions, which could be presented by the research subjects, in both the online environment and the offline space. The possibility of talking or being seen to be engaging in illegal practices may also encourage the research subjects to give false and misleading information. Järvinen (2001) comments, “this information is exceedingly valuable to the fieldworker when it is recognized as false” (p.84). The participants in this study didn`t show any moral remorse about being engaged in illegal practices or preoccupation of sharing this information with me. Their predisposition helped me to some extent in creating the positive environment.

By defining the field site as a network in accordance with the guidelines described above, the field site transitions from a bounded space that the researcher dwells within to something that more closely tracks the social phenomenon under study. This site is constructed in terms of how such a phenomenon is perceived and acted on by participants. The field site comes to be defined by the physical movements, places indexed in speech and text, and social imaginings produced by research participants. The researcher still, of course, plays a role in the sitting of research interests, and the resulting field site is a collaboration between the researcher and the researched groups.

Although not applicable to all field-based research, this approach is likely to be particularly useful to certain topics of social research, including migration, new communication technologies, broadcast media, transnationalism, and global institutions, among many others.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY

Back in Chapter Three, the concept of the community as network was introduced to define the context for this dissertation. The network concept was used to identify key points in the amorphous mass phenomenon of the file sharing practice in Bulgaria.

This chapter puts the methodology discussed in Chapter Four into context by presenting the three main actors in the network of the file sharing practice which is outcome of the field work– Internet Providers, torrent trackers and subtitling websites. The material is organized following the logic of these three core hubs and reveals insights from the conducted study. Firstly, the role of the Internet Providers is discussed. Secondly, a closer look to Zamunda.net – the most popular Bulgarian torrent tracker is presented as insights from observations. The site was a point of intersection for this study and contributes overall to the dissertation by providing details about the everyday file sharing activities Bulgarian ordinary users engage in. Finally, I will expose the subtitling practice using the most popular Bulgarian website for subtitles – Subsunacs.net with some specific themes related to this part of the file sharing chain.

5.1 INTERNET PROVIDERS

5.1.1 PENETRATION AND SERVICE

The group that witnessed the transition of the country from communism to democracy was the Pravetz generation. They were the pioneers who expanded

Internet access, connecting the nation, through cyberspace, to the world. In 1997 Bennahum wrote that there were about 30 Internet providers and 300 host servers and between 30,000 to 50,000 people with access to the network (not differentiating between schools, work accounts or home access). At that time the largest providers - Digital Systems and BIS OnLine - were run by entrepreneurs whose first connection with computers was hacking with Pravetz. By 1998 the providers had reached at least 100 (Belogusheva & Tom 2000).

Around 2001 the proliferation of Local Area Network (LAN) Providers started. According to ARC Fund report, in 2004 there were about 200-300 LAN Providers in the country. The common approach of these companies was to establish a base in a particular place and build their own local network of cables. Initially these hung between the buildings, but they were eventually buried underground.

Nowadays, the tendency among providers is to merge and get bigger. The logic is to cooperate with others from the same region. Key informants for this study were owners of three different companies and as an example used to illustrate this tendency: Telnet is a Ltd. of two other LAN providers – Magi and GoLink and covers the region of Veliko Turnovo[25] and Networx, with headquarters in Ruse[26] is the biggest Internet Provider in Northern Bulgaria, it is also a fruit of the union between several smaller providers from the same area.

The biggest advantage for the users is the lack of speed limit between the companies that merged when downloading or uploading material. For the rest of

25 City in Northern Bulgaria

26 City in Northern Bulgaria

the Internet uses, as surfing the web or watching TV online the customers receive the speed they are paying for.

The prices for fiber optic, which is the most common option for Internet connectivity in Bulgaria, are very low in comparison to other European countries. For example, Telnet offers 100Mbps for 12 euros per month for national connectivity and 40Mbps for international. Networx has packages for 13 euros for 80Mbps Internet and digital television. The fast speed of the fiber optic has been commented in interviews by experts as one of the main reasons for the proliferation of the file sharing practice in Bulgaria:

> ADSL technology has a big disadvantage and it is the following, if you have high speed of download, you don`t have any upload speed, it is very low, ridiculous actually... let`s say the faster ADSL in the world right now is 24 Mb of download and not more than 1,5 Mb of upload. .. you cannot be a server with 1,5 Mb speed of upload, this means you will destroy the quality of the rest of the services you use at home.[27] (Evo)

The LAN providers get into contractual relationships with each other about their mutual traffic and thanks to that cooperation, the local access speed increases – the so called BG peering, "...provider A has built 10 gigabits connection to provider B, provider B has built 10 gigabits connection to provider C, provider C to provider

27 "Технологията на ДСЛ има един огромен недъг и той е следния, ако ти имаш голяма скорост на даунлоад на ъплоад ти нямаш никаква скорост , тя е много ниска, тя е смешна просто ,... значи да кажем така и най-бързия ДСЛ в света в момента може да транспортира до 24 мегабита скорост на сваляне и до не повече от мегабит и половина максимум до скорост на качване ...не може да си със мегабит и половина сървър тоест ти си унищожаваш качеството на останалите услуги, които ги ползваш вкъщи." (Ево)

A and so on… these lateral connectivities are the bg peering" (Evo).[28] The reason for that is market approach, " I am friend with you, we have optics everywhere, so we connect fiber somewhere between us and start transporting…we exchange traffic and it doesn`t cost us anything…and the Internet stays within Bulgaria" (Evo).[29]

This local picture of current players involved in providing Internet is a consequence of a major conflict between the Bulgarian Telecommunication Company (BTC) and the rest of the Internet providers that have begun to organize themselves against the monopoly of the telephone infrastructure.

During Communism BTC was the main player in the telecommunication market, holding an actual monopoly as it owned the main telecommunications backbone, as well as the "last mile" connectivity infrastructure in the country. This situation has been challenged during the years following the turn to a market economy as the company denied access to its infrastructure to other possible providers and later was asking very high prices for using it. Its privatization has been also a contested process, which advanced slowly and hesitantly due to numerous political squabbles and conflicting interests.

As a result, several phenomena are observed:

- At the begging the company offered an incredibly bad dial-up Internet connection;

28 "Доставчик А си е изградил 10 гигабита връзка с доставчик Б , доставчик Б си е изградил 10 гигабита връзка с доставчик С , доставчик С 10 гигабита с доставчик А и т.н. Тия напречни свързаности помежду им са така неречената БГ пиъринг." (Ево)

29 "Аз съм приятел с тебе, имаме оптики навсякъде, свързали сме някъде влакно между нас и започваме да транспортираме… обменяме трафик и това не ни струва нищо…Интернета си остава на територията на България." (Ево)

- The LAN Providers made their cable networks independently from BTC, although in the begging they were hanging between buildings;
- The already privatized BTC launched the ADSL service a generation later and after the appearance of the LANs offering fiber optic;
- The country skipped the use of new technologies through the use of existing infrastructure - which could've been the less expensive option for the budget.

Thus, the country avoided the BTC's monopoly and today that company is not the only one with international connectivity. Specter, Interoute, Orbitel, ITD, Pantel, Neter, among other major providers, have their international connectivity independently of the national company. Today, only a small part of the international connectivity passes through the BTC.

In comparison to Western European countries, the Bulgarian telecom has a small role in providing Internet services to the population. In fact, as it is the only Internet Provider offering ADSL instead of fiber optic, the number of its users is insignificant, "BTC has 200 000 subscribers, which is ridiculous taking into account that the users in Bulgaria are around 4 000 000" (Evo).[30] The hard data by NSI (2013) show the same picture with almost 93% of broadband connection against only 7% of ADSL.

It should be recognized that finding themselves in a situation characterized by deterring economic factors and absence of decisive administrative steps toward

30 "БТК има 200 000 абоната, което е смешно,а потребителите в България за около 4 000 000." (Ево)

creating a favorable environment for the penetration of the Internet, entrepreneurs undertook creative maneuvering starting with delivering to the users Ethernet:

> Unprofessional standard (according to telecoms), when we started it was amateur. 'Ethernet' to the end user. Ethernet which is a classic network connection to him, to their network card. Thanks to the fact that Ethernet is the most popular technology for information transfer, its prices are very low so we were able to invest little money and made a serious market penetration, we were everywhere.[31] (Evo)

5.1.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF "FREE SERVICES"

Since the Internet is reality in Bulgaria, the microcosm of the Bulgarian Internet space is offering unlimited, free and high-speed connection access to easily reachable audio, video files and software.

Important role for establishing such practice is played by the Internet providers in this country. More than a decade ago, one of the leading Internet providers at that moment ProLink (also known as Techno-Link), launched a free hosting service site offering 1 GB of space for unlimited use. ProLink's offer was accessible only from Bulgaria due to the high price of international Internet traffic and users quickly caught its true potential – it had greater capacity for storage.

The hosting service of Techno-link equipped with search engines, alphabetical lists and bulletin boards stored tens of thousands of music, movies, software. This

31 "Непрофесионалния стандарт според телекомите, когато ние започвахме беше любителски. 'Етернет* до крайният абонат. Етернет е класическа,обикновена мрежова връзка до него, във мрежовата му карта. Благодарение на това обаче, че етернета е най-популярната технология за транспорт на информация в света, цените и са много ниски, ние правихме ниски инвестиции и правехме много сериозна пенетрайшан на пазара,тоест ние пробихме навсякъде." (Ево)

type of free hosting was very attractive to the users. ProLink customers were having priority access with fast connection to the system. As part of the Internet services company Spectrum Net, ProLink was an important income channel, always looking for growth and higher customer satisfaction.

ProLink had also developed a file sharing system, where users could upload large amounts of data on publicly visible directories, thus allowing others to download from a central server that was safe and extremely reliable.

For example, on ProLink's website a sophisticated forum had separate discussions for exchanging or requesting links to movies, music, software or games. Users who reached their limit of 1 GB could ask for more space. It was often assigned to them once the number of files that had been uploaded to the server was revised. The hosting service of Techno-Link offered catalogues of thousands of MP3 audio files located on the server. To avoid duplicate files, companies like ProLink were performing specific scanning procedures in order to remove already existing content from the server.

But how did this happen in the first place? Possible explanation was given to me from a former regional manager of one of the biggest Internet Providers in the country:

> Let me give you an example, imagine that you want to watch a new movie, you start looking and you find it on a free foreign server. What you do as a fan is start downloading it using international Internet traffic, this movie crosses the whole world to come to you. This costs crazy money. The International traffic is 20-30 times more expensive than the national. Ok, you`re only one user but in 5

> days everybody knows that the movie is over there and starts downloading it too. Even if you have the whole Internet in the world, everybody is downloading by themselves and you as a business person cannot afford to spend so much on international traffic. Your whole channel will be blocked up by the stupid movie that everybody downloads. So in order to survive in that situation, which is very often one, what should you do? You have to limit your users, to download within Bulgaria. Ok, let`s say Data.bg in Sofia exists and you, who are in charge of your network in Ruse, every time users start looking for the movie in question, you say they download it always from data.bg. Practically, you are cashing the content. In 2001, 2002 and 2003 Data.bg and Arena.bg were big with a lot of information and the small Internet providers, well they send you to download from there, they route your traffic so they can pay less. But data.bg is in Sofia and we are in Ruse so they don`t want to pay this traffic to Sofia and they make their own free server, so the Internet is staying within the city.[32](Snejana)

These free servers were helping providers indirectly to gain market advantages over other providers that didn`t support them, that is to say, gain customers. As U.S. Special 301 Priority Foreign Country Watch List came out, the government was pressed to take steps:

32 "Нека да ти дам пример, представи си, че искаш да гледаш нов филм и почваш да го търсиш и го намираш на чуждестранен сървър. И това, което правиш като фен е да почнеш да го теглиш използвайки международен интернет, този филм прекосява света, за да стигне до теб. Това струва луди пари. Международният трафик е 20-30 пъти по-скъп от националния. Ок, ти си само един потребител, но след 5 дни всички знаят, че филма е там някъде и почват да го теглят. Дори и да имаш целия Интернет на света, всеки сваля за себе си и ти като бизнесмен не можеш да си позволиш да изразходваш толкова много международен трафик. Целият ти канал ще е запушен с тъпия филм, който всички телгят. И за да оцелееш в тази ситуация, която е доста честа, какво трябва да направиш? Трябва да ограничиш потребителите си да свалят в България. Ок, да кажем дата.бг в София съществува и ти, който си на чело на мрежата си в Русе, всеки път когато потребителите почнат да търсят въпросния филм, ти казваш да то свалят винаги от дата.бг . На практика кешираш съдържанието. През 2001, 2002, 2003 дата.бг и арена.бг бяха големи с много информация и малкитеИнтернет доставчици, е те те пращат да сваляш оттам., те ти рутират трафика, за да плащат по-малко. Но дата.бг е в София, а ние сме в Русе и за да не плащат трафика до София си направиха си направиха фри сървири тук, така Интернет се върти тук в града." (Снежана)

> So Bulgaria took care of these servers, we had to go out of 301 list, they did it, they shut them down, loads of colleagues of mine 'burned out', what does it mean, operations in their offices, confiscating machines, etc., and that thing was over and since then you don't have where to download the movie from and watch it directly, I mean click and watch the movie.[33] (Evo)

The study E-Bulgaria Report (ARC Fund, 2006) also accentuated the tendency to shut down the free servers, despite the fact this wouldn't lead to their extinction. It was noted that providers of services to a certain number of customers (up to 1000 users) "hid" their servers, making them visible only to their clients. The information about them was passed from mouth to mouth or using false names, private IPs, traffic re-direction and other techniques that were allowed to distract, at least partially, a possible inspection. The power of these internal servers was provided by some bigger external source.

