Chapter 7 Conclusion

This research has explored the contingencies in online informal learning space to moderate the educational inequalities of the disadvantaged migrant youth against the persistent excluding mechanisms of the stratified educational system in Germany.

The reflective theoretical analyses of the development of Bildung and informal learning, as well as the mutual relations in the emerging global networked learning society, provide a critical perspective to understand online informal learning as an indispensable part of the Bildung process and a crucial space of competence acquisition. However, analyses then reveal that online informal learning is not only a potential enabling space of opportunities to reduce educational inequalities particularly for disadvantaged youngsters, but also a problematic field of reproduction of social inequalities (see chapter 2). According to the approach of network social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998; Burt, 2001; Lin, 2001; Norris, 2004), this contradiction is basically embedded in the mechanisms of online socio-cultural networks which constitute one essential attribute of informal learning online. On one hand, Norris’s (2004) typology of online socio-cultural networks is employed with a necessary revision to analyse network-related inequalities (Lin, 2001; Manske, 2007) in informal learning online, namely the differences between bonding and bridging online networks (Wellman et al., 1999, 2001, 2004; Putnam, 2000, 2002; Norris, 2004) in fostering competence acquisition of the migrant youth. Bridging networks online are argued to be a kind of reconstructive social capital which can enable the access to more Bildung resources and chances in online informal learning processes, especially for the unprivileged migrant youth. They therefore hold crucial possibilities to moderate educational disparities in contrast to bonding networks online, which are argued mainly to reproduce the precariousness of the disadvantaged youngsters (see chapter 3.2). On the other hand, an analytical framework of the social milieus is reconstructed to further investigate whether such enabling contingency for the disadvantaged migrant youth through bridging networks online is possible ultimately, or in other terms, whether the online network-related inequalities are essentially just the further reproduction of the offline milieu-specific structural inequalities (Bourdieu, 1990; Vester, 2001; Bittlingmayer et al., 2006) (see chapter 3.3). Based on the combination of the reconstructed framework of social milieus and the perspective of network-related inequalities, a theoretical model is reconstructed to holistically analyse the multifaceted
reproduction and reconstruction in and through online socio-cultural networks in informal learning online (see figure 3-05, p.88). Both the reproductive and the reconstructive mechanisms in online informal learning processes are further plausibly analysed based on empirical data concerning the Internet use of the migrant youth in online socio-cultural networks. The Turkish migrant youth make up the empirical sample group for this study (see chapter 5 and 6).

The major finding of this research is the solid empirical proof of social and educational inequalities being reproduced in the online informal learning space of the Turkish migrant youth. The reproduction of inequalities is first of all plain to see in respect to the information- and knowledge-oriented Internet use, in which the differences in using are significantly correlated with the inequalities in the formal educational background of the Turkish migrant youth (see chapter 5.2.2). This not only clearly indicates the persistent reproduction of educational disparities online but also reflects the crucial role the stratified formal educational system plays in maintaining and reproducing the domination of “formal knowledge” and “higher level learning habitus” in the online space of informal learning.

The decisive role of the formal educational background, however, is strikingly not significant regarding the communication- and entertainment-oriented Internet use. This result is also seen in networked informal learning – formal educational inequalities are vague in their effects on problem-solving with support from others online and learning through chatting for instance (see chapter 5.3). In contrast, specifically in the same aspects of Internet use, online socio-cultural networks play a significantly correlative role. Strikingly, results show that in respect to “chatting about school learning” and “chatting about politics”, which are more characteristic of formal knowledge-oriented informal learning, the formal educational background again plays a statistical significant role after accounting for the online networks in contrast to its non-significant role before that. Although this is not general to see in all the aspects of Internet use, the results do indicate the “hidden” co-effect of online networks as the repertoire and transfer of social support and resources in terms of social capital for youngsters to learn in the virtual space. In addition, the critical role of online networks to reduce the reproductive mechanisms of educational disparities in online informal learning is also accentuated to a certain extent (see chapter 6.2). Based on these empirical findings, a contingency
space embedded in online networks for the educationally disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth is apparently emerging.

However, findings also demonstrate that the online socio-cultural networks are not an egalitarian learning space that is free from social inequalities and exclusion. On the contrary, in addition to the inequalities in Internet use that are directly reproduced by the formal educational background, new inequalities in using are emerging based on the differences in online socio-cultural networks. Here, the corresponding research hypotheses are confirmed, proving that firstly, there are in principle two types of socio-cultural networks online when Turkish migrant youth use the Internet – the bonding networks of the ethnic and cultural homogeneities and the bridging networks of the ethnic and cultural heterogeneities. Secondly, new differences in Internet use as another crucial aspect of “digital inequalities” are emerging between the two different networks, namely the network-related inequalities in informal learning online. Instead of the existent categories of Internet use that either hold an implicit bias of “formal knowledge” and “higher learning habitus” or lack explicit criteria of categorisation, the three-dimensional Internet competences developed in the framework of the Bildung-oriented life competences are employed to explore the network-related inequalities in the online informal learning of the Turkish migrant youth.

