



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

Web Communities for Statistics for Social Innovation The experience and the lessons learned

Web-COSI project has been designed with the general aim to foster the engagement of society at large with statistics beyond GDP. Specific objectives are represented by the exploration on how digital initiatives are functioning to involve Web2.0 communities and the set-up of wiki applications to facilitate the access to data and information. This policy brief presents the two-year Web-COSI experience and the lessons learned. In particular, it illustrated the points of strength and the open issues highlighted considering the perspectives from the various stakeholders involved in the discussion: NSIs, civil society, social entrepreneurs, International organizations, Governments, Academia, business world, and society at large.

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ABSTRACT

Web-COSI is built up on the conviction that statistics are fundamental to drive behaviours towards Social Innovation

Web-COSI is built up on the conviction that statistics - data and information that lead to knowledge - are fundamental to drive individual and collective behavior for better lives towards a conscious Social Innovation.

Web-COSI was designed to respond to the need for investing in communication and new technologies to:

1. implement the engagement of society at large with statistics beyond GDP to foster their understanding and usage - opening up to non-experts
2. map how digital initiatives function to engage citizens and to exploit on-line data and information
3. implement tools for producing, collecting, visualizing information and data bridging the top-down and bottom-up approaches

Web-COSI moves from the two epochal revolutions that characterize the present era – the ICT explosion and the “beyond GDP movement”. They both represent new ways of people engagement - pushing to enlarge the traditional

vision on how to deal with statistics - opening the dialogue among experts and non-experts towards a Social Innovation based on knowledge.

The theme of communities' engagement and the exploitation of new technologies for better data is at the centre of the present statistical and economic debate carried out by traditional and new stakeholders. Participatory Web2.0 platforms enable different sectors of society to interact, opening - up to *non-experts* the dialogue for a better informed society. This process opens opportunities and poses challenges to the various key players involved to drive social innovation for a sustainable development. Web-COSI has analysed and conceptualized the perspectives from the various protagonists, underlining the points of strength and the open issues argued during the two-year activity carried out. Digital tools to foster the engagement on statistics and data have been set-up as outputs of the project.

Key words:

Web2.0, beyond GDP, experts/non-experts dialogue, societal awareness

Contents

Introduction	
The different stakeholders' perspectives	
The communication and dissemination of data	
Some concluding insights	
PROJECT PARAMETERS	
PROJECT IDENTITY	

Introduction

“New technologies are leading to an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available, creating unprecedented possibilities for informing and transforming society”

A world that counts¹

Web2.0 is profoundly transforming the way information is created and shared

Over the last 15 years, Web2.0 applications are profoundly transforming the way information is created and shared and the way how to build up knowledge within the society at large. The process is having an increasing impact on statistics: from new ways of collecting data to new ways of disseminate, visualize and recover them. Online platforms and networks - founded on the interactivity - provide a measure of how the roles of producers and users of information and data can radically change and how the relationship is moving to bridge the top-down and bottom-up approaches.

This process brings to enlarge the traditional vision on how to construct and deal with statistics and data opening the dialogue among experts and new non-expert forces of the society. Communities' involvement can be achieved both indirectly – by using the ‘liquid data’ available on the web (Big Data, Open Data – supplied by stakeholders and citizens for a variety of reasons) – and directly – through the set-up of collaborative platforms voluntarily nursed by stakeholders and citizens (crowdsourced data).

In conjunction with the Internet explosion, the last 15 years have been characterized by the debate “GDP and beyond” for the definition of new measurements of societal progress in terms of wellbeing and sustainability. It has grown enormously, creating a critical mass without boundaries at the local, national and international levels. Communities are involved in the discussion willing to give their voices to narrow the gap between what ‘cold’ economic data says and what people perceive. The beyond GDP debate (supported by Web2.0) has thus become a “global movement”, pushing for transforming society.

Against this framework, the significant Web-COSI challenge of opening up statistics (focusing on beyond GDP) exploiting the internet and interacting with communities, brought the project to interact with multiple protagonists – traditional ones (national statistical institutes (NSIs), academia, international organisations, government agencies) and new ones (civil society organisations, social entrepreneurs, young people, citizens, and communities at large) – to find new solutions to create a better informed society based on a shared knowledge.