The largest providers began transferring the contents of the servers to its customers and performing as mere brokers of their P2P networks. Even in this case the state was putting pressure on providers and users of the P2P networks, actively confiscated material and made threats[34]. Eventually, private torrent trackers appeared substituting these P2P networks and the cyber police is still trying to shut down some of them once in a while but new ones are always popping-up.

33 "...значи България се погрижи тези сървъри да ги затвори, трябваше да излезем от списък 301, направиха го, затвориха ги колеги много имах, които изгоряха по тоя начин какво означава изгоряха показни операции в офисите им, изземане на машини и т.н. това нещо приключи оттам насетне след като няма вече от къде да теглиш и да гледаш директно тоест само да кликнеш и да.. филма на тръгне..." (Ево)

34 For example, the case of Go Link in the city of Gorna Oriajovitsa where at the begging of 2006 the servers of the company supporting P2P network under the DC++ protocol were confiscated

All users interviewed for the study made reference to the existence of torrent tracker associated with their correspondent Internet provider used basically by the local community.[35] They are very small but still existing as a service and commodity of their clients.

The Internet providers that had been approached for interviews support such torrent trackers too. In one case there was evidence of the co-existence of torrent tracker with a hidden FTP server accessible to the customers of that provider. On this website I found instructions how to set your computer so you can access the server. As I was temporarily in the city and using pre-paid WiFi card[36] and that option was available only for users with a permanent Internet contract, I couldn`t access the server itself.

Further information about Internet providers` particular torrent services announced on the company`s websites was impossible to collect in interviews, which is understandable given the fact that the topic is quite conflictive legally speaking while in the country file sharing systems have been interpreted from the providers so far as a business possibility to gain customers.

The law enforcing system in Bulgaria has been notoriously slow and inefficient, and lack the interest and experience in policing digital technology. In the vast mess of critics from EU about the low efficiency of the judicial system in terms of organized "mafia" crime, cyber crimes haven`t been exactly a priority area. This

35 By local I mean here the clients of the specific Internet Provider

36 The provider offers WiFi coverage, visible from everywhere in the city. For example, if you don`t want a router in your house you can buy a pre-paid WiFi card for unlimited access for only 5 Euros per month and connect to the Internet from any point using the WiFi city network.

have been a long enough situation for others to benefit and for the popularity of the LAN providing the service to grow unabated.

Thus, users and Internet entrepreneurs have become accomplices in a game that makes the practice go on. They refuse to be captive of economic circumstances and lack of political will. They try to take their fortune into their own hands and, interestingly, choose solutions involving attempts at a "potlatch economy", a notion borrowed by de Certeau from Mauss to signify "an interplay of voluntary allowances that counts on reciprocity and organizes a social network articulated by 'the obligation to give' " (de Certeau, 1984, p. 27). In this case, the obligation to give is applied to things that actually are not users` own (software, music, films, etc.), but the principle remains valid.

5.2 ZAMUNDA.NET

It is difficult to say how many torrent trackers operate in Bulgaria right now. According to my observations, file sharing is now so widespread in Bulgaria that the collective in question is beginning to make up a population quite similar to the "conventional" music and movie audiences. Zamunda.net is without a doubt the most visited and used Bulgarian torrent tracker. The Web Information Company Alexa is placing it into the Top 10 Sites in Bulgaria (see Figure 1).

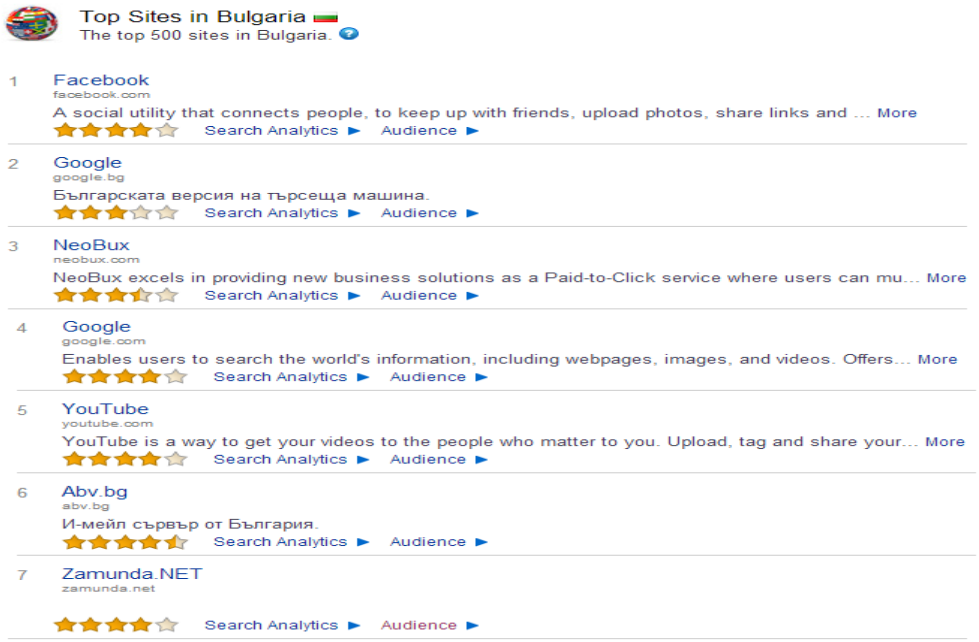

Figure 1.Top sites in Bulgaria

It is situated just after the most popular social networking site Facebook, two versions of Google – Google.bg and Google.com, Neobux – the paid-to-click services, Youtube and the Bulgarian hotmail website Abv.bg.

Zamunda.net is a form of computer-mediated communication that is defined by participation and presence. Like the online forum explored by Campbell, Greenhill and Fletcher (2002), it exhibits “tribe-like” group boundaries.The website operates by requiring users to register with the site.When the website showed up for the first time (2004) the method for controlling registration was an invitation system in which active and contributing members are given the ability to grant a new user permission to register at the site. Invitations, typically sent via email or an invite code system, are normally granted to active users who have uploaded a pre-determined amount or meet specific upload-to-download ratio requirements. Later in time the policy changed and from time to time free registration was possible,

while most of the time the website was closed for new registrations. It is a wide spread practice amongst the population in Bulgaria to share the accounts. For example, by 2012 Zamunda.net had 500.000 registered users but the real numbers are higher and impossible to trace as one account is almost always shared with friends and family. The website monitors how many users upload or download, and in most situations, enforces a minimum upload-to-download ratio so it is very important if you own an account and decide to share it with somebody to notify this person to maintain the minimum ratio in order to keep the account in good conditions. Some of the benefits of being a torrent website with your own tracker server are the higher speed, tighter community[37]and safer downloads. The site has strict rules so files containing malware are extremely uncommon. The membership is an indicator for boundary and exclusivity as all requests to join are screened. This is different from public file sharing, which is open to anyone with an Internet connection.

There were number of useful 'lessons learnt' from my stay on such a private file sharing community website:

- Gaining insights into the community structure and the various online services available to members;
- Beginning to understand the obligations of community members, the rules of the community and the ways in which members communicate.

With some knowledge of these elements of the community, I initially found out that:

37 in the sense of Rheingold's community (1996)

- Certain characteristics can be identified that seem to support a sustainable community – quality control, rules, roles, detailed information, range of content available;
- Participation is an important component for sustainability of this community; and
- A medium level of technical competence is necessary to engage.

This initial stage was important in understanding that the site was operating as a community, as this is described in early studies of online communities (Baym,1995; Hine, 2000; Jones, 2003; Rheingold,1996; Smith & Kollock, 2003). It presents: (a) commitment among members (Jones, 2003), (b) existence of limits that define who is and who isn`t part of the community (Watson,1997) and finally (c) norms and rules of behavior (McLaughlin, Osborne & Smith,1995; Smith & Kollock, 2003; Watson,1997).

The site was a point of interception and useful to help me become familiar with day –to-day activities of Bulgarian users.

5.2.1 ROLES AND NORMS

Usability is a well-established concept in Human-Computer Interaction Design, being concerned with developing computer systems to support rapid learning, high skill retention and low error rates. Such systems support high productivity: they are consistent, controllable and predictable (Schneiderman, 1998), in much the same way that the cultural practices inscribed within Zamunda.net provide an environment which is consistent, controllable and predictable. Preece (2000) argues that the effect of such inscription on online communities is that users are

able to communicate with each other, find information, and navigate the community software with ease.

Zamunda.net is efficient on matter - designed to distribute large amounts of content using BitTorrent protocols. Members can download available digital content files using a torrent software application (such as uTorrent). Zamunda.net has a ritual and symbolic aspect, it requires regular contribution and participation.

In order to become and remain a member of Zamunda.net, an individual must recognize and abide by the cooperative norms of the community (Putnam, 1995). To a new member, the community norms are not clear, unless a person has previous experience with a community such as Zamunda.net. To understand these norms a relatively inexperienced user needs to look for patterns of activities or rituals that occur on a daily or some other regular basis.

Participation here can be seen through the activities a member engages in within the online community. Different classes of members have different privileges in the community which determine their activities (see Figure 2).

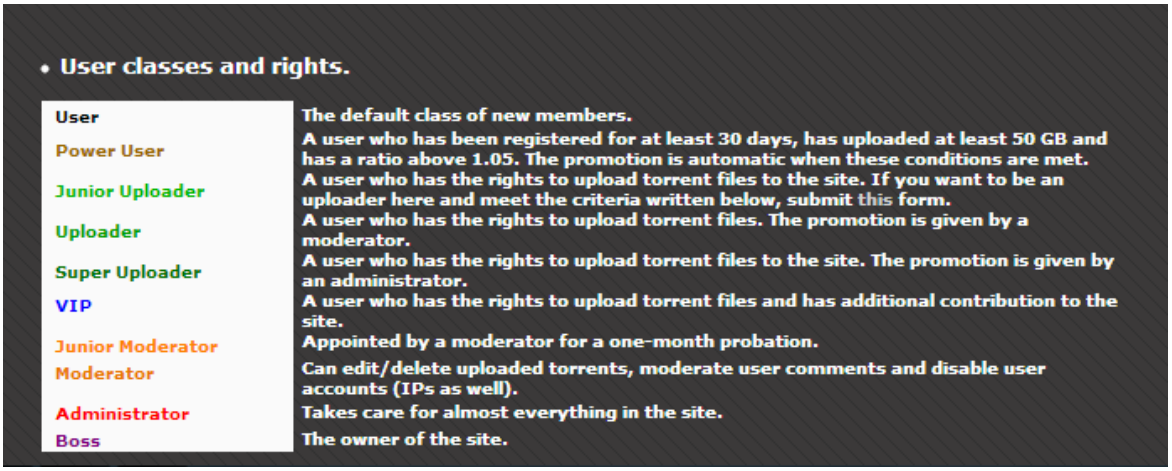

Figure 2. User classes and rights

The discussion here is from the point of view of a Power User (me – samater98). Once logged in, at the top of the site some information about the user is shown (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Member Welcome bar

Rating (*Рейтинг)* is the ratio of the member which is calculated on the total uploads and downloads in the community. Additional information about the user is available going to the member`s profile page by clicking on the name at that member welcome bar and there, the member's rank is listed as the number of torrent comments, forum posts and total downloads performed.

A member`s rank is determined by their share ratio. This ratio is calculated on a member`s volume of downloads compared to the amount they share with the community. For example, a share ratio of 1 means that a member has shared the same amount of content they have downloaded from the community.[38]

Each member is categorized in one of the following 9 groups. In order of assumed authority, the site lists: administrator, moderator, junior moderator, VIP, super uploader, uploader, junior uploader, power user and user (see Figure 2 for rights details).

There are no statistics available such as total number of registered users or how many are the members in each rank. The current active users are neither listed at

38 Share does not equate with uploading new content

any moment. During the period of the observations on the home page of the website, the news that they have reached the number of 500.000 was shown for a period of one week and as a consequence they were closing the possibility for new registrations temporarily. In an interview with an uploader from Zamunda.net he shared that “we are 50 very active and there are a 100 more not so active uploaders"(Ivo).[39]

Members can be promoted into a higher rank based on their ratio which leads to more privileges and status within the community, "having Uploaders rights is a question of 'prestige', at some point you can be promoted to VIP, VIPs have the same rights as Uploaders but with special contribution to the site" (PlayHard).[40] The key for gaining and maintaining more privileges is to participate actively and be reciprocal. The member roles determine not only members privileges but also obligations.

Members are obliged to actively participate and interact regularly within the community in order for membership to exist. It is important to note though that this is not made clear on joining the community, and it is not highlighted any more than any other topics in the frequently asked questions. One of the reasons Zamunda.net has been sustainable for 10 years now and could be considered successful is due to the regular participation of members of the community.