The differences are plain to see between the bridging and the bonding networks in fostering the professional- and method-dimensional Internet competences of the Turkish migrant youth. In general, the bridging networks are more effective than the bonding networks in promoting not only the technological skills of the Turkish migrant youth to use the Internet but also their abilities to integrate Internet use with various learning situations (see chapter 6.3.1). Similar differences also exist with regard to developing their competences in social integration as well as in constructing their intercultural identity as Turkish-German that constitute important dimensions of the intercultural competences. In both aspects, the online bridging networks again play a significantly higher correlative role compared to the online bonding networks. This indicates that the Turkish migrant youth who are more connected with online bridging networks are generally more competent in these aspects of informal learning than those who are more connected with online bonding networks (see chapter 6.3.3). In contrast, such network-related differences between the online bridging and bonding networks are not seen as significant in developing social competences, such as the construction of online social bonds and the integration of online network support into various learning
contexts (see chapter 6.3.2). Despite this exception, the general tendency is still obvious such that the online bridging networks are greatly more advantageous than the online bonding networks in fostering the Internet competences of the Turkish migrant youth in the processes of online informal learning. Different from the inequalities directly based on the formal educational gap, the network-related inequalities in Internet use constitute a much hidden aspect of “digital inequalities”. This aspect of inequalities in Internet use not only provides a new perspective to broaden the view on the inequalities existent in online informal learning processes, it also accentuates a potential space in which the perpetual educational disparities can be somewhat reduced through the mechanisms of the online socio-cultural networks.

The point is that there are certain overlapping aspects of Internet use in which online socio-cultural networks and formal educational level play a similarly influential role. This is most explicit in respect to the development of the professional and method competences which cover a big variety of information- and knowledge-oriented Internet use. In these overlapping aspects, the inequalities are evident not only between the higher- and the lower-educated Turkish migrant youth, but also between the Turkish migrant youngsters who are connected with stronger online bridging networks and those with stronger online bonding networks. This indicates that specifically in these aspects of online informal learning, in which the educational gap is explicitly further reproduced, the differences between the bridging and the bonding networks online are also evident. This result stimulates a further critical consideration of the relations between the online networks and the formal educational background. Were the online socio-cultural networks of the Turkish migrant youth not just the complete reproduction of their offline social cultural conditions and especially not that of their formal educational background, a crucial contingency space in online informal learning could then be enabled to moderate the educational inequalities of these disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth. Clearly, the enabling of such contingency would much rely on developing online bridging networks for the Turkish migrant youth in their informal learning online.

Further empirical analyses have plausibly proven the hypothesized multi-constituted social milieus of the Turkish migrant youth, namely the social milieus formed by the vertical social hierarchy and the horizontal ethno-cultural differentiation as well as the individual differences in motivation for social integration. Based on this, a holistic view has been proposed on the complex relations between the online
socio-cultural networks and the offline social cultural conditions of the Turkish migrant youngsters (see chapter 6.4.6 and 6.4.7).

On the whole, the tendency is evident that the offline milieu-specific inequalities – the social hierarchy and the ethno-cultural differentiation in the everyday life context – are further reproduced into the online socio-cultural networks of the Turkish migrant youth. The reproductive mechanisms of the offline structural deficiencies, especially of the vertical educational stratification, are specifically explicit in respect to the online bonding networks. It is shown that those Turkish migrant youth from lower social positioned, ethnically separated and lower integration-motivated social milieu (“LOSE”) display an obvious cluster in the online bonding networks (see chapter 6.4.7). These youngsters, in general, are those with lower educational level and economic situations. They often use the Internet at youth centres. Turkish language is their main language of communication at home and with peers. They have a strong ethnic bonding peer structure. In addition, they demonstrate a weak intercultural identity and low motivations for social integration. In contrast, the characters of the online bonding networks in general are much weaker among the youngsters from the middle and higher social positioned milieus. In this sense, the online bonding networks, to a great extent, just indicate the further reproduction of the social and educational disparities as well as the ethnic closure of the disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth. Additionally, as a kind of reproductive social capital due to the homogeneity and closure in such networks, the online bonding networks thus play a role in transferring the disadvantages from the offline milieus to the online informal learning processes. In the same line of finding reproduction of social and cultural inequalities among the disadvantaged youngsters, the reproductive mechanisms of social and cultural privileges in the virtual space of young people from better backgrounds are also evident in the findings. This can be seen in the clustering of those from the higher social positioned milieus (“HIIN” and “HIMIX”) in the online bridging networks. This implies that those of higher social positions, in particular higher educational levels and living in rather intercultural familial and peer settings, are generally associated with a higher level of online bridging networks, no matter whether they have higher (“HIIN”) or lower (“HIMIX”) motivations for social integration (see chapter 6.4.7). In this sense, the online bridging networks can, to a great extent, represent the effortless reproduction of the offline advantages of those from the higher social milieus. They therefore have the potential to further transfer and reproduce these related privileges into the online informal learning processes. According to the
above two aspects, the reproductive mechanisms of the offline milieu-specific social inequalities, especially of social hierarchies, are evident to see in the online socio-cultural networks of the Turkish migrant youth.

Taken together, the above-summarised empirical findings concerning the online informal learning networks illustrate a multi-faceted view on the social reproduction of inequalities in the online informal learning space. Here it can be firstly concluded that the online bonding and bridging socio-cultural networks themselves in principle reflect the transformed but continuous reproductive mechanisms of the offline structural deficiencies – the milieu-specific disparities and especially the social and educational hierarchies – into the online society. As limiting reproductive social capital and enabling reconstructive social capital respectively for Bildung and learning, they can further transfer social disparities into informal learning processes of the Turkish migrant youth. This leads to the network-related inequalities in Internet use and competence acquisition. According to such hidden but still persistent unequal structural mechanisms, it can be argued that the moderation of the educational inequalities of the disadvantaged migrant youth cannot be radically realised automatically through the “ideal” bridging networks alone in the online informal learning space. In this informal context, the online bridging networks can eventually function as a reconstructive enabling social capital, in terms of reducing educational inequalities by being possibly (re)constructed beyond the offline unequal structural mechanisms.