¹ A world that counts, prepared by The Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG), chaired by Enrico Giovannini, November 2014 (www.undatarevolution.org)

Web-COSI challenge of opening up statistics interacting with web communities, brought the project to interact with old and new actors

To reach its goals, the activities carried out in its two-year lifecycle (2014-2015) can be gathered into four groups:

1. The mapping of the existing digital initiatives for communities' involvement with statistics beyond GDP and for the exploitation of new technologies to collect 'better' data, carried out at local, national and global level;
2. The fostering of the debate and the creation of a critical mass through digital initiatives – blogs, online discussions, webinars, newsletters, target citizens campaigns, data visualisation competitions etc. – and the organisation of face-to-face events (five workshops and four focus groups, and participation in international and national events, networking with other EU and global projects);
3. The fostering of the engagement of young people through the set-up of target initiatives and a Youth portal;
4. The facilitation of communities' access to statistics, thereby empowering the collection of locally-generated information and data with the development of a Wiki data portal of progress statistics.

The Wiki progress data portal (managed by the Wikiprogress.org team from OECD) constitutes - with its areas and functions - the interactive tool released by Web-COSI. It contains: the crowd sourced map of the digital initiatives (conceived as an interactive inventory so far has listed more than 150 notable digital initiatives carried out by more than 120 organisations); the Youth Portal; and the European Wikiprogress University Programme.

The impact generated is impressive: 18,000 proactive participants and followers and more than 1.5 million people reached via social media

The discussion generated by Web-COSI activities (5 workshops, 4 focus groups, 5 discussion on line, participation in International events, etc.) has involved a large number of participants. There were some 18,000 proactive participants and followers of the activities, and more than 1.5 million people became better informed via social media.

The results reached are notable in that they demonstrate a strong potential for a socioeconomic impact and wider societal implications. An exhaustive documentation on the activities carried out and their results is available on the website (www.webcosi.eu).

The different stakeholders' perspectives

The dialogue has permitted to analyse the role and the contribution of the different actors involved

The dialogue set-up by Web-COSI has permitted to analyse the role and the contribution of the different actors (both old and new) involved - each one with its needs and expectations - so as to search for new and efficient ways of making use of online data interacting with society at large, underlining the points of strength and the open issues of their engagement.

The National Statistical Institutes (NSIs), the historical producers of official statistics, are now called to exploit the new sources of data (Big, Open, crowd sourced) interacting with citizens to involve them in the process of defining statistics close to their information needs and with the aim to make statistics easy to access and use. It opens the door to a new way of being an NSI, capable to take advantage of the liquid data available in the Net generated by a diversity of providers (public and private) as well as locally generated by crowd sourced platforms. On this side, enormous issues on the integration of non-official data with official data rise. The trade-off between more and real-time data and their quality is an open matter.

The Academia, under the aegis of the EC, UNECE and other International Organizations, such as OECD, are involved, jointly with the NSIs and the research world, in theoretical studies and applicative exercises to explore the potential of the new sources of data (text mining, text grasping, open data linkage, geo-referenced data). Moreover, academia is finding the way to complement traditional statistical and economic courses with ones on new ways of dealing with data and information.

A crucial and well-established actor for the definition of better statistics is the civil society (CS). CS is a proactive protagonist in the search of more exhaustive way of making data with the aim to exploit the potential of locally generated data to create a critical mass to drive the policy action for a sustainable societal progress.

Social entrepreneurship is an emerging force which is becoming a more and more important stakeholder to drive the economy for a sustainable societal growth. The need of structured and unstructured data is fundamental to foster the social business which carries out so many divers ventures dealing with global, national and local matters. Social entrepreneurs are young users of data. In this sense, it is important to build up a common language in order to deal with data and information close to the needs of social entrepreneurship.

International Organizations (IO) and Governments are fully involved into the debate of new ways of collecting data and information interacting with communities and exploiting the data available in Internet. They have a wide perspective pushing for the usage of integrated (official and non-official) datasets to permit comparisons at National and global level. In this sense, it is clear that opening up data by Governments and IO means to set-up

It is fundamental to pay particular attention to the young people involvement with statistics

methodologies to re-use data and the linkage of open data from different sources.

The business world is dealing with this new way of making data in different perspectives. On a side the “ICT market” such as Google, Facebook, and other important private Social Platforms can be seen as provider of the data (collected for its use) and useful to complement official statistics. On the other side the business market has to deal with the new statistics (beyond GDP) in order to read the citizens as conscious consumers to treat no longer with a merely profit approach.