If a member ceases to participate for a defined period of time (4 weeks), the member’s account is terminated. This rule is a motivating factor for regular

39 “50 сме много активните, иначе да има още 100 по-слабо активни.” (Иво)

40 "Въпрос на "престиж" са тези ъплоудерски права, всъщност, в даден момент, може да те повишат до VIP, виповете имат права, като на ъплоудерите, но са съм специални заслуги в сайта." (PlayHard)

interaction. Some authors in the literature argue that positive and regular contribution behaviors can improve organizational effectiveness (Goodman & Darr, 1998; Olivera, Goodman & Tan, 2008) and this appears to be the case in Zamunda.net.

On the other hand, in the very philosophy of peer-to-peer technology lies the principle of reciprocity. Values of reciprocity are embedded in the design of systems that use such technology, such as private file sharing communities like Zamunda.net. Wellman and Gulia (1999) acknowledge that even between strangers, there is evidence of reciprocal supportiveness; communities like Zamunda.net operate on a strong sense of reciprocity (favors given and received), in addition to a strong sense of fairness (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). In fact, these regular multiple exchanges with unknown members form the norms of the Zamunda.net community.

5.2.2 NAVIGATING THE COMMUNITY

The daily rituals of members are closely related to the options visible on the Navigation Bar (see Figure 4), with the following discussion focused on the commonly used features within *Torrents.*

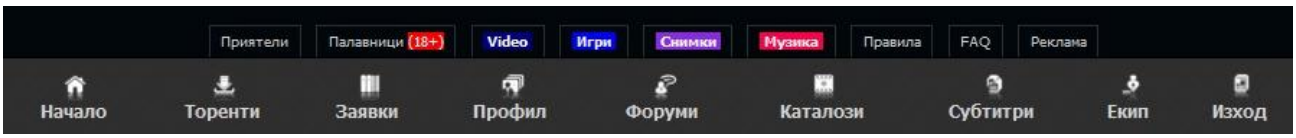

Figure 4. Navigation Bar

The navigation bar allows members to move to any part of the community at any time from any other location within the community. There are links to:

- *Request* (*Заявки*) – you can sent a request to the team for content you want to be uploaded, this option is not available for Users;
- *Forums* (*Форуми*) – links to discussions on topics, such as software, hardware, discussion of technical issues of the site, general chat, inquiries and much more;
- *Team* (*Екип*) – you can send a message to the team, but you cannot actually see whom are you writing to. An empty message is displayed so you can write down your question. Very specific situations in which the team is not answering are given in a pop-up window: (a) if you don`t write in Cyrillic alphabet[41]; (b) if the answer can be found in FAQ section; (c) if your request is related to upgrading your rank and you don`t deserve it; and (d) if the questions are related to software, games, problems with the torrents, etc., you should go to the related discussion in Forums.

Above the main bar there are links to:

- *Rules* (*Правила*) - a list of the rules of being a member of the community,and
- *FAQ* - answers to frequently asked questions about the community.

The *Torrents (Торенти)* option lists all content available for download. The majority of activity for the members is situated in the above mentioned options, with the other features[42] on the Navigation Bar, seen as periphery activities to the file sharing community. The *Rules* and *FAQ* features are information pages mostly

41 It is a common practice for all Bulgarians to use Latin alphabet and write phonetically in Bulgarian when chatting or writing unofficial messages or emails. Latin alphabet is not official in Bulgaria and that practice is not correct linguistically speaking. Lately, there is some tendency within the Bulgarian Internet Space to protect the Cyrillic and require from users to comment using it when they write in Bulgarian.

42 Other options available on the navigation bar not discussed here are links to videos, music, game and picture websites as also some advertisement links

used when first joining the community and not really used on an ongoing basis; the *Profile (Профил), Catalogues (Каталози)* and *Subtitles (Субтитри)* are dynamically updated so they give up-to-date information, but they are also only used on a rare need-to-know basis, much like the information pages. Other features, such as *Forums* are used also as information sources; however observing such activities situated here posed difficulties from an ethical perspective so they are not discussed, although it is acknowledged that they are an important, but not integral part of the file sharing practice. The *Forums* is a discussion board posting links to discussions on software and hardware, discussion on technical issues of the site, suggestions, inquiries, general chat, etc. On an arbitrary day of the observations, the statistics were showing 347,114 comments within 8,352 discussions [43]. Due to ethical reasons, the forum was not included in the covert observations and is not discussed further.

The *Rules* page lists the rules relating to being a member of the community and more detailed information can be found in Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).The *FAQ* page lists answers to frequently asked questions about the community and how it works. The list is presented as a topic and associated questions. The topics include: user classes and rights; uploading; user information; torrent information; configuration and user`s questions, such as uploading and seeding speed; differences between seeders and leechers; What does the uploader do?; What is the rating and how can I raise it?; Why can`t I use some sections?; and Why can`t I write comments?

43 "Нашите потребители са написали 347,114 коментара в 8,352 теми" (Zamunda.net)

Zamunda.net penalizes with a ban in relation to two activities: uploading files and sharing. If a file is uploaded without following the specific instructions for quality and detailed information, then the user is banned for a period of one month after which period he could negotiate the situation. Thus, quality of the available content within the community is maintained.

In relation to sharing, a ban occurs when a member refuses to share the downloaded material within the community. If members are only downloading without sharing back, this will be reflected in their share ratio. If they continue to download new content and not share it back, their ratio will reach 0% and they will be expelled from the community. This information is not formally codified in the rules; rather it is part of the informal learnings from within the community. The strong rule of active participation and reciprocity also remove the ability to free ride (download without sharing) for extended periods of time in comparison to public file sharing communities where a tendency to free ride could be found.

Members of Zamunda.net have a strong trust, not specifically in others from the community as Putnam (1995) says, but a trust in the community as an "always on - meeting place". The trust is that there will be a community available to participate in, trust that the content available will be of the highest quality. So in some ways there is trust in the system operators and administrators to fulfill all these expectations, and these expectations are built as much as possible into the rules and the rituals of the community. There is also trust that others will respect and embrace these rules to contribute to maintaining a sustainable community.

It is important to remember the distinction between members that administer and maintain the site (administrators, junior moderators and moderators), members with privileges to upload (junior uploaders, uploaders, super uploaders and VIPS), and members with few privileges (power users and users) (see Figure 2). The majority of members don't have any administrator rights and have limited privileges in accessing the content and tools compared to the other two groups. Those in this least privileged member group (which samater98 belongs to) basically engage in three activities: *browsing content, downloading and sharing content, and interacting with other members.*

5.2.3 BROWSING CONTENT

Browsing content is very easy and it constitutes one of the main activities on site. It is possible to find content searching in *Torrents, Catalogues* and also choose specific categories from the 36 existing ones at Zamunda.net.

Content is listed in order of date/time added (except in a few instances), and its category is visible. The listing of "all" content is much like a *dynamic* television program guide, being updated many times a day with new things to watch/listen/read/play. The main differences in the television analogy are that you can not only "watch" (access) content that is being screened (uploaded) right now (or even from that day), but you can search and browse back through previously uploaded content to the community for what could be considered a reasonable period of time. The other main difference is that there is little predictability in what content will be uploaded at any time (very different from the usually predictable daily/weekly shows on television). With less predictability, the most recent airings

(or pre-airings in Bulgaria) of weekly television shows from the US (such as Game of Thrones), and airings of popular weekly local free-to-air television shows (such as Under cover[44]) are among the most regularly uploaded to the community, and also the latest blockbuster movie, either before it is released in Bulgaria or just after its release in the US.

On an arbitrary day, 129838 torrent files were listed on the site (see Figure 5). During the whole period of observations the 10 most active torrents were always movies and TV shows with available subtitles in Bulgarian language, which is represented with a Bulgarian flag next to the torrent file.

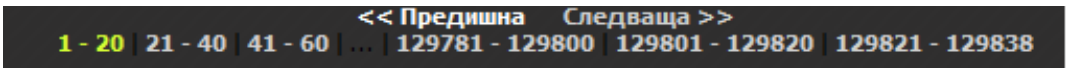

Figure 5. Navigate the pages of content

The size of content available ranges widely from what could be considered very small (1 megabyte) to very large (60 gigabytes). This could suggest that a significant amount of storage space is needed, although the community is using distributed technology, the servers that actually host the community don't host all the content.

Administrators decide which content to filter through Zamunda, so it is available to its members. There is a non-obvious association between the focal actor of Zamunda and the success of the community and the happiness of its members. In order for members to have enough content regularly to satisfy their needs, new content must be sourced and approved by the administrators of Zamunda.

44 Под прикритие

This content comes from "top sites", called "the Scene" and members with the authority to upload:

> The system is even more complex, there are people who record, then those who process, upload... firstly, everything is uploaded on the so-called Scene - several trackers where the material is uploaded directly by the people who record and process it, those who record the TV series, and then for a question of seconds, people with an inhumanly fast Internet upload everything on their websites - such people are the uploaders at Zamunda.[45] (Damian)

It is the ability to source content from outside the community (which is often more current than content uploaded from a member's own collection) which is translated into "success" of the community and "happiness" of its members.

Strong technical skills are needed to participate both at the community level, and also higher up in "the Scene". Strong technical skills are needed to implement encryption, and to mask their existence.There is little doubt that those involved at the grassroots of "the Scene" are "the brains of the operation".

Two groups of users - administrators and uploaders are "looking after" the rest of "mortal" members. Without them, available content won`t exist as such. Similar to the hacker ethics, they have the strong belief that they are providing for themselves and their peers, "I do it to learn something and to make people happy and to offer them access to the culture of others" (PlayHard).[46] Those participating

45 "Там системата е дори по-сложна. има хора, които записват, после такива, които обработват, качват... най-първо всичко се качва на т.нар. Сцена - няколко тракера, в който качват директно хората, които записват и обработват, също и онези, които записват сериалите от телевизията, след това за секунди хора с нечовешки бърз интернет качват всичко по техните сайтове - такива хора са ъплоудърите в замунда." (Дамян)

46 "Да науча нещо ново и да радвам хората, да се докоснат до културата на останалите." (PlayHard)

in the administration and moderation of file sharing sites like Zamunda.net can be considered hackers to some extent.

Without this ritualistic injection of new and current content from "top sites", the community could risk becoming stale and irrelevant. New and current content ensures members return to the community regularly, and continue to participate through seeding/leeching this new content. New refers to "new" to the community and "current" refers to content recently released by content creators and producers, such as the latest album/movie/software.

5.2.4 DOWNLOADING AND SHARING CONTENT

Essentially Zamunda.net is a distributed network of files and users, with the peer-to-peer (BitTorrent) technology supporting sharing activities of the decentralized community. This means content (e.g. a movie file) is not actually stored within the community, only a file with instructions on where to access it is stored. "Torrent" is the format of the file (.torrent, comparable to a .txt or .pdf file format) that is listed on the community for download. The file is a small text file with information for the computer to find the actual content file for download from other members' PCs. Using some free torrent software application (such as BitComet or uTorrent etc.), the downloaded torrent file is opened and the download begins automatically.

The facilities are not available for just any member to upload new content to the community. Members are only expected to share content that they have downloaded in this community. This is different from uploading new content for others to download, although the terms uploading and sharing are often used interchangeably.

A good analogy is to think of downloading individual pages of a book in any order and then bringing them together to read them in the correct order after downloading. Others that request the same full file (through downloading the same .torrent file) are soon referred to as a "seed", as well as a leech as they will soon have something, however minor, downloaded to share back to the next person. Remember the full file does not have to be fully downloaded to be a "seed", it can be the smallest piece. There is no limit to how many files can be downloaded and shared back at any time, so often these activities happen in parallel.

A second example, also related to a book, gives a different analogy. Think of a book in the library, it first has to be placed in the library to be borrowed. For content in the community, it first has to be "uploaded/seeded" (placed in the library). However what is uploaded is a torrent file (which gives information to the computer where to pick up the full content file), rather than the full content file being available on the site. This can be thought of as an entry in an old library catalogue, which points to where the book is on the shelves. For most public torrent sites like thepiratebay.org, it is possible for almost anyone to register and upload torrent files. However, in these much less public sites as Zamunda.net, this activity is restricted to a small amount of members, suggesting an attempt to maintain not only quality control but also restrictions over the content made available.

5.2.5 SEEDS VS. LEECHES

A fundamental concept of peer-to-peer networks is sharing. It works on the basis that those who download also share that content back within the community. Thus,

participants take on a number of roles. In BitTorrent communities, users/peers engage in two main activities:

- seed or seeder – a member's computer with a partial or complete copy of the content file (at least one seed computer with a complete copy must exist for a download to begin – the original seed);
- leech or leecher – a user who downloads files with the option to share (upload) that content back within the community.

In Zamunda.net, basically the same roles exist, however the leech *must* share content. Thus, each member *must* act as a seed in addition to being a leech. A member can be a leech and seed at the same time (e.g. beginning to share a partial file/s they are still downloading) or only a seed (just sharing the file/s they have downloaded from within this community).

It is possible for a member to act only as a leech (downloading and not sharing content), however this is a manual change that would need to be made to the torrent software application being used (as the default is always to share downloaded content, the inscribed reciprocity of the torrent technology). However, being only a leech indefinitely would result in a minus share ratio (sharing less than you are downloading), and ultimately being removed from the community.

BitTorrent generally works on the premise that you:

1. Find a "torrent" (usually on a site such as thepiratebay.org).
2. Click and download that file to your computer.

3. Open the file in a torrent software application (such as utorrent) in order to download it.

The full content file begins to download during which time the software automatically starts to "share" with other users (who subsequently download it) by default. This file (even if it is only partially downloaded) will continue to be shared until the user either physically stops it (by pressing stop while selecting the file) or by closing the application. It appears that the only real incentive for ongoing sharing in public file sharing communities, such as thepiratebay.org is the knowledge that you are in turn making the content (or part of it) available for others to download, often termed "gifting" (Skageby & Pargman, 2005).