Next to the major evidence of the perpetual reproduction of the structural mechanisms, a striking finding of the present study is that the contingencies of reconstruction – reducing the structural deficiencies – as well as the corresponding new Bildung chances particularly for the disadvantaged migrant youth, do exist to a certain extent in the informal learning online. This is convincingly evidenced by the strikingly strong bridging network characters of the lower social positioned but high integration-oriented and –motivated milieu (“LOIN”) (see chapter 6.4.7).

Different from the previous milieu studies, the social milieus reconstructed in this research, based on the empirical data of the Turkish migrant youth respondents, consist of a new dimension in addition to the basic social hierarchy and ethno-cultural differentiation (see chapter 6.4.6). It refers to the active role played by the Turkish migrant youth as social actors in constructing their online socio-cultural networks. Based on the empirical data, this individual role is mainly represented by the differences
in the motivations of the Turkish migrant youth for social integration. It is shown that this individual dimension is more closely related to the dimension of the ethno-cultural differentiation. In contrast, it strikingly has a significant negative correlation with the social hierarchy dimension, which indicates that the lower social positioned Turkish migrant youth tend to have stronger motivations for social integration than those from the higher social positioned milieus (see chapter 6.4.6). When this motivational factor of individuals is included in the offline milieus of the Turkish migrant youth, it is surprising to see the decrease of the reproductive mechanisms, particularly of the social hierarchy to some extent. This is specifically evident in the distribution of the offline milieus in the online bridging networks. As mentioned before, those from the higher social positioned milieus are explicitly more connected with the online bridging networks. In addition, results distinctively reveal that the Turkish migrant youth from both “LOIN” milieu clusters hold a rather high percentage of the online bridging networks. Specifically, those from the “LOIN” milieu cluster 5 show the strongest feature of the online bridging networks. In general, the Turkish migrant youth from the “LOIN” milieus are characteristic of lower educational backgrounds and socio-economic situations, but higher intercultural orientations. They often speak both Turkish and German languages at home and often use German with peers. They also demonstrate a relatively strong ethnic identity as Turkish-Germans. Moreover, they particularly distinguish themselves from other groups of lower social positioned peers, those from the middle positioned but ethnically separated (“MISE”) milieus as well as those in the higher “HIMIX” milieus, by their distinctly stronger motivations for social integration.

As already confirmed, this factor of individual motivation for social integration is in general not decided by the formal educational background of the Turkish migrant youth (see chapter 6.4.5). Interestingly, it even holds a negative correlation with the comprehensive indicator of the social hierarchy, which indicates that those lower positioned are likely to have higher motivations for integration. Based on these findings, it is clear to see the active role that the Turkish migrant youth can play as social actors in constructing their online networks in the informal learning processes. This factor of the individual motivation for social integration thus in the least indicates a positive enabling mechanism parallel to the perpetual reproductive mechanisms of the structural inequalities. With the involvement of an active individual role, the network structure of the Turkish migrant youth can then be somewhat changed or reconstructed in the
processes of informal learning online. The strong characters of the online bridging networks held by the Turkish migrant youth from the lower social positioned “LOIN” milieus provide the strongest evidence for this point. In addition, it is also found that the Turkish migrant youngsters from this milieu, in contrast, have a relatively strong ethnic bonding peer structure offline – most of their friends in offline society being Turkish. This further confirms the reconstruction of their personal networks from more homogeneous bonding offline to more heterogeneous bridging online.

The enabling role of individual motivation for social integration among these lower positioned Turkish migrant youth in the reconstruction of their online networks provides convincing evidence for the “open dispositions” of the social milieus, as argued by Vester (2004b). The difference, however, is that the role of individual motivations in developing the milieu structure is not specifically accentuated in Vester’s research. Such a motivational role is important and well confirms the reflexive relations between agent and structure in the process of structuration as theorised by Giddens (1984). Clearly, social actors can play a critical role in constructing and reconstructing their personal networks at the micro level and even their milieu structure at the macro level.

The strong online bridging network characters of the Turkish migrant youth from the lower social positioned but higher integration-oriented and –motivated milieu not only confirm the reconstructability of their socio-cultural networks in the processes of online informal learning but also further indicate the possibilities, especially for the educational disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth, to access more diverse resources for Bildung and competence acquisition. This is achieved through the advantageous bridging networks online in contrast to their limited chances due to the excluding mechanisms offline. This means that contingencies to moderate educational inequalities can somewhat be enabled. Specifically, this provides a plausible explanation to the interesting finding mentioned above – the re-emerging significant role of the formal educational background in certain formal knowledge-oriented aspects of Internet use when accounting for the co-effect of the online networks. Here, the reconstructed networks online, namely the online bridging networks, of those lower educated but higher motivated Turkish migrant youth should clearly play a co-influential role in narrowing the formal educational gap.

As shown by the frequency analysis, the higher integration-oriented and -motivated (“LOIN”) milieu takes up nearly 30% of the Turkish migrant youth respondents. While there are still 22, 5% of them belonging to the higher ethnic-separated and lower
integration-motivated (“LOSE”) milieu who are explicitly more connected with the bonding networks online. Despite that the reconstruction of socio-cultural networks in virtual space is not general to see among the whole lower positioned groups, its existence among the “LOIN” milieu does provide a convincing argument for the contingencies that online bridging networks can somewhat be (re)constructed through a mechanism beyond the persistent reproductive mechanisms of the social structure. In this sense, a contingency space is emerging in which the bridging networks online can eventually work as the enabling reconstructive social capital especially to reduce the educational disadvantages of the lower educated Turkish migrant youth. Based on the above summaries, it can now be concluded now that the excluding mechanisms of structural deficiencies can still be somewhat moderated in the online informal learning space despite their perpetuation and transformation. To realise this, one critical precondition is required: the individual motivational role of these disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth, here mainly referring to their motivations especially for social integration, has to be considered, activated, supported and promoted.

