

# 1st Dialogue on "Platforms For Collective Awareness And Action"

Brussels, 9 September 2011, European Commission

## Forum: ADDRESSING RESEARCH CHALLENGES AND OTHER OPEN ISSUES

Session chaired by **Robert Madelin**, Director General, DG INFSO, European Commission.

Report by **Fabrizio Sestini**, Scientific Officer of the Paradiso project, DG INFSO, European Commission (report available at [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/collectiveawareness/](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/collectiveawareness/))

This session was meant to be an open forum giving voice to a number of participants which were identified shortly before the event. As such, in many respects it was an "exercise of style" in order to deliver clear messages in a very concise manner. This report is based also on the numerous tweets made by participants during the session.

The first panellist was **Herman Koëter**, Managing Director of the Orange House Partnership. His talk was focused on innovative manners to effectively communicate food information thanks to ICT. The objective is to provide factual, verifiable and honest information to consumers, in easy manners (e.g. through smartphones), to allow **informed choices** in respect to health, sustainability, energy saving characteristics of the different products.

**Max Froumentin**, Programme Manager at the World Wide Web Foundation, focused on the need to build a **globally accessible web**, where any type of phone can be considered an access point. This would bring the accessibility of Internet worldwide from 18% to 75%. The problem then would shift from the availability of access devices to availability of relevant content, with some kind of "entry level" which can allow participation of all kinds of people (from farmers in Africa to those with learning and reading difficulties...). For him, the only credible stakeholders for this change are those who empower citizens and participation. We should promote a culture where **technology is not a given but a social construct**.

**Philippe Aigrain**, CEO of Sopinspace, Co-founder of "La Quadrature du Net", offered a passionate speech about the recent "**counter-reform**" of the Internet, made by the big industrial players who have been reinforcing their dominant position by enforcing extensions of copyright and patents and by advocating increasing security; eventually, in current days, by recentralising computing, data storage and service provision according to the cloud paradigm. To balance this, he backs the efforts for **new decentralised infrastructure** for the open Internet (e.g. Freedom Box, Diaspora, Commotion, etc.), which will empower citizens and participation and preserve the freedom of the Internet infrastructure. He invited the EU to provide **more support to free software and open hardware common infrastructure** (e.g. Arduino), with different funding schemes (e.g. 100% funding).

**Malene Bruun**, Project Manager from the European Environment Agency, described the Eye on Earth Development towards a **Citizen Science**. In particular, she described how ICT can facilitate collective action against invasive alien species in our environment, by gathering data through web and smart phone applications, with the collaboration of normal citizens.

**Joe Cannataci**, Professor at the University of Groningen and coordinator of the EU project CONSENT, talked about the implications of social platforms for privacy and data protection. He was in favour of a holistic approach, transparently setting guarantees for the quality of content of online social media, without any form of strict control but rather assuming **self-regulation**, for instance based on collective awareness platforms.

Some questions asked whether control is an outdated form of regulation, and whether it would be more important ensuring that innovation is constructed in a way that reflects our society's

will. As remarked by the chairman, "the tragedy [for Europe] would be having neither an effective regulatory framework for the innovation we need nor obtaining for society a voice in that technological future".

The second part of this open forum session was dedicated to shorter talks, including:

**Alok Nandi**, Director of Architempo and Founder of coCreationcamp, on the networking of public institutions, creative people and private corporations.

**Vittorio Loreto**, Research Leader ISI Foundation, introduced the FET **EveryAware** project, enhancing environmental awareness through social information technologies. He described "**experimental tribes**" of users wearing sensors of normal smartphones to conduct web-based experiments, thus implementing a form of Citizen Science.

**Luisa de Amicis** and **Lucas Fülling**, from the Euclid Network (the European network of civil society), talked about how citizens can provide solutions for a sustainable society using ICT. They provided two examples of raising awareness to engage citizens: and observatory on civil dialogue, and Naples 2.0, a contest inviting citizens to submit innovative solutions to social challenges.

**Laszlo Papp**, CTO of **echo** - Living Democracy, presented his project, intended to connect like-minded people, in order to discuss (cross-language and self-regulating) and act, to make a change by bridging the gap between virtual discussions and real-world actions.

**Lucy Setian**, Business Development Manager at TCS Digital World, presented a few examples of projects using awareness from social media, mobile devices and location positioning, for instance for learning as entertainment, awareness raising, or fast reaction to accidents.

**Willy De Backer**, Head of the Greening Europe Forum, and Social Media journalist, reminded the background scenario of the initiative warning about the present perfect storm of unsustainability. Can ICT connect the islands of sustainability represented by current platforms? There is a dark side of the internet, represented by the energy consumption of internet itself, and by the populist movements using internet trolls to steer discussions.

**Ricard Ruiz de Querol**, from the Barcelona Media Foundation, focused on trust architectures for collective awareness and action, and the underlying **trust chain** which is essentially a social concept, embedded in different cultures under different assumptions.

**Audrey Scozzaro Ferrazzini**, Manager at RIM, presented her view of how mobile devices have contributed to community forming, also by providing augmented reality.

**Alia Papageorgiou**, Editor at Qwentes, described the "**Crisis Commons**", as groups of technically minded volunteer people, who are using their hi-tech skills to do good e.g. in emergency response. Their main added value is to provide connectivity in time of crisis.

**Fabrizio Davide**, professor at the University of Rome, presented the Open Genius open source approach to **crowdfunding of research**, based on an open platform for research, "philanthropy 2.0" and P2P reviews of the projects to be funded, as an example of Citizen Science.

**Leandro Navarro**, Professor at the Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya, presented his FIRE project CONFINE building **Community IP Networks**, which are meant to connect people in an ad-hoc, d-i-y approach, without needing centralised infrastructures and therefore very resilient to accidental or intentional service interruptions. It is based on sharing of knowledge and collective action, in a bottom-up self-organising evolutionary approach driven by needs and trial-errors.

As concluding remarks, the chairman observed that a success factors for this area is to drive **holistic collaboration** encompassing all the different social and technical facets of the problem, through coordination actions which can distil from current activities the best practices, and cross-projects research to better define broader platforms. Such best practices would show **how to embed technology in political and social processes that will generate real commitment and effort**. As policy-makers, this complex process has to be approached being very careful and modest. But neither the size of the challenges nor their complexity, or the need for modesty, should be an excuse for inaction and continuing to do research in silos. He remarked the **urgency and the size of the challenges** presented, as well as the importance of the areas which have been mentioned, where indeed EC is committed to do more, such as health, energy, ecosystem, food, development, access for the poor.