Zamunda.net is different from other well-known file sharing communities, such as thepiratebay.org, because it requires reciprocity and active participation in order to remain part of the community. In such communities the question is not only relaying on the inscribed in the peer-to-peer technology reciprocity, but also in how the community is designed and organized in order to guarantee that reciprocity and active participation that sustain it.

Sharing is an activity that all community members must partake in. To share, a member only needs to download content through the community and while their computer is turned on, the torrent application is open and the network is connected, the content they have downloaded (even if only partial) will then be automatically uploaded (shared) with others in the process of downloading it from the community.

In this case we talk about sharing as sharing downloaded content on an everyday basis participation. Most members can only share the content they have downloaded from the community (apart from those with upload privileges). Experience and technical skills often translate into more participation. Those with higher levels of experience and technical skills are more likely to have their computers turned on longer, and to see the importance of them "seeding" content for long periods of time.

Only a small group of members (150 total of 500 000 registered users at Zamunda.net) are entitled to upload content to the community. In order to become an uploader you need to have a minimum of 1.05 ratio which depends on your downloading and sharing activities within the community. Once you have this ratio you can apply for Uploader and you become one after successful completion of the one month probation period.

For those users with rank Uploader, experience to share could mean not only sharing what is downloaded, but when responding to a request, they need to decide if they have the experience to match the request (for content in the context of Zamunda.net). If a person responding to a request doesn't easily find the exact match, they need to decide if they want to continue the search until a match is found. This decision is usually based on the person's experience in retrieving requests for content previously, the perceived likelihood of finding the match, and their intention to increase their status.

Taking into account the previous discussion about available content in a community like Zamunda.net (filtered down from "the Scene" or "top sites"), those

in that small group of users allowed to upload in Zamunda.net, or at least some of them, more than likely have connections higher up in "the Scene" and use Zamunda.net as a distribution outlet for this type of content. Having these connections also identifies the uploader as someone who has extensive experience (as it takes connections and time to work your way into "the Scene"). For the content that a member is uploading from a source other than "the Scene" such as a locally aired TV or radio program, or a CD or DVD rip, they must follow specific website rules for making it available to avoid having their profile "banned" which negatively affects one`s status in the community as that means that the profile will be temporarily blocked or they are expelled from the community.

5.2.6 INTERACTING WITH OTHER MEMBERS

In Zamunda, digital content is shared as a good in demand to satisfy individual needs of music/movies/software, which also has a ritual value of being the primary means of communication among members of the community.

Interacting with other members generally comes in three forms; comments on particular content, messages via the messaging system, and comments in the forum. Once content is downloaded, members often comment on particular content on its detailed content page. Once content is chosen for download, at the bottom of this detailed content page, there is an option for members to *Add a comment* (Добави коментари) (see Figure 6). Users may choose to add a comment to simply say "thanks!", "have been waiting for this", or they may wait until after the content is viewed/listened before posting a comment about the quality of the file they have downloaded. The amount of comments may vary and it

is a very common phenomenon to find discussions in this section. Usually a lot of comments are seen when the material is a popular movie or TV show without subtitles in Bulgarian language. Often the comments in this case are related to questions about "Where are the subtitles?" and "Why is it not translated yet?". In order to write a comment in the detailed content page, members must have at least ratio of 0.30, otherwise only reading is possible. Low ratio here means, less possibilities to interact verbally with the rest of the people in the community.

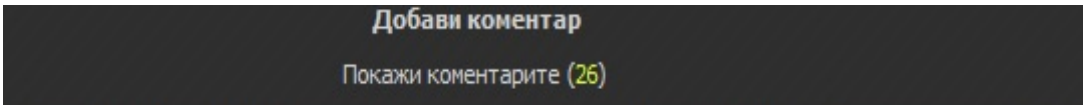

Figure 6. Content comments

Messages can be sent to another member of the community via online messaging system (like email but posts to a personal message page and is then visible as a number in the member's message status). This built-in messaging system is the way for system administrators to contact members about any system related problems, such as low ratios (at risk of getting account closed due to excessive leeching, etc).

Interaction also happens via the *Forums*. This is in the form of a request for content, technical questions and/or general chat. The request option is available for members with rank equal or higher than Power user. As it was mentioned before, no further information about the *Forums* will be discussed here.

Being an active member of Zamunda means that a person is structurally embedded in the Zamunda network. When a member joins, they are allocated to a member class/role which inherits certain privileges. They become both a leech and

a seed when they participate within the community, which structurally embeds them in the network, as they become the recipient and subsequent provider of content. Being a member, comes with the expectation that they will contribute on a regular basis and make every effort to be an active part of the community.

Zamunda supports the interests of hundreds of people who were enrolled during the time of observations. However, the community is not standalone, it is partly reliant on "the Scene", which is made up of "top sites" that filter available content down to the community.

In terms of becoming irrelevant, Zamunda only maintains its member base by providing something not available elsewhere. That elsewhere is often public file sharing networks. Much of the content available at Zamunda is eventually available through public trackers, however the quality is a key characteristic of Zamunda content. Another important element for the common Bulgarian user, only briefly mentioned so far, in choosing national torrent sites like Zamunda.net before other international private or public ones, is their cooperation with Bulgarian subtitling websites which make available the access to information for many people who don`t speak any other language than Bulgarian.

5.3 SUBTITLES PARADISE

The approximate number of people who speak Bulgarian in the world is 9.000.000, distributed between 7.000 000 living in the country and around 2.000.000 living abroad. Bulgarian media and movie market is a small one and often access to favorite content is only available online. In the world of the Internet where this

content can be accessed quickly, the Bulgarian user needs to cross language boarders in search of this content or look for subtitles.

Unlike the situation with the torrent websites in Bulgaria, there are only two websites for Bulgarian subtitles – Subsunacs.net and Subs.sab.bz. The first one was founded in 2005 and the second one appeared in 2007 as a result of an internal conflict in Subsunacs:

> The current administrator began to receive many complaints from expelled translators like myself back that year and he was forced to invite a group of translators who were acting like Stalinist censors to leave the website [subsunacs.net], they have now another website – subs.sab.bz.[47] (Mitko)

Both sites work in parallel making subtitles available for downloading and free of charge.

5.3.1 NAVIGATING SUBSUNACS.NET

The path for the Bulgarian user who wants to see a movie or TV show with Bulgarian subtitles is:

- To find the movie usually on Zamunda.net or some smaller local torrent tracker;
- To go to Subsunacs.net (more rarely to subs.sab.bz because of the smaller database) and look for the subtitles.

47 "Сегашния администратор започна д аполучава много оплаквания от изгонени преводачи и беше принуден да помоли една група преводачи, които се изживяваха като Сталински цензори да напуснат сайта, те сега имат друг преводачески сайт - sub.sabs.bz." (Митко)

A quick look to Subsunacs.net shows very easy interface and navigation. The navigation bar contains the following options:

- News – is the home page showing the newest subtitles on site, movies in translation process and last updates from the forum;
- Subtitles – alphabetic list of all subtitles available on site;
- New – the last uploaded subtitles on site;
- Search – is a search engine for subtitles on site;
- Add – is a space for translators[48] to upload subtitles on site;
- Top 20 – shows the most downloaded subtitles for the last week, last month and for the whole period;
- Software – contains the following categories: players, software for subtitles, codecs and others;
- Articles – a space for articles related to subtitling;
- Links – contains links to other websites for subtitles, software and manuals for it;
- Forums- discussions divided in: movies, TV/shows, cartoons and others.

Users only looking for subtitles usually engage in two activities: *search for subtitles and requesting them.* Most of those only searching subtitles are invisible to trace as no registration on site is necessary in order to search and download, they can freely read the forum discussions too and thus, they act like lurkers on site.

48 'Translators' in this research refer to people who do both translation and subtitles from that translation. The word is used by the same participants to refer to themselves.

Searching and requesting subtitles

There are three options for searching subtitles. The first one is from the home page or *News* (*Новини*). The search engine is simple and Figure 7 shows the blank text field with a drop down list with two options (Bulgarian by default and English and it refers to the language of the subtitle) and a search button.

Figure 7. Search option from News

The second option is from subtitles (*субтитри*) where the subtitles are organized alphabetically (see Figure 8). By pressing the corresponding letter a list with subtitles is displayed. There is an option to choose the language of subtitles (Bulgarian by default and English). On an arbitrary day of the observations the list of all content was showing 60815 subtitles.

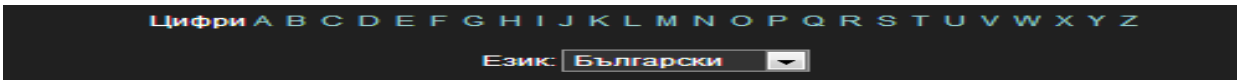

Figure 8. Subtitle option

The last search option is available at *Search* (*Търси*). It is the most detailed search engine on site (see Figure 9).

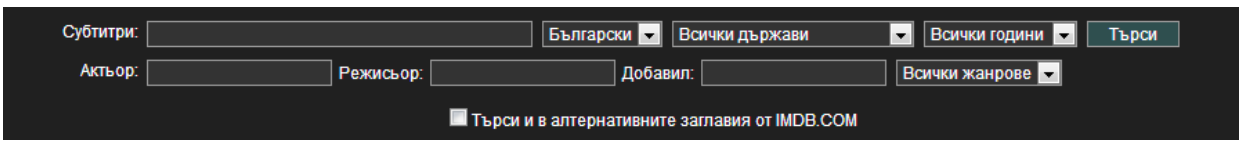

Figure 9. Search option

It contains the following labels with correspondent blank text field: subtitles (*субтитри),* drop down lists for choosing the language, all countries or choose one from the list, all years or a specific one, actor (*актьор*), director (*режисьор*), uploaded (*ъплоадър*), a drop down list for genre, and a search button. The user can fill in all the text fields or only few and proceed with the search. When the content is found, the user can proceed with its direct download. Usually the file format is SRT and most of the times it is compressed as ZIP.

If the content is not found the user has the possibility to request it by posting within the corresponding forum discussion. For that matter a registration is needed. The forum is organized by 4 main sub forums: movies, TV shows, cartoons and others. The first three forums contain three identical discussions:

- *Subtitles* - discussions about finished subtitles, links to the subtitles and opinions;
- *In progress* – subtitles in progress;
- *Requests* – requests from all users about specific subtitles in the corresponding sub forum (movies, TV shows or cartoons).

The user requesting subtitles goes to *Requests* in the corresponding sub forum and posts a message about the film for which subtitles are necessary. If some translator decides to work on subtitles for the movie/TV show/cartoon in question he or she replies to the post. The translator also could put directly a notice within the corresponding *In progress* discussion so the user and the rest of the translators would know that someone is already working. It is also a practice for uploaders from Zamunda.net to request subtitles, “the uploaders from the tracker

[Zamunda.net] are users of our site and they make requests sometimes" (BadNick).[49]

5.3.2 TRANSLATOR`S PATH

If someone is interested in being a translator or is currently one the forum *Others* is an important section to check. It is organized in 4 sub discussions:

- Discussions – all kinds of topics related to translation, subtitles and general chat are available;
- Evergreen - is the place where topics of interest regarding subtitle software, tips for translators and some guidance from other translators are posted;
- Subtitles in English – available subtitles in English language;
- Teams – shows 10 different translation teams (Hell Crew Team, The Partisans wtf, Unacs Team, Re-vision, When – Then, Russian Roulette, Lazy, Lost in Translation, League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Law &Order Addicted).

The forums in general contain all information and help necessary to make proper subtitles, including detailed technical information about software and how to deal with it. Most active topics of debate are usually those related to technical issues about the subtitling process. The forums basically operate as an online support between translators and rarely others than them are commenting, except those people requesting subtitles.

49 "Ъплоудърите в тракера при нас са потребители и понякога подават заявки" (BadNick)

Teams and translators

In order to upload subtitles it is not mandatory to become a member of any of the 10 teams. Therefore, all interviewed translators were part of one or more teams as "basically within the teams the people help each other and that is how translators become better and faster" (BadNick).[50] It is also an often situation that the translators work together within the team, especially when subtitles for a full-length movie are necessary.

The teams operate based on interests in genres and on an arbitrary day of the observations the registered members in each team were as follow:

- Hell Crew Team – 9 members (newly created);
- The Partisans wtf – 3 members (non-active);
- Unacs Team – 66 members, distributed between 49 translators, 2 editors, 8 timing specialists, 7 temporarily working with the team;
- Re-vision – 5 members;
- When – Then – 39 members (non-active);
- Russian Roulette – 4 members;
- Lazy – 6 members (non-active);
- Lost in Translation – 12 members;
- League of Extraordinary Gentlemen – 14 members;
- Law &Order Addicted – 1 member (non-active).