With regard to supporting and promoting motivation in the disadvantaged migrant youth, their roles as social actors need to be encouraged with necessary conditions or offers in order to be fulfilled. In other words, these youngsters can follow their motivations as well as realise their motivation-related aims. With respect to this, the online informal learning space undoubtedly holds a critical advantage, specifically due to the ever-growing capabilities of the Internet to enable and enhance the networking as “a new system of social relationships centred on the individual” (Castells, 2001, 128). Strong evidence for this can once again be seen in the “LOIN” milieu. On one hand, the Turkish migrant youth from this lower educated milieu are shown to have a strong offline ethnic bonding peer structure although their everyday linguistic settings, be it at home or with peers, are quite intercultural. On the other hand, they explicitly have higher motivations for social integration, for instance, meeting German people on the Internet. More importantly, it is striking to see that their distribution in the bridging networks online is also rather high. Individual motivations for social integration thus coincides strongly with the construction of motivation-related personal networks online in this special Turkish migrant youth group, a finding which clearly reflects the individual-centred networking capabilities embedded in the online informal learning space to support and fulfil the active role of users as social actors. This demonstrates the point that the online informal learning space can afford social actors critical possibilities
to construct relations with whom they want, or put in another way, to specialise their own personal networks – the “networked individualism” (Wellman et al., 2004, 2006). Accordingly, in promoting the fulfilment of the individual role of disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth in (re)constructing their networks and in extending their social capital, the online informal learning undoubtedly is a vitally important space. In comparison, such reconstruction in the formal educational system is difficult to be realised due to its excluding mechanisms.

As a crucial part of this space as well as a main Internet activity in which most Turkish migrant youth often participate in, online chatting is worthy of special concern. The empirical findings have clearly shown that online chatting plays a specifically important role in supporting the lower educated Turkish migrant youngsters to reconstruct their networks and consequently to expand their social capital for Bildung and competence development. Taking again the members of the lower educated but higher motivated (“LOIN”) milieu as an example, it is explicit that these youngsters have stronger affirmations, as compared to those from most of the other milieus, that they can make new friends through chatting, and that especially chatting in German helps them to know more German people. In addition, these “LOIN” milieu members also more strongly confirm than those who are higher educated that they can learn new and interesting things from others and get support for problem-solving through online chatting (see chapter 5.3.2). Moreover, they agree that chatting in German also helps improve their German language. This affirmation is significantly stronger even when compared to those higher educated. All these findings provide a convincing argument that online chatting plays a critical role to a great extent in fostering the motivations of those lower educated but higher-motivated Turkish migrant youth for social integration as well as in reconstructing their online networks as oriented by their motivations. In addition, it also helps expand their access to resources and support for learning and competence acquisition. Following the above argument, chatting online therefore cannot be simply regarded as a less effective part of communication- and amusement-oriented Internet use. Moreover, the phenomenon which has been commonly found and confirmed in many existent studies, indicating that lower educated youngsters more often engage in and have higher interest in online chatting than their higher educated peers has to be re-interpreted. Clearly, instead of blaming the lower educated for their strong bonding with online chatting, it has to be learned what motivations they have in doing that, and what they are exactly experiencing and acquiring, and then to figure out
how to help them achieve more benefits from not only online chatting but also in general online informal learning. Based on the above-mentioned findings, the critical contingencies embedded in online chatting to reconstruct the network social capital of unprivileged migrant youth and to further reduce their educational disadvantages need to be seriously thought out and sufficiently developed.

As focused in this research, the individual motivational role in reconstructing their online networks is mainly related to the desire for social integration. However, the motivation factor can also be multi-faceted. As shown in the most recent “digital youth” project specifically focusing on youth’s social network sites (Ito et al., 2008), in addition to the friendship-driven ones, the interest-driven sites constitute the other principal genre of participation in online socio-cultural networks. “Interest-driven practices are what youth describe as the domain of the geeks, freaks, musicians, artists, and dorks, who are identified as smart, different, or creative, and who generally exist at the margins of teen social worlds. Youngsters find a different network of peers and develop deep friendships through these interest-driven engagements” (Ibid., 10). Similarly, the interest-related motivations of the migrant youth users, be if for the same or different interests, can actively help these young people to reconstruct their networks, namely to have more online bridging networks. Nevertheless, this necessitates further empirical investigation particularly to support the notion that interest-driven networking can help to enable contingencies for the lower educated migrant youth and thus to moderate their educational disadvantages.

In summary, it can now be comprehensively concluded that parallel to the persistent reproductive mechanisms of social inequalities, contingencies of reconstructing socio-cultural networks and consequently the reduction of such reproductive mechanisms do exist to a certain extent in the online informal learning space. The convincing evidence provided by this research shows a rather high percentage of the online bridging networks constructed by those lower educated but higher integration-motivated Turkish migrant youth who in contrast have a rather strong offline ethnic bonding peer structure. This enables these youngsters to extend their access to resources and support for Bildung, learning and competence acquisition through such online reconstructive bridging networks. There are therefore emerging contingencies for the disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth to moderate their educational inequalities when their active individual roles, particularly their motivations for social integration, are activated and supported as the first indispensable precondition
and additionally when their online bridging networks can be (re)constructed as reconstructive social capital following their motivations as the second. In brief, the combination of both the active role of the disadvantaged migrant youth in reconstructing their networks and the reconstructive role of the bridging networks online in extending their social capital is necessary. The online informal learning is undoubtedly a critical enabling space to foster the role of social actors and to realise the role of the online socio-cultural networks.

