

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

Brussels, 9 September 2011, European Commission

DEFINING A VISION FOR COLLECTIVE AWARENESS AND ACTION

Session chaired by **Mario Campolargo**, Director, Emerging Technologies and Infrastructures, DG INFSO, European Commission.

Wrap-up by **Fabrizio Sestini**, Scientific Officer of the Paradiso project, DG INFSO, European Commission.

The Keynote speech was given by **Genevieve Bell**, Director of Interactions and Experience Research at Intel Labs. It was a broad talk about salient issues for the post PC world. For instance, she remarked that **demographics** are rapidly changing and will strongly influence the future scenarios: instead of addressing technology at the younger generations, we should better target them at the 50+, which are already outnumbering the 18-. Or to women, who are the fastest rising group of people accessing technology. She pointed out that successful networks always **involve humans**, sometimes in unexpected manners (e.g. in India people bring their 2G mobile phones to shops where they are daily recharged with new content by a local employee, thus elegantly overcoming the need for 3G). In general, network complexity has outpaced support networks, creating risks of disruption; the result are increasingly crowded conversations, but "full of possibilities". And modern technologies also bring new anxieties, which more and more people overcome by looking for **places where to be disconnected**. Another "surprising" observation is that TV is still the dominant platform worldwide, in spite of the enormous growth of Internet hours.

The presentation from **Frank Escoubes**, founder of imaginationforpeople.org (Canada), focused on the concept of platforms for collective awareness and action, where **needs are co-designed and solutions are co-created**, exploiting **open data sets** with no predefined format, for the community to invent the need to be served by the data set. He introduced the concept of "**curated smartsourcing**" which is based on coordination techniques and competencies platforms in order to stimulate (and partially shape) the online crowds. This would also need the definition of some "social currencies" to acknowledge participation and reputation. He also mentioned that real innovation would be achieved by **PPPP**: Private-Public-People Partnerships.

Dirk Helbing, coordinator of FuturICT (one of the projects which are competing for a FET Flagship), presented a view of the current world as a complex system shaped by mega-events such the financial crisis, the Arab spring and the Fukushima disaster. In his vision, this is related to the fact that **strongly connected systems** have higher probability of extreme events (it's the "fat tail" of the resulting non-Gaussian probability distribution, leading to 100-fold increase in blackswan probabilities); in such systems, centralised control fails, we need bottom-up interaction. He then went on to describe how ICT can harness this principle to help solving problems, from simple application to optimise traffic lights, to collective self-awareness creation, management of the socio-economic climate, measuring the invisible (social capital, well-being, the social footprint of political decisions), building a web of trust. These would be the objectives of the **living Earth simulator** which he wants to build.

Amelia Andersdotter, "Lisbon" Member of the European Parliament for the Swedish Pirate Party, warned that technologies born to openly connect people have come to be closed and **controlled by commercial interests**, threatening privacy and anonymity: she sees in the

corporate data aggregation a power shift away from people. She would envisage "**peace**" as **an application** of technologies. She then said that policy results must be followed-up by policy decisions, thus calling for **more public investments in infrastructures** to keep them open. She also reminded that new technologies, to make sense, must be linked to sustainable energy production, in order not to aggravate the current problems (in this, linking to the speech of Peter Madden the day before, where he said that ICT should increase society's resilience, not just efficiency).

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumers' Organisation, described ICT as a tool for **Consumer Empowerment** (even though she also mentioned this concept as one of the current "magic words", together with "Holistic Approach" and "Sustainable Growth" – which is possibly an oxymoron), with concrete examples of the different forms, such as **mobilization, democracy, knowledge sharing**, and for **changing consumers' behaviour**. She also described the challenges to overcome, in terms of access to ICT, digital divide (30% of EU citizens have never used Internet), net neutrality, privacy, and especially **involvement of the civil society in the design** of future technologies: science has to adapt to people, not viceversa. ICT should be used just as a tool to bridge the gap between awareness and action.

The last speaker was **Thomas Roessler**, Technology and Society Domain Leader at W3C, who made a brief history of the emergence of related ideas: **man-machine symbiosis** was proposed in the 60's, in the 90's ICT tools started to **extend the limits of the mind**, now we talk about **collective intelligence** (Halpin, 08). His reflections were focused on how to build this collective intelligence, based on correlation of human behaviour and on mass observation and data processing, in a manner which is really **distributed** (and anonymized). We lack **vision** on how to connect industrialized big data with collective awareness, taking into account privacy concerns. Geoff Mulgan in the previous session had mentioned the parallelism between bees, which are stupid animals living in an intelligent society, and men, which are intelligent individuals in a stupid society: perhaps, technology can help making our society as a whole more intelligent.

During the **open discussion**, **privacy** was debated at long, described by some as a floating concept. Mrs Bell mentioned that in traditional societies the privacy problems were often eased by the human capability (and attitude) to lie, which is often essential for the good functioning of society, whereas machines cannot lie. Should we teach machines how to lie?

Alois Ferscha reminded that in this kind of global developments we must also think at how to include (or at least respect) those people who cannot or do not want to participate.

Some final questions addressed the issue of the possible **manipulation** of the data used or generated in these distributed collective systems ("information is never pure"). There was a feeling that, somehow, **public authorities should take charge** of the legitimate expectations of citizens that somebody takes care of their privacy and of the quality of data.

During the session some 20 participants were tweeting, and this short report takes up the interesting (and useful) comments made by online participants.

Blogs are also available, for instance at <http://yfrog.com/mmgz6fj>, <http://cosent.nl/en/blog>, <https://plus.google.com/103411760688868522737/posts/eNZuebXkfRs> .

All the **relevant links** presented have been added to the website of collective awareness at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/collectiveawareness/links/index_en.htm .