50 "По принцип в отборите хората си помагат и така израстват по-бързо като преводачи." (BadNick)

The total number of team members is 154 but it is necessary to take into account the fact that some translators are members of more than one team and it is also possible to upload subtitles without being a member of a team. Thus, the real number of translators uploading subtitles on site is impossible to trace. By the words of the global moderator "there are no more than 80, the serious ones I mean…"(Mitko) [51], and a senior translator commented that "20 - 30 very active for the whole site, … I mean that make at least 3 -4 translations monthly" (Badgirl). [52]

From the observations and interviews made to moderators and senior translators on website, it is to supposed that the active part of translators are almost always part of a team and only a few active ones do not belong to any. During the time I spend on site the most active and organized team seemed to be Unacs Team. The same impression was shared with me by others. There were those who think that "there are other teams in theory, you can see them in the forum but these teams don`t translate regularly, don`t have quality subtitles, etc." (Badgirl)[53] and even others who opined that "it is the only working team at the moment" (BadNick).[54]

Quality and coordination

Unlike Zamunda.net, Subsunacs is open and there are no rules either for searching and downloading, or for uploading material. Thus, the purpose of the teams is to establish certain rules for translations and look after the quality of the

51 "Не са повече от 80, за сериозните говоря" (Митко)

52 "Активно превеждащи са около 20-30 в целия сайт, имам предвид, които на месец правят по 3-4 превода поне." (Badgirl)

53 "Има на практика, може да ги видиш във форума, но тези отбори не превеждат редовно, нямат качествени субтитри и т.н." (Badgirl)

54 "В момента има само 1 действащ отбор" (BadNick)

subtitles before they are uploaded. For example, Unacs Team has a strict hierarchy and rules within the team.

In order to become a member the candidate must submit two subtitles for revision and if the membership is approved, he or she is on a test period during which the work is supervised by a senior translator from the team:

> So I am on probation, E-tle, who is part of the Unacs team is my supervisor and he is helping me. For example, I make the translation and he is revising my subtitles. There are thousands of things you have to consider. It is not like translating a plain text. You have to take into account the timing for subtitle. For example, how many symbols for how much time, 14 symbols – 2 seconds, etc, etc. Besides, there are limitations for the symbols by raw, no more than 37 -38, etc, etc… he is helping me with all that.[55] (Katia D)

The idea of the rules in general is not only to exercise control over the quality, but also to establish certain organization where other people's work is taken into account:

> It is anarchy, everybody is translating what they want and don`t even bother to write in the section *In progress* so the rest of us would know and avoid this anarchy …long time ago we had order, you start something – you write in the forum in the section *In progress* and everybody knows that the movie has been translated. Now I start a movie and I got to 40% of the translation and boom,

55 "... аз съм на изпитателен срок. E-Tle, който е част от УнаксТийм ми дава напътствия. Примерно правя превод и той ми преглежда субтитрите. Има хиляди неща, с които трябва да се съобразяваш. Не като да преведеш просто един текст. Трябва да се съобразяваш със времетраенията за субтитър. Има си до колко символа каква продължителност на субтитъра трябва да е например до 14 символа, минимално времетраене 2 секунди и т.н. Освен това има ограничение аз символите на ред. Не повече от 37-38 символа на ред и т.н.... той ми помага с всичко това." (Катя Д)

somebody upload the translation of the same movie and my work became pointless, that is the anarchy about. [56] (Mitko)

The rules are also about coordination within the team members, “there is no coordination, with the new rules we want to establish some… so within the team you can notify your colleagues that you are translating something and avoid duplicates which is a premise for problems ” (Petar).[57]

Motivators and strategies for choice

Making a subtitle from one language into another is an important challenge. Firstly, because it is impossible to map ideas without interpretation as the good translation is not the literal one. It implies not only knowledge of the languages but also a great deal of creativity and the whole process becomes time consuming and absorbing. Secondly, it is necessary to convert the translated text into a subtitle, which means to have the technical level to manage special software which helps to arrange important details as timing (x symbols per y time), number of words per raw etc., implying thus more effort. The translators from Subsunacs are doing both translation and subtitle and they don`t see these activities in economic terms.

What seems to be a specific motivator related only to making subtitles among others[58] is the passion for the proper translation and language. The idea to make content in a properly written Bulgarian was recurrent in interviews, "it is a hobby to

56 "При нас е пълна анархия, всеки превежда какво си иска и даже вече не пишат във форума кой филм са започнали, та да има информация за другите преводачи и да не се получава анархия…имаше преди ред, почваш нещо да превеждаш, пишеш във форума раздел "В прогрес" и всички знаят че филма се превежда, сега почвам филм и тъкмо стигна 40% превод - хоп, някой качва превода на същия филм, труда ми се обезсмисля. само по това е анархията , иначе си има правила и то доста страги, макар че много мразя да ме ограничават с правила, понякога и аз се съобразявам с тях.” (Митко)

57 “Няма координация, с новите правила изискваме да има някаква, да се обяви в тема за превод, за да не се получава дублиране вътре в отбора, което е предпоставка за проблеми.” (Петър)

58 Motivations for file sharingare commented in Chapter VI

translate and I want people to watch movies with Bulgarian subtitles in proper Bulgarian."(Mitko).[59] Some of them were also seeing it as a way to improve and practice both Bulgarian and other languages. A typical expression of this view is contained in the following quotation: "basically, to enrich my knowledge of English...I learn a lot about both English and Bulgarian language"(Damian). [60]

Different translators adopt different paths in choosing the content for translation. Some of them are looking into *Request* sections, “at the moment I look only the requests but in general every translator is looking for his favorite genres, the last two movies were actions despite the fact I don`t like action movies but they were requested” (Yavor).[61]

Others are exploring the torrent trackers, “you cannot make Bulgarian subtitles for a movie without the movie, even if you have English subtitles. There are words and phrases with several meanings and it is necessary to watch the movie in order to know which meaning to apply” (Katia D).[62]

Others rely on their personal taste “if something grabs my attention I check if there is an announcement about it and if not I put one [in the section *In progress*]” (Petar).[63] There are also translators that translate everything, “well, a little bit of everything. Sometimes from requests if I like something or I look at the posters or

59 " Нещо като хоби, искам хората да гледат филми с бг субс на правилен български." (Митко)

60 "Основно, за да си обогатя знанията по английски...научих страшно много и за английския, и за българския." (Дамян)

61 “Към момента гледам само заявките, по принцип всеки преводач си търси неговите любими жанрове, въпреки че последния ми беше – екшън, не харесвам екшъни , предпоследните 2 бяха по заявки.“ (Явор)

62 “Няма как да се направят бг субтитри за даден филм, без самия филм, дори и да има англ. субтитри. Има думи или изрази, които има няколко значения и трябва да се гледа филма, за да се разбере кое трябва да се използва.” (Катя Д)

63 “Ако нещо ми хареса, проверявам дали има обявена тема за превод,ако няма си пускам аз.” (Petar)

for example, if I like some movie I watch the spoiler on Youtube and then If I decide I translate it" (Badgirl).[64]

It is also possible to specialize in certain genres, " I don`t translate actions despite the fact that at the begging I was 'eating' everything, in the last 2 -3 years I choose to translate less commercial movies because there are more valuable and not actions"(Mitko).[65] Looking for movies without subtitles is another strategy for choice, " I look into requests everyday but most of the titles are not worth it, I look also at the torrents, both new and old titles that don`t have subtitles or have one but written by idiots☺))" (Badgirl).[66]

Technical issues, time and language

The software used for subtitles by the translators of Subunacs.net is Subtitle Workshop, Pascal script and IDI Spell Checker. Detailed information about software is available on site and there are many topics related to technical issues in the forum sections which translators use a lot in their work. As it was mentioned before in text the most discussed topics are technical and the general spirit is very collaborative as it was also commented in interviews by translators.

The most common practice in making Bulgarian subtitles is to use a source subtitles as it is also explained for the beginners in the topic *How to make subtitles?*:

64 "Еми каквото дойде. Или ако си харесам нещо от заявки, или се ориентирам по постерите. Както с Фрийрънър, обаче сгреших. Постера хубав, филма тъп. :x Или пък примерно ако си харесам даден филм, гледам трейлъра в ютюб или някъде другъде и ако ми хареса, го започвам." (Badgirl)

65 "Екшъни почти не превеждам, макар че в началото бях всеяден, последните 2-3 години съм се ориентирал към по-малко комерсиални филми, които са ценни именно защото не са екшъни." (Митко)

66 "Гледам я ежедневно, но повечето не си заслужават в темата "заявки", гледам торентите, новите заглавия или стари такива, които нямат превод или пък имат, но са писани от полуидиоти :)" (Badgirl)

> You find subtitles in a language that you understand, at least to use their timing. For the beginners I explain the reason… and for the impatient ones who believe that the subtitles are coming from nowhere ready to be used and the translators are some kind of lazy nerds ☺If you come across a movie with bad sound and you cannot distinguish what is said it will be good to have correct subtitles. Or the other way round – if you find bad subtitles /usually some machine translation/, at least the movie has to be with clear sound. Otherwise you will spend a lot of time and effort. Avoid this combination because you will lose enthusiasm. Finally your subtitles have to be at least acceptable, right?:) Without source subtitles for timing, forget about your ambition. It takes so much time that while you are making the first 50 remarks, the subtitles will be out there made by someone else. Well, there are exceptions but it is not a job for beginners."[67] (public message from Global Moderator at http://subsunacs.net/)

All interviewed translators use at least English language, but Dutch and Russian were also common. Most of the time they use source subtitles for the above mentioned reason and a less often practice is to translate "by ear".

How fast is the translation made depends on free time, difficulty and volume. Usually the translators dedicate a certain time for subtitling depending on their everyday life. Some of them "by night, when everybody at home is sleeping,

67 "Намираш си субтитри на език, който разбираш, за да използваш най-малкото тайминга за тях. За начинаещите пояснявам причината...а за нетърпеливковците, които вярват, че субтитрите едва ли не се взимат от някъде готови и преводачите са някакви смотаняци, които само си мързелуват. Ако си попаднал/а на филм с лош звук, при който не успяваш да различиш точно какво се говори, ще е добре субтитрите да са пълни и да са верни. Или обратното – ако си попаднал/а на зле направени субтитри /обикновено някакъв машинен превод/, поне филмът трябва да е с ясен звук. Иначе ще ти отнеме много време и нерви. Избягвай такова съчетание, че бързо се губи ентисиазъм при това положение. А твоите субтитри все пак трябва да имат сносно качество, нали? Без готови субтритри за тайминг, просто забрави за амбицията си! Толкова време отнема, че докато набиеш тайминга за първите 50 реплики, излизат нечии други субтитри. Е, има и изключения, но по принцип не е работа за начинаещи." (Глобален Модератор)

otherwise I cannot concentrate. If I am in the mood 100 remarks by day, which is around 1,5 – 2 hours" (BadNick).[68] Others don`t have any system:

> When I have time. Before I was doing 1 – 2 translations per week but now I don`t have time, so only on the weekend and sometimes during the week…The show Power Rangers is 20 minutes more or less which means 300 subtitles. If I work the whole day I can do it but as I don`t have time now so 2 days. If the show is 40 min. - 2-3 days minimum.[69] (Katia D)

When you have more free time you translate more, "as I don`t work at the moment If I start a movie I finish it as fast as I can, one day – day and a half, per week- it depends on how much stuff I am translating" (Badgirl).[70]

The optimal time necessary to make the subtitles for a TV show episode of approximately 40 minutes is "I would say 8 hours totally for the translation"(Petar).[71] If it is a movie of 80 minutes the needed time is "15 hours approximately non-stop work" (Badgirl).[72] It depends of course on the difficulty, " it depends on how many remarks there are and what kind of remarks they are, for some movies it is necessary to do some research, for example medical terms, I read websites and look for information so the translation could be proper" (Badgirl).[73] It depends also if you work alone or with others, "let me tell you that 3

68 "Обикновено вечер, когато всички спят, иначе не мога да се концентрирам. Когато съм на кеф 100 реплики, това е около1.5-2 часа" (BadNick)

69 "Когато съм свободна. Преди правех по един, два превода на седмица, но понеже вече нямам време, само събота и неделя или някой път и през седмицата…Сериала за Пауър Рейнджърс еп. е 20 мин. горе-долу, което ще рече 300 субтитъра. Ако се занимавам цял ден, мога да 1 ден да го направя, но не се товаря пък и нямам време така, че 2 дена. Иначе ако сериала е 40 минутки 2-3дена минимално." (Катя Д)

70 "Тъй като в момента не работя, започна ли един филм го завършвам по най бързия начин, за ден - ден и половина, на седмица - зависи колко неща превеждам." (Badgirl)

71 "Сумарно може да се каже 8 часа за един превод."(Петър)

72 "15 часа някъде непрекъснат труд." (Badgirl)

73 "Зависи колко реплики има в него и от какво естество са, за някои филми се налага да правя проучвания, на медицински термини например, чета сайтове и търся информация, за да е най-точен преводът."(Badgirl)

people translate a movie faster, because they have 3 times less remarks for translation... we made the movie in 6 hours" (Mitko).[74]

Infractions and links

The general spirit of the website is free, everybody can translate and upload subtitles on it. The intention for organization and rules is only in order to improve the results and respect the effort of other translators. The consequences of such free spirit is that some abusive practices from Zamunda and other torrent trackers were noticed in the past, "…before they [Zamunda] were uploading our subtitles within the torrent and the translators were mad because our website was out of the picture…"(BadNick).[75]