The active role of individual motivation in reconstructing one’s network social capital supported by informal learning online is an important factor. However, the activating of such a critical individual role is another issue. Behind the emerging contingencies and the apparently powerful individual role, there is a need to question and reflect why certain social actors play a more active role but not others. More concretely, there is a need to clarify why certain similarly lower social positioned and educated youngsters are higher motivated compared to others.

The active role of social actors in reconstructing their network social capital through online informal learning can easily be attributed solely to the responsibility of the disadvantaged migrant youth. Compared to their similarly lower educated but higher integration-motivated peers (“LOIN” milieu), the lower educated and lower integration-motivated (“LOSE” milieu) Turkish migrant young people can easily be blamed and held responsible for their own “fault”. Such a blaming attitude is common to see in various aspects of the migration society. This, however, is absolutely problematic since this attitude can lead to ignorance or even to the pretence of having no problems. The responsibilities of social institutions, like formal educational institutions and non-formal social pedagogic settings also stay unchanged. As Niemeyer (2005, 89-90) more explicitly demonstrates, this blame-the-victim-strategy serves as an excuse which systematically negates the structural and social grounds for social exclusion and therefore conveniently attributes the full responsibility of social inclusion to the individual and in doing so denies the important role of social responsibility. In this sense, problems relating to underlying structural deficiencies have firstly to be concerned with in order to understand the motivation question posed above.

As summarised before, the excluding mechanisms of structural deficiencies still constitute a major part of the online informal learning space. This must not be under-estimated even when contingencies of reducing educational inequalities do exist.
In the contrary, the individual motivational factor – especially the difference in the motivations for social integration between the “LOIN” milieu and the “LOSE” milieu – clearly reflects the hidden problems deeply embedded in structural deficiencies, or more concretely, in the “milieu-specific mechanisms of the educational segregation” (Vester, 2004b). As found in this research, those lower milieu-positioned Turkish migrant youth, no matter higher or lower integration-motivated, have explicitly strong Turkish bonding peer structure offline. As evidenced in PISA (2000 and 2006), it is undeniably shown that students with migration background in Germany often attend the lowest level schools, such as the “Hauptschulen”. They are mainly visited by the disadvantaged populations in terms of economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, their school conditions such as resources and climate etc. are less favourable. Against this background, the strong ethnic social bonds with Turkish youngsters in offline society can thus reflect to a great extent the inequalities embedded in the formal educational system. This explanation is confirmed by results of the present study. There is a significant correlation (-, 142*) between the offline peer structure and the formal educational background, which indicates that the higher educated the Turkish youngsters are, the more German friends they have, and vice versa. Clearly, the stratified school system plays an important role not only in excluding the educational disadvantaged migrant youth in formal institutions but also in the formation of their ethnic bonding peer structure in the informal context. For the Turkish young people who are higher educated or attending higher level schools, social integration like meeting or making friends with German peers, can be the “effortless implicitness” (Vester, 2004b) of self-assurance and the orientation in their everyday life context. In this context, regardless of their motivation level, be it higher explicit motivation for social integration, like those from the “HIIN” milieu, or lower, like those from the “HIMIX” milieu, their higher proportion of online bridging networks further indicates the effortless reproduction of their offline superiority.

However, this is different among those who are lower educated and have lower social positions in their offline bonding networks. Where is their motivation for social integration from and how can they be motivated? Certainly, they can be self-motivated based on practical reasons, like building useful networks for social support due to their disadvantageous situations. Their daily linguistic-cultural settings, especially at home – for instance, not just only speaking Turkish but often using German or both languages etc. – play an important role in their motivation for social integration. In addition, the
responsibilities of pedagogic settings should not be neglected as these institutions can play an important part to motivate or to activate these motivations of the disadvantaged migrant youth. This is, however, the typical problem existent in Germany. In addition to the stratified institutional structure as the first mechanism of educational segregation, Vester (2004b) accentuates the pedagogic culture as the second form. He argues that specifically “the pedagogic praxis and the school culture are obvious to see in Germany that they do not motivate young people as much compared to other countries” (2004b, 48, my translation).

This is also partially reflected in the present research. Compared to these higher integration-motivated peers from the “LOIN” milieu who mainly speak both Turkish and German languages at home, those with lower motivation from the “LOSE” milieu have a major Turkish language-orientation at home. Accounting for the familial ethno-cultural influence as well as the individual factor, the explicitly lower motivation for social integration of the “LOSE” milieu Turkish migrant youth therefore reflects in the least, a tendency that their motivation particularly for constructing intercultural networks, to a certain extent, has not been much developed be it in school or in out-of-school pedagogic settings. Due to these reasons, those who are lower educated but higher motivated, despite their offline ethnic bonding peer structure, fortunately are still able to construct their bridging networks online. But for the lower educated and less motivated Turkish migrant youngsters, they are not only left to stay in the offline bonding networks but also online. Based on the above argument, the general public image of the disadvantaged migrant youth – as commonly portrayed by media and sometimes also by research – that they often stay within their own ethnic cultural closure both offline and online is problematic. It not only ignores the higher motivation for social integration of some but also denies the underlying social problems contributing to the lower motivation of others. Above all, it lacks critical reflection on whether these disadvantaged migrant young people have been genuinely accepted, equally treated and positively motivated in their hosting society. Or already from the beginning, they have always been excluded.

Such educational excluding mechanisms in pedagogic praxis and culture usually take place unconsciously such as in “pedagogic communication” and in “recommendations of teachers” etc. (Vester, 2004b). They can also be identified in the non-formal social pedagogic settings. Although much more empirical observation and
confirmation is still required, some clues are already provided in this research. There are 
most obvious to see concerning the role of youth centres.

The youth centres visited during this survey, in general, share a strong character of 
a higher proportion of lower educated Turkish migrant youth as visitors. Moreover, 
using Internet at youth centres has a significant correlation with online bonding 
networks. This indicates that the youth centres play an important role in transferring 
social and educational inequalities further into online networks (see chapter 6.4.2). 
Firstly, the strong ethnic bonding peer structure that is often seen in these youth centres 
implies that the intercultural social relations between the Turkish migrant youth and 
their native German peers have not been well developed there. As explained by some 
professionals in these youth centres, due to continual conflicts that happen between the 
two groups or the “unwillingness” of both sides to remain together in one youth house, 
such an ethnic bonding structure has thus been maintained. Clearly, the youth work in 
this field has not played an effective role in motivating not only the Turkish migrant 
youth for social integration but also the German peers for playing and cooperating with 
their migrant peers. In this manner, one critical contingency space which can 
compensate for the segregated informal peer structure is therefore likely to be closed for 
these disadvantaged migrant youth. Such pedagogic arrangements not only 
unconsciously further exclude disadvantaged migrant youth, but also ignore and 
therefore hinder the justice of those youngsters who do have motivation for integration 
and constructing networks with more German peers.

Secondly, as shown by the reproduction of the bonding networks from offline to 
online at youth centres, such unconsciously less-motivating strategies in these social 
pedagogic settings can further influence the construction of online socio-cultural 
networks of the Turkish migrant youth. This indicates that the youth work in this field 
has neither sufficiently recognised the possibilities online nor played an effective role in 
motivating and helping these disadvantaged migrant youth to reconstruct their networks in and for their informal learning online. Consequently, through such less-motivating 
and “non-recognising” (Hughes, 2004) social pedagogic arrangements, the excluding 
mechanisms produced by formal institutional structural deficiencies are just 
unconsciously left to continue in non-formal educational settings and to be further 
reproduced in the informal learning space. Against this problematic background, a 
critical reflexion on the professional arrangement itself then becomes requisite in terms 
of the “reflexive professionalism” (Dewe & Otto, 2001).
Based on all the above discussions, two clues can now be concluded regarding the contingencies in reducing the educational inequalities of the disadvantaged migrant youth through their informal learning in online socio-cultural networks. On one hand, the individual active role as social actors, particularly in the motivation for integration in the disadvantaged migrant youth, can be fostered to some extent in the online informal learning space to construct or reconstruct their network social capital especially their online bridging networks. Critical contingencies can then be accordingly enabled through such reproductive social capital to moderate their educational disadvantages. On the other hand, various excluding mechanisms which limit the unprivileged to get equal Bildung chances are generally not only still existent but also further reproduced in the online informal learning space. Firstly, the milieu-specific inequalities, in particular the structural deficiencies of the formal educational institutions, are to a great extent directly reproduced in the access of the migrant youth to the online bonding and bridging networks. Through the network-related inequalities in acquiring Internet competences between the online bonding and bridging networks as the second dimension, structural inequalities are then continually reproduced into the online informal learning processes of the migrant youngsters. Additionally, the third dimension of the excluding mechanisms is hidden in non-formal educational institutions and can be identified as the unconsciously less-motivating and non-recognising social pedagogic arrangements for the disadvantaged migrant youth, which to some extent functions together with as well as reproduces the other two mechanisms of exclusion. From the social pedagogic perspective, to redress all these forms of inequalities reproduced in the access to, usage of, networking and self-formation on the Internet and to enable contingencies of reconstruction embedded in online networking so that the equality of opportunities and the social inclusion can be improved for all the disadvantaged migrant youth to fulfil their potential and self-formation in the informal Bildung processes online, the notion of “reflexive professionality” needs to be articulated and centred in the youth work related with fostering the Internet use of youngsters.

In the framework of “critical reflexion on the self-understanding of the professional action in the professional-client interaction processes”, “reflexive professionality” requires “investigating, activating and integrating the situational living conditions, the interest positions of clients, the existence or even loss of communicative
relations, the social networking and the political ability of actions” (Dewe & Otto, 2001, 1418, my translation). In the general context of supporting the Internet use of youngsters, as formulated by Klein (2008, 531), professionals need to engage in “the reflexive interaction with different concerns and interests of different users” and “provide appropriate support for different user-groups so as to open an effective possibility to realise their interests”. In this meaning, the “inequality-sensible and -reflexive professional arrangement” (Klein, 2008) is accentuated. This refers to not only the sensibility to discern and define but also the ability to redress the unequal problems existent in Internet use based on the knowledge about the social, cultural, ethnic, and personal contexts of the users in communicative interaction processes both offline and online. It also necessitates the ability to recognise or to anticipate the inequalities that can be implicitly and unconsciously resulting from unequal professional arrangements. Only through such “inequality-sensible and -reflexive professionality” can the reproduction of the disparities as well as the new inequalities in online informal learning space be reduced and prevented. Moreover, it is only in this way that the equality of the “institutional component of social capital” (Karstedt, 2004) can be achieved in youth welfare in respect to supporting the Internet use of young people.