Also some cases involving money were commented, "a few years ago, one torrent tracker was asking for money from its users in order to download the subtitles. Subtitles they didn`t pay for and that were uploaded for free use.I left speechless. I am talking about Arena [second biggest torrent tracker after Zamunda]…4 leva for subtitles" (Katia D).[76]

The abusive practice resulted into an agreement between the torrent tracker Zamunda.net and Subsunacs.net because of their interdependency, "the important thing is that everybody realized that we cannot exist without each other"

74 "Да ти кажа 3 души превеждат по-бързо един филм, защото имат три пъти по-малко реплики за един превод, направихме филма за 6 часа."(Митко)

75 "Преди правеха така, че качват субтитрите в самия торент и преводачите се сърдеха, защото така не се рекламира съответния сайт." (BadNick)

76 "…преди години един торент тракер е искал пари от потребителите за да свалят субтитри. Субтитри, за които не е плащано на преводачите и са качени за свободно ползване. Останах без думи!За Арена става въпрос…4 лева за субтитри" (Катя Д)

(BadNick).[77] A movie without Bulgarian subtitles is not of interest for the regular user of any Bulgarian torrent tracker:

> It is a rare phenomenon to find a movie within the Top 10 at Zamunda.net without subtitles. When the subtitles are available, people start downloading the movie and viceversa – when the logo is added at Zamunda the downloads from our website are higher too.[78] (Damian)

Since 2010 the torrent tracker offers direct links to subsunacs.net when subtitles are available for movies/TV shows/cartoons. The logo/link of subsunacs.net is posted within the description in the particular content page and redirects users to subsunacs.net, "…now when you click on the logo – you are redirected to our website right in the place where the correspondent subtitles are…" (Mitko).[79]

The logo at Zamunda.net is added by translators from Subsunacs.net, "they [Zamunda.net] gave us a few VIPs and our people here, the ones that are on higher positions give these VIP to whom they think is appropriate. Recently, I was allowed to post logo/link on to the subtitles at Zamunda, so I will be there more often…I think the VIPs are 4 in total" (Petar).[80]

The situation with the rest of the torrent trackers is different, "about the smaller trackers, well we left them to decide. There are correct ones and they put links but there are some disoriented people that still put the subtitles within the torrent as if

77 "Важното е, че всички осъзнаха, че не можем един без друг." (BadNick)

78 "Рядко има филм в топ 10 на замунда без субтитри. излязат ли те, тогава хората почват да го теглят. като има и обратния ефект разбира се - когато се добавят субтитрите в замунда, се качват значително даунлоудите им. и от нас." (Дамян)

79 "Сега като чукнеш на логото за препратка към субтитрите - препратката е за нашия сайт за мястото откъдето можеш да си свалиш съответните субтитри." (Митко)

80 "Отпускат ни няколко ВИП места и хората ни тук, които са в по-горни позиции , предлагат на когото преценят съответното място, наскоро ми дадоха права в Замунда да качвам субтитри, така че вече по-често ще съм там … мисля, че станаха четири ВИП местата." (Петър)

we are back in 2005…in Zamunda we, the moderators, watch out if everything is correct…" (Damian).[81]

Thus, in the amorphous practice of file sharing in the Bulgarian context, a peculiar connection between Internet providers, torrent trackers and subtitle makers is constructed. Each one of these actors has its own background and dynamics but they are also interdependent and with a common purpose - file sharing.

81 "За по-малките тракери сме ги оставили те да си преценят. има и коректни тракери, които слагат линкове, има и неориентирани хорица, които още слагат в торентите все едно сме 2005-а... в замунда и арена специално модовете съблюдаваме дали всичко е точно." (Дамян)

6 CHAPTER SIX: “GET –UP –AND –GO”

In what follows I will present the perspectives revealed from participants about their sharing attitudes sought through the interviews. Quotes from interviews are used to provide an insider’s point of view (Van Maanen, 1988). The research subject’s insights into their file sharing activities provide an understanding of the incentives for belonging to the file sharing “community”.

The research literature refers to variety of arguments and motivations (discussed in Chapter Three) with emphasis on economic factors which appear at some extent in the present study too. Based on the empirical research in this dissertation, I have summarized the values that consumers have about file sharing in four main issues: cost and "poverty", choice, scarcity and convenience.

6.1 COST AND “POVERTY”

When considering the costs of physical product (movie, music, games, etc), value for money is important. The high costs can turn those who genuinely want to purchase to file sharing. Cost is an important factor in the choice between file sharing and purchasing, “because it is free” (Niki).[82]

Another strong view held by most of the research subjects is that the “low income” makes people go online and file share instead of purchase. Cost and “poverty” are simultaneously mentioned and interrelated in most of the interviews as a reason for file sharing:

82 “shtoto sa free :)” (Ники)

> For example, Avatar is from 2009 and it costs 20- 30 leva but when it first came out on the market it was about a 100 I think, and when the min. income in the country is 240 leva (now 270 leva) it is too much money to pay and in the torrent tracker they put it for free.[83] (Katia)

There appears to be a consensus that the high cost of the material and the low income are the reasons for file sharing, "...in Bulgaria the salaries are low and the movies are expensive. I don`t mind spending 10 -20 leva monthly for cinema but I can`t afford to buy all movies because the good movies are expensive"(Lora)[84]; "well… people don't have enough money, so they can`t afford the luxury to buy some game or go to the cinema regularly. If the salaries were normal, there wouldn't be so many people file sharing"(PlayHard).[85] Others feel that in the West it is different, "everybody can go to the cinema, rent a DVD, etc., here we are struggling financially and the masses count on the trackers" (Badgirl).[86] Even in cases when the doubt is evident, the "poverty" seems to be the chosen one to explain the motivation, "I don`t know, it could be a question of mentality or finance, I guess it is more of finance, the tickets are expensive" (BadNick). [87]

Cost, coupled with lack of choice can be a motivator for file sharing, "I translate and share because I know what it is to be a monopolist, to ask people for their last money and put them into a very advertised movie which turns to be a shit, so how

83 "Еми, щото например, Аватар е от 2009, а се продава по 20-30лв, а като беше излязал беше поне 100лв мисля, което при мин.заплата 240лв (вече 270лв) е много! А в торент тракерите го пускат без пари". (Катя)

84 "В България заплатите са ниски, а филмите са скъпи. нямам нищо против да отделя 10-20лв на месец за кино, не мога да си позволя да изкупувам всички филми, защото хубавите филми са скъпи." (Лора)

85 "Ами... хората нямат достатъчно средства, че да си позволят лукса да си купят някоя игра или да ходят редовно на кино, ако заплатите бяха адекватни, нямаше толкова хора да се занимават с този начин на разпространение на файлове." (PlayHard)

86 "Там всеки може да отиде на кино, да вземе двд под наем и т.н. тук сме ограничени финансово и масово се разчита на тракерите." (Badgirl)

87 "Не знам, може да е въпрос на манталитет или на финанси, по-скоро от беднотия,а и билетите са скъпи." (BadNick)

to ask the regular guy to pay 10 leva for a ticket or as it was before, to pay 3 [leva] for DVD or VHS and they were paying because they didn`t have another choice, but they were sharing between 3 people – each one 1 lev, I hate monopolists" (Mitko).[88]

6.2 CHOICE

Choice refers to consumers being able to access the content they want, in a format they want. Physical stores or cinemas seem to have less variety available to purchase than they used to, with a focus on the "hits" and what is popular at a particular point in time:

> Besides they come to the Bulgarian market very slowly and about the cinema, well you cannot watch all the movies there. For example, I can go and see Pirates of the Carribean 4, but I can`t go and watch a different movie every day and also if I want to watch a particular TV show, as Malcolm for example, I cannot find it elsewhere except on the torrent trackers.[89] (Lora)

In the last two decades a lot of cinemas were closed down in many of the middle size and small towns in Bulgaria, "the closest movie theater and that is a recent event, is 60km from here as it is the closest videoclub"(Yavor).[90] Consumers value being able to access whatever they want, when they want, "Zamunda is the

88 "Ами превеждам, защото знам какво значи да си монополист,да дърпаш от хората последните им пари за да ги вкараш да гледат много рекламиран филм , който се оказва боза, как да накараш обикновен човек да извади 10 лева за билет,или преди да даде 3 лева за диск или касета, макар че даваха 3 лева, защото няма къде да ходят, но правех комбина 3 -ма души по 1 лев , гледат го и връщат диска на Александра, мразя монополистите." (Митко)

89 "Освен това много бавно излизат на българския пазар, а за кино, не може да се гледат всички филми на кино. Аз например мога да ида и да гледам Карибски пирати 4, но не мога всеки ден да кисна и да гледам различен филм, а и например като ми се догледа даден сериал, например Малкълм, няма откъде да го намеря освен от торент тракерите." (Лора)

90 "Най-близкото кино и то от скоро в региона е на 60км, както и най-близката видеотека."(Явор)

biggest tracker in the country at the moment, you can find plenty of new and interesting stuff" (PlayHard).[91]

6.3 SCARCITY

Sampling and substitution are discussed in the literature (e.g. Andersen & Frenz, 2007; Gran & Molde, 2009; Quiring, von Walter & Atterer, 2008; Steinmetz &Tunnell, 2013) to account for reasons consumers file share. To sample is to "try before you buy", and to substitute is to download instead of purchasing. Both are argued to be hurting industry, however it is argued in the literature that sampling can increase sales, and substitution may not harm the industry as much as reported, because those that substitute, may not have purchased anyway.

Scarcity refers to something not easily found; the economic literature argues that scarcity determines price. Scarcity refers to the lack of ability to purchase desired content in either physical, or digital form; therefore scarcity is a motivator for file sharing. Scarcity is a situation that exists when it is not possible to purchase desired content; consumers engage in file sharing to download what they want through unauthorized sources, it may not be ok or even legal but the situation in Bulgaria is such that otherwise people cannot access the culture of others"(Ivo).[92]

91 "Замунда е най-големия тракер в страната за момента, можеш да намериш много нови и интересни неща." (PlayHard)

92 "Може и да не е много правилно, дори законно, но такова е положението в България, че хората не могат да се докоснат до културата на останалите." (Иво)

Scarcity in certain genres can encourage individuals to go "underground", “because thus people watch what they want, for example, I enter there every day to see what`s new, these sites are among my obligatory ones for the day” (Niki).[93]

The advent of file sharing was exciting for many individuals, as it allowed them to have access to things they did not have access to otherwise, “the biggest problem is that in Bulgaria there is no movie industry…in Bulgaria there are no cinemas…I stopped downloading when in Turnovo a movie theater was opened…They did Kinoarena in Turnovo and I stopped downloading movies because the difference is big, I want to see it in the big screen, to enjoy the movie and not to watch it … well at home I have a big plasma TV, big one… but it still has nothing to do with the cinema” (Evo).[94]

6.4 CONVENIENCE

Convenience in accessing online content refers to accessing it whenever and however you want, ”well yes…I have access to a lot of information and a bigger choice how to cheer myself up in my everyday leisure” (PlayHard).[95]

Has society suddenly started "pirating", or has this behavior always existed, and have similar values always existed? It is argued that this behavior has not changed significantly with the introduction of the Internet; rather, the technology has just made it easier than ever before.

93 "Zashtoto taka gledat vsichko kakvoto iskat, az primerno vlizam vseki den zaduljitelno, da razgledam kakvo novo ima, te sa mi ot zaduljitelnite sitove za denia." (Niki)

94 “Най-големия проблем е , че в България нямя кино индустрия... в България няма кина ... аз спрях да тегля торенти когато в Търново отвориха кино. В Търново направиха Киноарената и аз спрях да тегля торенти, защото разликата е драстична аз искам да отида да го гледам на големия екран , да му се изкефя на филма , а не да го гледам на... айде аз у дома имам голям телевизор,огромен ... нищо общо няма с киното.” (Ево)

95 "Ами да... имам достъп до много информация и по-голям избор как да разнообразя ежедневието си.” (PlayHard)

Almost every participant in this study admitted to taping music or movies from the radio or the TV for friends and family. In the era of DVD and CDs once you purchase it you can play it as many times as you want on as many different pieces of equipment as you like and people traditionally, although the copyright law was probably there but it was certainly never policed. You could copy it onto a tape, or rip it onto your computer and you could even pass on the CD to your friends for nothing, resell it or even rent it as it was very popular in the 90s in Bulgaria. With new technologies, the new rules of an old practice are set:

> There are people who tape, then other who edit, upload…but firstly everything is uploaded to the so called Scene – a few trackers where the people who taped and edited the file and also the ones who taped the TV shows from the TV are uploading directly, after that in a question of seconds, other people with inhumanly fast Internet upload everything on their websites – that kind of people are the uploaders in Zamunda. All this happens in a question of seconds. For example, an episode of a TV show in the USA is on TV at 15.00 our time, at 15.30 the advertisement is cut off the show, smaller releases are made as resolution and the episode is uploaded on the Scene.[96] (Damian)

96 "Има хора, които записват, после такива, които обработват, качват... най-първо всичко се качва на т.нар. Сцена - няколко тракера, в който качват директно хората, които записват и обработват, също и онези, които записват сериалите от телевизията, след това за секунди хора с нечовешки бърз интернет качват всичко по техните сайтове - такива хора са ъплоудърите в замунда. всичко това става буквално за секунди. пример - епизод на сериал се излъчва в САЩ в 3:00 тукашно време, в 3:30 вече са изрязани рекламите, направени са по-малките релийзи като резолюция и епизода е качин на сцената." (Дамян)