Following this “inequality-sensible and -reflexive professionality” approach, to redress the inequalities of the disadvantaged migrant youth in the informal learning contextualised in online socio-cultural networks, appropriate professional support can only be realised when based on the comprehensive investigation and integration of conditions that influence and limit their using of the Internet. These conditions firstly include the offline milieu-specific backgrounds of these youngsters like their social and educational positions as well as their ethno-cultural orientations in everyday life settings such as being at home or with peers etc. Secondly, they refer to their online milieu structure, namely their bonding and bridging networks online. Finally, these conditions should also involve their personal characters as identified by different individual motivations, needs, concerns and interests etc.

Based on the present research findings of excluding mechanisms and contingencies in reducing educational inequalities in the online informal learning of the migrant youth, there is another point to be accentuated as a critical complement to the “reflexive professionality” in respect to supporting their Internet use. This refers to the motivating youth work that provides professional support to activate the motivations of
the disadvantaged migrant youth for enabling changes and chances through initiativevly exploring and employing the contingencies embedded in the online informal learning space.

The usual self-reflexion of professional arrangements centred in “reflexive professionality” focuses on explicit action processes like doing, offering, supporting and solving problems. In comparison, the rather implicit non-recognition and non-action of the professional arrangement can be easily ignored. As demonstrated in this research, this factor can be illustrated by the less-motivating professional arrangement for disadvantaged migrant youth at the youth centres where they often use the Internet in a rather ethnic bonding peer structure. To realise different motivations, wants, concerns and interests etc. of these disadvantaged youngsters with appropriate support is one important aspect. However, to motivate them to explore the chances in Internet use for self-development in a reflexive interaction process is another. It is the latter that can potentially broaden their interests and concerns, stimulate their self-responsible and self-reflexive learning, and open new chances of changing as initiated by the disadvantaged youth themselves. In contrast to the disadvantaged Turkish migrant youth identified in the “LOIN” milieu who have higher motivations for social integration through the use of Internet and who also have explicit bridging networks online and thus can acquire new chances for self-formation, those of a similar lower social position but who have lower motivations for social integration are in need of necessary motivating and activating support against resignation. The strong bonding networks online constructed by these lower educated and lower motivated Turkish migrant youth provide convincing evidence of this. Against this background, the reflexive youth work for the disadvantaged migrant youth as oriented by “opening the equal chances of using” (Iske, Klein, Kutscher & Otto, 2007) is not only to simply extend offer-forms without exclusion but more importantly, it needs from the very beginning to motivate particularly the lower motivated migrant youngsters to achieve positive dispositions for social integration, for reconstruction of their network relations, and for “life-changing learning” (Walker, 2006) in the processes of Internet use. To put it another way, extended offer forms cannot ignore motivating and guiding the disadvantaged migrant youth to take the initiative to participate in the space of online contingencies. This constitutes one precondition for the youngsters to access the “equal chances of using” as opened by youth welfare.
In addition, such a motivating youth work is also closely related with the Bildung process of self-reflection and is vital in activating the reflexivity of the migrant youngsters during using and for using the Internet. “Reflexivity is the ability of the individuals of a social system to reflect on and evaluate both their conception of the system and their role in it and to choose activities according to their own reflexive evaluation” (Webb, 2006, 36). As argued by Livingstone (2006, 215), “it is only when people are given an opportunity to reflect on actual learning practices in relation to their daily lives that much informal learning is recognized as much by the learners”. In this sense, different forms of the pedagogic motivating work are needed in opening such chances for the disadvantaged migrant youth, namely in helping them to positively engage in a reflexive online informal learning process and to activate the online contingencies which can reduce their educational disadvantages. It can thus be argued that motivation should be included in the primary educational capabilities that reflexive social pedagogy needs to activate and foster for youngsters, especially for disadvantaged migrant youth when following the capability approach in terms of promoting social equality.

Reflexive motivating youth work to support the disadvantaged migrant youth in exploring the online chances for informal learning and self-formation is becoming increasingly necessary in respect to the construction and reconstruction of their online networks as extension of their social capital. The evidenced online network-related inequalities combined with the advantages of the online bridging networks in fostering the competences of the Turkish migrant youth indicate that “networked individualism” – specialised relations with whom one wants in virtual space – is not absolutely an ideal status of social networking. Particularly against the background of the strong bonding networks online constructed by the lower educated, higher ethnic separated and lower motivated (“LOSE” milieu) Turkish migrant youth, the formation of “networked individualism” clearly necessitates appropriate social pedagogic intervention and support. It is thus necessary to advise and to show the disadvantaged migrant youth how to explore the contingencies embedded in online social networking, especially in the bridging networks. The need to motivate them to initatively optimise or (re)construct their networks based on self-reflexion on their current network status is also equally critical. Only when these youngsters are motivated and encouraged then can their individual roles as social actors be activated to change the unequal structure or at least to mobilise in the social structure.
In this context, next to the individual-centred online bonding and bridging networks, appropriate linking networks as “linking social capital” (Woolcock, 2000; Kessl, Otto & Ziegler, 2002; Domínguez & Watkins, 2003; Kessl & Otto, 2004; Karstedt, 2004) need to be initiated and provided by youth work. In the context of supporting Internet use of the disadvantaged migrant youth, such “linking social capital” firstly involves constructing interactive relations with these users. Secondly, it refers to motivating them as well as helping them with online social networking, especially in the orientation of a broader bridging networking such as the intercultural, or even inter-educational and interclass networking when possible. The “linking social capital” for the disadvantaged migrant youth is therefore much broadened in meaning. It is not simply a leverage or sustained access to formal institutions for them but more importantly, a reflexive professional support directly provided by non-formal social pedagogic institutions to link them with the accepting society. As argued by Woolcock (2000), the poor often means typically more “bonding capital”, maybe modest “bridging capital” but much less or almost no “linking capital”. This means that the disadvantaged migrant youth, given that they simultaneously also value “bonding capital” to get by, still need not only “bridging capital” to get ahead but also “linking capital” that can motivate and help them to get ahead. In this sense, the “linking social capital” provided by youth work in motivating and supporting the (reconstruction of) social networking online of the disadvantaged migrant youth then plays a critical role in promoting their equal “getting the social relations right” (Woolcock, 2001) as well as their capability of “social relations and social networks” as one primary educational capability of young people (Walker, 2006).

Based on the above discourse, it becomes clear that to increase the social positions and especially the educational achievements of the disadvantaged migrant youth in Germany, the provision of only language fostering (OECD, 2006; Tholuck, 2006) is far from enough. Language integration is one but networking integration also represents an essential aspect of social integration. The disadvantaged migrant youth can better integrate into the “hosting society” only when they are really accepted and highly encouraged and supported to integrate. This can be partly mirrored by the extent they have (constructed) equal intercultural social networking and their interaction with German people and especially with their German peers. In this respect, the informal learning in online socio-cultural networks is undoubtedly a critical contingency space, in which reflexive youth work can play a promoting and enabling role.
As the last critical complement to reflexive youth work in supporting Internet use of disadvantaged migrant youth, to motivate and help them to (re)construct their online social networking cannot ignore the bonding networks existent among them. Despite that the online bonding networks are generally not as advantageous as the online bridging networks for the youngsters to develop competences, they do provide them with a certain necessary support which is strongly related to their own ethnic culture as found in this research. In addition, such bonding networks are also important to foster their emotional integrity like “feeling more settled and stronger” (Christopoulou & Rydin, “CHICAM” 2004) and therefore can also be providing them with “stronger social capital” (Haug, 2006). Accordingly, in respect to activating and fostering more bridging networks online for these young people, the ethnic and cultural reasons why they prefer to have bonding networks also need to be understood and simultaneously contextualised into the professional arrangement. Instead of being absolutely denied, the positive effects of the online bonding networks can be integrated with fostering the construction of online bridging networks. In this context, the meaning of “intercultural competences” of professionals (Mecheril, 2002) is plain to see in “reflexive professionality”.

Clearly, following the approach of “inequality-sensible and -reflexive professionality”, youth welfare can play a critical role in the reconstruction of the learning culture for the sake of moderating educational disparities of disadvantaged migrant youth and improving their social inclusion. This is a new culture of equal informal learning in online socio-cultural networks, which is first of all oriented by Bildung, centred on individuals, and embedded in networks. This culture stimulates and values the motivations of the disadvantaged migrant youth as preconditions for their integration, participation and learning. In addition, it fosters their initiative roles as social actors in life-changing through reconstructing their network social capital.

The construction of such a new learning culture, however, by all means necessitates political support and initiative. At issue is to reflect to what extent and in which orientation informal learning as a “‘bottom-up’ initiative” (Sefton-Green, 2006) to empower the disadvantaged youth can be accepted and fostered. There is also the question of to what extent life competences in a holistic spectrum acquired by the disadvantaged migrant youth in online informal learning – not only formal-knowledge-oriented but also social, practical and self competences – can be valued by and integrated into the so-called learning and knowledge society that has
actually been much dominated by formal knowledge and information and oriented by
the economy. Additionally, it is also critical to question how the youngsters’
motivations, for instance, their positive dispositions for school as found in PISA
(OECD, 2006) and in this research, and their positive attitudes toward social integration
etc., can be fulfilled when they are still positioned in the stratified excluding educational
system. This challenge can even proceed further to consider if the educational
disadvantaged migrant youth, who still have or can only acquire the lower or less
favourable certificates despite critical development of their life competences through
informal learning online, can access equitable chances to enter the labour market. As
criticised by Vester (2004b), the criteria of “literacy” employed in PISA study, despite
an extension, still do not include all the social milieus in particular the underprivileged
milieus. They are absolutely not much about the capabilities toward the life formation
(Winkler, 2004). As claimed by Bock (2004), “Bildung is more than PISA”. In the
midst of an ever-changing complicated, uncertain and unequal networked learning
society, Bildung is not only more than PISA, but more than school, formal education
and acquisition of competences as preferred by the labour market. As theoretically
formulated in this research, Bildung is the full development of one’s potentials and
capabilities into an inward harmonic whole in the complex self-world relationships.
Basically, it is oriented by the life world.

Based on the above critics, the political support for constructing such a new equal
informal learning culture online for the sake of the disadvantaged migrant youth is
supposed to remove the excluding mechanisms rooted in the social, economic and
educational hierarchies as well as in the socio-cultural closure. Above all, it is essential
to accentuate the complete concept of Bildung and to value the holistic development of
life competences in youngsters. In this sense, there is a need to foster an integral
Bildung landscape including not only formal, but also non-formal and informal
processes of education and learning. Informal learning online can only enable a partial
reconstruction of social capital of disadvantaged migrant youth and compensate to some
extent for their educational inequalities, even after the involvement of active individual
roles and also the reflexive professional arrangement. Only when the closed entrance is
deconstructed through the insiders who define the keys (Heikkinen & Niemeyer, 2005)
can the contingencies for disadvantaged migrant youth be radically enabled to moderate
their educational disparities through informal learning, not only online but also offline.