This easy technology helps to find what you desire with little effort at no cost and it became a habit as many of the research subjects affirm, “it is a habit, why should I pay money for a DVD when I can simply download it from Zamunda?" (Damian).[97]

6.5 BELIEFS ABOUT FILE SHARING AND THE FUTURE

Key informants have the assumption about file sharing as a “cultural thing” which is confirming some similar theoretical suggestions from Coldwell (1995) and Bagchi, Kirs and Cerveny (2006) about file sharing as cultural exercise. All of the participants in the study, except the experts, see it as “harmless and inconsequential” hobby and the belief that the file sharing is so extended in the country is generalized at level that it becomes a norm and it is not even questionable, “…as it was written recently in a torrent tracker, “even your grandmother is sharing” (BadNick).[98]

When a few years ago the torrent technologies came to Bulgaria, it was very difficult for people to stop downloading directly from sites like free.techno-link and free.evro.net. Then these sites were shutted down and the users had to learn quickly how to use a torrent which seems to be a very easy task for the ordinary Bulgarian user. Several times the National Security Service tried to intimidate the Bulgarian torrents but finally nothing happened. Then the time for Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA)[99] came and the manifestations started again and as a consequence the government did not approve it. Technology will continue to play an important role in how people create, distribute and use

97 "Навик е. защо да даваш пари за филм на дивиди, като можеш да си го дръпнеш от "замундата"?" (Дамян)

98 “Както беше написано наскоро в един торент тракер, даже и баба ти сваля.” (BadNick)

99 ACTA is a multinational treaty for the purpose of establishing international standards for intellectual property rights enforcement

material, “the torrent is just a kind of technology and it will disappear like the old transfer systems, something new will show up and still we will still share” (BadNick).[100]

There is a generalized view that industry has to “catch up” with user`s desires and needs:

> It is impossible the way that the industry has chosen, the so-called Digital rights may have to change. I think in 5/6 years is too soon, but in 10 years there wouldn`t exist rights, the information will be free and we will pay in a time chart. For example, there is an event, you want to watch it in real time = you pay, you want to watch it in one hour = the price is lower, you pay. Let`s say after such and such time its price becomes zero and it just comes out in the space. There is a movie, you want to watch the premiere on your home TV, you pay, because there will be no space you can get the information from, it will be only one – the source, there will be no time to multiplicate. That is what I think will happen globally. You pay to be the first who reaches the information and not because the whole world has already seen it and it`s 5 years old , etc, etc., no sense in that.[101] (Evo)

This chapter presents that motivations for file sharing surround four key issues, that of the cost; many believe that currently the available content is too expensive,

100 "Торента е само вид технология и тя ще изчезне какво старите системи за трансфер на файлове, ще се появят нови, а ние пак ще си превеждаме.” (BadNick)

101 “Не става, по тоя начин ,както е тръгнала индустрията така наречените права и сродните им, може би ще трябва да се променят, след айде да не са 5/6 години,но след 10 права няма да има , информацията по принцип ще е свободна и ще се плаща просто във времева диаграма. Да речем излиза някакво събитие, искаш да го гледаш в реално време =плащаш си, искаш да го гледаш след един час = цената е по-ниска, плащаш си , да речем след еди колко си време цената му става нулева и излиза просто в пространството излиза филм, искаш да го гледаш на премиерата на домашния си огромен телевизор, който ще бъде, ще го има, плащаш си, защото няма да има от къде да вземеш информацията ,тя е само един първоизточника , няма време да се мултиплициратова е според мен,което ще се случи в световен мащаб. Плащаш си за това, че си първия, който си стигнал до информацията , а не че вече целия свят ще я е гледал и ще е на 5 години и т.н.няма смисъл от тая.” (Ево)

and the costs are unreasonable. The next motivation is choice. Consumers are frustrated that they cannot access the desirable content at music, video stores or cinemas, whereas sources that share unauthorized content provide an unlimited access to almost anything digital. Scarcity is related to choice as lack of ability to access otherwise than file sharing the content. The final motivator is convenience.

Systems trading in unauthorized content are said to be easier to use and provide less barriers to the transactions. In order for industry to compete with free, it is necessary to address each one of these issues.

In what follows, I give voice to my personal interpretation of the phenomenon based on my experience and observations as a researcher, but also as a consumer of such P2P technologies. Centered in the file sharing practice in Bulgaria I comment how the observed phenomenon could be understood as strategy, autonomy and occasional activism.

7 CHAPTER SEVEN: SIDE EFFECTS

7.1 BULGARIAN P2P HUBS AS STRATEGY

The dedicated P2P hubs such as Zamunda.net and its associated, more peripheral sites can be said to adopt a publicly visible stance in the country. Moreover, they become updated, spatially configured sites from which one can conduct actual file sharing operations. It is in their interest to remain operational and to cater for a wide user base, not least since Zamunda.net and others carry adverts and have significant running costs. Thus, it makes sense to see these establishments as not only relying on enthusiasts for their making, but as also decidedly strategic endeavors, with a "mainstream" aim in terms of genres and availability, combined with an aim for permanence in their infrastructure. I associate these current operations with permanence and ultimately strategy. As BitTorrent-based file sharing becomes the norm in Bulgaria, the fact that the architecture of torrent distribution requires stable indexes of such torrent links means that they compete for visibility. Thus, they are more akin to publishers, who strive to maximize their brand and their advertising revenue in order to remain the most comprehensive service.[102] Whether these changes makes P2P-based file sharing a revolutionary or disruptive technology is probably too early to say, however.

In asserting this strategic dimension of file sharing, I draw on the work of Michel de Certeau. He argues for everyday consumption to be labelled as tactical, since it involves *poaching* (a form of "making do" with whatever is at hand) and is largely

102 Recently, BTV (one of the major TV channels in Bulgaria) declare media war to Zamunda.net as the torrent tracker apparently attract more publishers that the TV channel itself.

decentralized, *provisional* and ultimately *quasi-invisible*. This notion is being increasingly turned on its head by the solidifying effects of digital networking: the generative forces inherent to consumption are here being materialized in new, previously unexpected ways. The acquisition and exchange that makes consumption possible is visualized in numeric charts, listing the popularity and thus accessibility of each film, album or computer game. The exchange is routinely monitored both by market analysts and by legal enforcers. It is an exchange that is traceable. The absolute majority of data exchange on the global Internet now consists of P2P-based file sharing. For de Certeau, as soon as a mode of agency changes from a temporary endeavor to a permanent, prescriptive factor, its nature changes from tactical to strategic.

The tactical nature of consumption is in other words increasingly replaced by more strategic instantiations of distribution and consumption, as the users themselves take more control and a new order gains permanence. Drawing from the above notion of consumption ceasing to be tactical as it gains situatedness, permanence and visibility, strategy is in de Certeau's account characterized by a double sovereignty: it need not be interpreted only as a literal command of a place or space, but as a mode of agency. However, as with the imagery of piracy, which stipulates that pirate autonomy in fact might work in strategic rather than tactical ways, a more accurate way to portray file sharing might be to see it as an increasingly normative condition.

In this mode of interpretation it makes no sense to make any *a priori* decisions as to whether a course of action is strategic or tactical; this definition is contingent on

how a course of action is related to the other actors involved. Even actions which need not initially be intended as either tactical or strategic – they might not be meant to be conflictual at all – might take on a more markedly conflictual meaning as they become caught up in a bigger game. Andrew Feenberg (1999) similarly compares de Certeau's theory with how games define the players' range of action "without determining their moves" (p.112). In other words, this theory does not presuppose any form of predetermined hegemony or "false consciousness" which would imply that the strategic, ruling entity is a *fixed* one to which the tactics would have to react; hegemony is here rather the upshot of whichever side finds itself in the dominant position. Similarly, hegemonic forces can arise on a macro scale from aggregated local interactions without hegemonic intent. The strategic endeavor is here to direct these forces, something which sites like Zamunda.net do on a daily basis.

7.2 PIRACY AS AUTONOMY

Why is the "pirate" ethos so popular? To begin with, practices of cultural appropriation that have always been around – the kinds of poaching, re-appropriating agencies that de Certeau elaborates on – are in fact deemed "piratical" in relation to the way contemporary copyright is formulated. As Pang (2006) writes, the legalistic regime of copyright is in this sense bound to fail, in that it tries to shield off a field (everyday culture) which is in itself infinitely wider. This becomes increasingly apparent when digital technology allows for much more extensive re-appropriation, re-mixing and re-use, when the digital infrastructure helps in actually manifesting such uses materially. An exchange that previously happened in someone's living room now becomes instantiated and potentially

multiplied in-between P2P hubs. Something that was once an intimate joke between friends now has the potential to spread virally in an instant over the Internet.

One central aspect of the multifaceted term "piracy" is the way it works as a positive affirmation of this renewed user agency. Piracy becomes visualized as a productive response to the neo-liberal hegemony of the cultural industries. Along with its countercultural connotations and romantic aura of dissent, "piracy" here invokes positive liberty: freedom *to* rather than the negative freedom *from*. It is a means to assert one's autonomy, a way of becoming proactive (strategic) rather than reactive (tactical). Piracy here defines the ability to make one's own destiny, to open the black box of technology and utilize it for one's own ends – while doing this in the open, even forming part of the "mainstream".

On the other side, "piracy", even as an act, is in no way innocent. In fact, the term itself makes for a very confrontational standpoint – one that has the potential to be all the more controversial in that it is not based on a simple dialectic of resistance, but rather lays claims to something much more harrowing: self-sufficiency.

However, this utopian thrust of self-sufficiency only applies to its autonomous channels of distribution. So-called "Internet pirates" are not so much producing their own media, in a community which exists in isolation from that of the mainstream, but are instead re-appropriating the products of mainstream media, often without paying for them, and finding alternative ways of distributing and sharing them. Still, one can argue that the ripped .avi and .iso files that carry the digitized mainstream movies which circulate via BitTorrent in effect constitute

artifacts of their own, ontologically different from a purchased DVD or even a downloaded legal file (which most often comes with a set expiration date). An Internet user can today live their entire life as a consumer without ever opening a legally produced DVD sleeve; their experience of the film as a cultural artifact thus becomes an affair largely autonomous from the expectations of the mainstream corporate establishment. It might be worth noting, though, how this would constitute a rather extreme behavior, given that virtually all file sharers interviewed in my own study noted the permeability between "pirate" and "legitimate" consumption: all of them did occasionally purchase DVDs and specifically noted the practicality of illegal files for giving a "preview" of whether material was worth purchasing or not.

7.3 OCCASIONAL ACTIVISM

The current situation of users sharing copyrighted material with impunity – massively, anonymously and with full discretion – is often depicted as a crisis of control: the spiraling by-product of the convergence of computer, audiovisual and telecommunication media, making it possible to convert any textual product to instantly duplicable data. This convergence is also said to imply the interconnection and blurring of roles in-between users, distributors and producers, as well as "narrowcasting", i.e. highly specialized choice and user activity (see Hirsch, 1998; Jenkins, 2006). If this poses a challenge more than an opportunity, as representatives of the entertainment industry (i.e. lobby organizations such as RIAA, MPAA, IFPI, BMR, etc.) seem to claim, this “monster” was spawned largely due to the consistent digitization of cultural products brought about by the content industry itself, through its dedicated conversion to formats such as CD and DVD

throughout the 1990s. Thanks to increased broadband connectivity and the implicit potential of extensive P2P networking it was already clear in 1999, with the soaring wildfire popularity of Napster, that the situation was, at least in purely technical terms, irreversible.

Ironically, the praise of "free flows of information", which has been so vital to the historiography and futurology of the Internet, suddenly became problematic when it was realized to what extent old media forms would be remediated by new ones. P2P-based file sharing, which in its early days was more or less synonymous to with Napster, thus came to prompt an extensive system of prohibition of information exchange through laws and technical implementations, as thousands of civil lawsuits have been issued by the entertainment industry in their worldwide clampdown on illegal file sharing.

What was wholly unexpected was how quickly this infrastructural transformation came about and how monumental its impact was on certain economic institutions, most notably the entertainment industry. File sharing has thus moved the compass of information use “in a direction that directly contradicts the carefully mapped-out plans drawn by some large corporate and government players” (Oram, 2001, pp.395). The question is often split into a proverbial tug of war between two views of how to use technology and information: one that gives consumers and users the maximum amount of control over the application of technology and information; the other that maintains that the provider of information or technology should control all its uses.

What a number of authors, including Lawrence Lessig (1999, 2002, 2004, 2008) and Siva Vaidhyanathan (2001; 2004), have in common is that they take as their principal examples those spheres of agency where a certain self-reflexive stance is pronounced among the actors involved: that of deliberately creating alternative platforms of peer-production or business models of user-generated content, or of using platforms such as blogs and wikis for expression (grassroots media production).

There is, I would argue, an activist bias inherent in much of this espousal of P2P as an emancipatory technology which sometimes borders on the quasi-religious. Much of it comes from an assertion that many file sharers, cyber activists and net libertarians seem to believe that they are being actively persecuted by a looming, nefarious media industry which forces any alternative formation to become hard-lined and creative in inventing new ways to keep sharing. This assertion is somewhat misguided, however, when one comes to reflect on the fact that the very same media industry is striving to find similar ways of creatively harnessing user agency. Indeed, the whole "Web 2.0" hyperbole is exactly about this: as Henry Jenkins (2006) writes, Web 2.0 enterprises are in effect instantiations of media corporations increasingly picking up on insights from fan forums and grassroots media activism. What is adopted, he argues, is increasingly a strategy of *collaboration* (or, in a more critical view, exploitation) rather than an outright *prohibition* of these consumer-led movements. The media industry is here seen to effectively appropriate decentralized consumer agency, for both the creation and circulation of media content – however, in ways that rarely involve direct remuneration to these decentralized authors.

Furthermore, the non-commercial aspect of the activist bias risks overstating the alleged altruism of file sharing and is clearly at odds with the actual capitalist appropriation of P2P infrastructures that is currently seen with entities such as Zamunda.net. Indeed, a more useful way to characterize the situation would be to regard P2P-based file sharing as a vital part of the radically increased media convergence that is taking place due to the rapid digitization of consumption, production and distribution. Convergence brings about multiple ways of accessing media content and "ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture," Jenkins argues (2006, pp.243). With the entirely digital modes of consumption and distribution that we see on the Internet, both legal and illegal, the roles of consumer and producer are blurred and occasionally clash, as media consumers become more like participants and co-creators of trans-media narratives, infrastructures and communities, and traditional media producers try to harness this participatory agency.

What is appealing about Jenkins's account is that – in contrast to much of the literature on hacker culture (see Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Strangelove, 2005) – it is based on fandom rather than political radicalism. Fandom fosters participation and knowledgeability, but not necessarily activism. The active, creative reappropriation of media forms here comes from the love of these media rather than from any allegedly oppositional political stance relating to the political organization extraneous to these media. In those modes where use necessarily becomes more politicized, what is acknowledged are infrastructures which do not force users to take a specific political standpoint, but instead favor modes of use which generate possibilities for *occasional activism*. However, the emphasis on activism described

above often overshadows the important conditional fact of the word preceding it in this italicized form: much of the productive activity online is indeed occasional.

8 CHAPTER EIGHT: FINAL REMARKS

8.1 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the study was to explore the file sharing practice while considering the local context of a specific country - Bulgaria, and the outcome of this provides insights into the characteristics of the phenomenon by heeding the specificity of a local situated ethnographic account.

The conception of the thesis spanned from my initial contact with the subject in 2005, leading to 2009 when the work on this thesis began. My main fieldwork took place in 2010 when I did most of the participant observation and interviews. Later in 2012, I did some additional observations and interviews to refresh the study and check if some major changes had occurred.

The contribution of my research lies first and foremost in the empirical evidence that it adduces. On a general level this means that the study provides insight into the file sharing subculture through questioning commonsense assumptions about file sharing. As most file sharing activities are considered illegal, this research is significant as it explores a topic not often discussed in social studies and helps in growing this field up. It adds to the literature a close vision into file sharing communities, and more widely an understanding of how people participate, what they do when they participate and why they are motivated to participate. This dissertation gives insights into the daily activities that make up the act of file sharing from an insider`s point of view.

More specifically, it contributes also to the body of studies about file sharing by providing data on that activity in a cultural context often considered "periphery" and remaining outside the scientific interest.

By taking into consideration the local economic, political and social forces, the present study helps to gain a better understanding of the file sharing in Bulgaria and adds knowledge to the pool of studies about interaction between Internet and Society in different regions and the diversity of technological appropriations that exists nowadays.

As for the distinctive features of the file sharing practice in Bulgaria, three main actors were identified during the fieldwork: Internet Providers, Torrent trackers and subtitling websites. These actors have their own dynamics and characteristics but they are interconnected and share a common purpose - file sharing. The construction of this network is an outcome of the ethnographic research rather than something I`ve decided at the beginning of the study. I believe it is a good practical example of how different groups are overlapped and connected in order to constitute the file sharing *community* in the country*, a community* which is rather a network of connections than a collectivity fixed in a location. It is an ethnographic study of parts rather than wholes, and movement and connectedness are its main characteristics. By defining the field site as a network, the field site transitions from a bounded space that the researcher dwells within to something that more closely tracks the social phenomenon under study. Moving back and forth between various locations did not always allow me to spend a long time on site so as to get a proper experience of participation as it is understood in classical ethnographic

studies and is often seen as a problem of " being there" of "multi-sited ethnography". Although, this approach is very useful when dealing with digital technologies which is the case of this research.

The file sharing practice has become a normative condition and one of the most common uses of Internet technologies in Bulgaria. Considered worldwide an underground practice with alleged political implications against the industry, in the local Bulgarian context this practice has been rather appropriated and interpreted by Internet providers as a business opportunity to gain clients. They have played a crucial role in implementing the file sharing as a service starting with FTP servers and eventually migrating to P2P file sharing trackers. A basic requisite for fast download and upload speed is also covered by these actors as in Bulgaria, fiber optic is the most common Internet connection. The transition to market economy and the main conflict with the Bulgarian Telecom denying access to other companies in the 90s have facilitated the current Internet situation in a positive way. Nowadays, there is no monopole of the Internet in Bulgaria but plenty of local Internet providers with their own fiber optic networks and the national telecom offering ADSL is not even an important player with 200 000 from a pool of 4 000 000 households using the Internet. The first Internet providers in the country were "geeks" who established networks with cables hanging between buildings and thus become Internet entrepreneurs. I believe there is a connection between that fact and the file sharing appearance in their companies which back then was only available to the IT crowd. Their interpretation of the file sharing as a business opportunity helped to further develop the practice as a mass phenomenon in Bulgaria.

The proliferation of file sharing practice is at such extent in the country that its audience is quite similar in size to the conventional movie and music audience. Sites like the torrent tracker Zamunda are used on a daily basis in many households to download music, movies, software and books. According to my observations in Bulgaria, most of the torrent trackers are private, that is to say they require registration. They have strict rules which guarantee quality of the content and malware is extremely rare to find. Fundamental attributes of such private file sharing communities are active participation and reciprocity which are also embedded in the philosophy of the peer-to-peer technology, but are enhanced in communities like Zamunda by the rules and norms, the very design and organization of the community. The strong rule of active participation and reciprocity also remove the ability to free ride (download without sharing) for extended periods of time in comparison to public file sharing communities like The Pirate Bay where a tendency to free ride could be found. Members in communities like Zamunda.net have a strong trust in the community as a "meeting place" and that the content would be of a highest quality. Thus, some of the benefits of being a torrent website with your own tracker server are the higher speed, tighter community and safer downloads. Finally, strong technical skills are needed to participate both at the community level, and also higher up in "the Scene".

Private file sharing communities like Zamunda guarantee access not only to quality content but more importantly by collaborating with subtitling websites, they have an added value, that of matching subtitles in Bulgarian language for their releases. Bulgarian language is a minority language with around 9 000 000 native speakers in the world and Bulgarian media and movie market is a small one and

often access to favorite content is only available online. The ordinary Bulgarian user needs subtitles in order to access this content. Unlike the situation with the torrent websites in Bulgaria, there are only two websites for Bulgarian subtitles.

Subsunacs which was approached for this thesis has a very free spirit and, unlike the private torrent trackers, registration here is necessary only if the user wants to publish into the forum section. Downloading and uploading subtitles is free and anonymous activity, it is also free of charge. The forums basically operate as an online support between translators and rarely others than them are participating, except people requesting subtitles. Translators organize themselves in teams in order to help each other and learn from the others. Also, the purpose of the teams is to establish certain rules for translations and thus, look after the quality of the subtitles but also to respect the work of others. Subtitling involves not only language competence in order to make the translation but also a technical one for the timing and use of subtitling software.

As for the incentives to participate in file sharing, a specific one related only to subtitling was the passion for the proper translation and language. Interviewed translators define their activity as (a) a hobby, (b) a way to enrich their language knowledge, and (c) a contribution to content in proper Bulgarian language.

Other four issues related to motivation for file sharing were identified from interviews with participants:

- Cost and "poverty" - there is a consensus that high cost of desired content and the "low income" in the country make people go online and file share instead of purchase. There was also a widespread opinion than in the West

it is different because people are richer. Even in these cases of a doubt, "poverty" instead of mentality is selected as justification;

- Choice - people want to access the content they want in a format they want and when they want, physical stores and cinemas seem to offer less of the desired content, whereas sources that provideaccess to unauthorised content enable unlimited access to it;
- Scarcity - scarcity refers to the lack of ability to purchase desired content in either physical or digital form and consumers engage in file sharing activities in order to access what they want;
- Convenience - technologies supporting file sharing are seen as easy to use in accessing the desired content whenever and however you want free of charge.

When the norm is to file share, the alternatives seem to be rarely considered.The respondent accounts contained a high degree of acknowledgement that society would have to adapt to this now irreversible, underlying material configuration. As the technical protocols that enable digital networking are so open and mutable, while the Internet at large is based on file sharing and a P2P diagram, the file sharers' own argument of the "naturalness" and "unstoppable" nature of the phenomenon does carry considerable weight. Since the overall agency is so highly distributed, no single agent can be said to have the entire responsibility.

Have people stopped sharing, after having seen various actions during the years against FTP servers and torrent trackers? A migratory behaviour is commonplace, where users shift to newer protocols as the older ones get to be seen as no longer

adequate, while the notion of being "hidden in the crowd" makes for a view among the file sharers themselves that the activity is relatively risk-free. Moreover, virtually no cases were brought forward in Bulgaria during that period against private, file sharing individuals, while overall P2P traffic remained strong; it even increased significantly.

Nevertheless, the legal climate appears to have prompted a low degree of reflexivity among the file sharers. It could be argued that societies like Bulgaria where cybercrimes aren't exactly a priority and there is no strong public discourse on intellectual property and laws in this area foster such lack of reflexivity.

On the other hand, in the bizarre climate of a post socialist country characterized by complex transformations due to the clash between pre-existing forms and values and the newly adopted order, a social, economic and cultural vacuum is at hand where local people reconstruct and interpret the new verities in their own ways. The fact that the file sharing in question is, in most instances, illegal appears to force widespread justification by comparison with Western intellectual property and copyright laws which do not apply to "us" who are poorer and cannot pay the prices of intellectual products. This attitude suggests that the Iron Curtain psychologically and culturally speaking might be still there.

The use of Internet technologies is not exclusive to youth or gender but can be more effectively understood as a cultural stance dependent of personal inclination. In the case of file sharing, I would argue that the most vital conditions for the practice are technical, economical and - in the case of Bulgaria - national (as that is the arguably most determining linguistic and historical condition here). In

Bulgaria, this has been facilitated by high levels of computer literacy and access to broadband, which might hide or naturalize the barriers of entry involved (such as knowledge, skill and material ability). What is also required is a strong personal inclination to individually govern one's own media consumption, to discover new media and explore technologies - in this sense, a highly autonomous media consumption. For many years, during communism the access to information was controlled by the government and circulation of what was considered by the administration "Western- ish" was very limited to what was measured as non offensive for the local paradigm. Often circulation of cultural artifacts occurred underground as the only available possibility. After the end of the communist era, people had the possibility to access the information they want without restrictions and they go for it without any moral remorse.

As file sharing so clearly thrives on opportunism, individual utility and gratification, the alleged dichotomy between non-commercial and corporate interests that the "copyfight" implies is in fact contested, as actors such as Zamunda appear to be Internet entrepreneurs, as well as subversives. While such services do ease access to technologies that were once at the behest of "geeks" only, this semi(institutionalization) is not necessarily dependent on altruism or democratic agendas. Moreover, as "heavy" file sharers tend to be similarly "heavy" media consumers or fans in general, file sharing becomes a prime example of how customers rework core premises of the means of distribution in order to accommodate their own interests (Jenkins, 2006). It also means that the opportunism and convenience which the phenomenon thrives upon is not

necessarily antithetical to contemporary, mainstream capitalism, and can in fact be accommodated within it.

In Bulgarian society the notion of "copyfight" did not reach yet the traditional news media in the way as it stands in the western countries and file sharing is a widely established phenomenon, which was never framed in the way the early American debate frame it (likened to terrorism and an assault on existing commercial structures). In Bulgaria, the question of how to rid society of file sharing does not exist nor more progressive question of how to accommodate it within contemporary capitalism. Yet, the phenomenon is already accommodated and seminstitucionalized in the country and it would be interesting to observe its evolution once the intellectual property debate is on the focus.

Formations like Zamunda and other similar venues can be understood as strategic sovereigns helping to formulate the phenomenon of P2P-based file sharing as one of condition/norm rather than reaction/deviation. They have publicly visible presence and even the "copyfight" is yet non-existing in the country they play the role of occasional activists without giving the impression of the activism as more crucial to the phenomenon that it actually is.

8.2 FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

It is a fairly non-controversial observation that heavy file sharers are heavy consumers of culture in general. However, given the greater ability of previewing material and of acquiring more obscure content thanks to file sharing, how have the habits and consumption patterns changed among those media consumers who routinely file share? More detailed studies of this aspect are needed, as well as on

how individual users come to question their own role, and the impact of their own actions - and what the level of awareness actually is, in different geographical/ demographic settings, of conditions for cultural production, distribution and consumption.

Also, more studies that take a localized, situated view of the Internet are needed in order to talk about different national histories of the Internet, defined primarily by linguistic boundaries. Theses with similar focus and methodology as this one could, for example, usefully be replicated in various geographical settings, for comparative purposes.

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