Besides these new and old stakeholders, it is fundamental to pay particular attention to the young people involvement with statistics. On a side young people are the ones who strongly can give their voices using Web2.0 to path the way for a better informed society for a good future. On the other side the young people have to be educated for the new skills needed to construct better statistics.

Moreover, it is crucial to focus on the usage of beyond GDP statistics by policy makers. It is a hard way to go ahead. But now society at large can contribute to steer the policy actions for well-being and sustainable societal progress thanks to the increasing individual and collective awareness nursed by Internet.

The communication and dissemination of data

It is crucial to invest in the communication and dissemination of data to make it more accessible

The Web-COSI experience has highlighted how it is crucial to invest in the communication and dissemination of data to make it more accessible and understandable to society at large. It has to be done in several new and efficient ways.

Storytelling and narrative is a new and potent way to foster the understanding and usage of data. It is a way to help people to understand data and to feel that data can give a picture of the reality close to their individual status and that data can contribute to change behaviours and actions for individual and collective growth. In this direction, there is also the necessity to combine quantitative data with qualitative information and use “alternative data” (for instance, by explaining that a certain phenomenon is equal to four tennis courts in size, etc.).

Web 2.0 technology has a particularly powerful role to play in the communication and dissemination of data. Web 2.0 technology such as mobile and interactive web platforms allow statistical information to be packaged and presented in a way that is much more meaningful for a wider public.

Web-COSI has launched a data visualization competition. The three winners, under 26, have presented notable works to facilitate the access to beyond GDP data

In this direction, data visualizations can be very appealing: they provide a unique means of highlighting new patterns in statistics and looking at the world in a different way. The visualization of data usage is vitally important in enhancing its understanding and engagement. On this side Web-COSI has contributed launching a data visualization competition for well-being data receiving exceptional entries. The entries were judged with respect to clarity, concept and originality by an expert jury. Three of these have been presented on 14 October 2015 at the 5th OECD World Forum² during the Forum Talk "Opening up well-being statistics to new audiences: opportunities and challenges" organized to present the Web-COSI experience.

The three winning works are notable for their diversity and inventiveness of the applications:

- Scattered Well-Being by Andrew Mollica

It “shows how varied well-being measures can be within a country and consequently how country-wide statistics can over-simplify. While it’s convenient to characterize whole populations by talking about national averages, we are often masking a lot of important complexity. This visualization attempts to make understanding this complexity approachable by allowing users to view the overall distribution of different well-being indexes as well as let them focus on a particular area.

- Seeking a Better Life by Fidel Thomet

It “takes a look at what people say is most important to them in life and how this reflects in their choice for a new home. It thereby also raises the question how other aspects, like distance, language and immigration laws, affect the decision.”

- Access to Higher Education is Not Equal by Alice Feng

The concept behind this work is, “that although young adults in developed countries have generally become increasingly well-educated over time, when we take a closer look at the family backgrounds of those young adults, we see that children of less educated parents are under-represented relative to children of highly educated parents. Indeed, most college students come from already privileged backgrounds; children of parents with at most a secondary education are much less likely to enrol in higher education. Since higher levels of education are linked with greater earnings and better economic outcomes, this situation perpetuates inequality.”

² 5th OECD World Forum on ‘Statistics, Knowledge and Policy: Transforming Policy, Changing Lives’ (13-15 October, Guadalajara, Mexico)

Some concluding insights

The Web-COSI final conference has represented a wrap-up of the project experience with a large discussion with the floor

Web-COSI project experience has been presented at the Final Conference “Beyond GDP - Statistics for Everyone”, held at OECD premises in Paris the 3rd December 2015, with a wide participation of various (old and new) stakeholders. The Final Conference was organised in two main sessions: i) “Boost Wellbeing” with the key speeches by Enrico Giovannini, Former Minister of Labour and Social policies, Italy (*New Technologies’ Horizon*) and Filippo Addarii, Director of International strategy, The Young Foundation; co-founder PlusValue, UK (*Civil Society Participation*); ii) “Statistics for Everyone - Facilitate People’s Engagement” with the presentations of the main digital outputs of the project. The conference with the final round table on “*Actionable Priorities and Policy Implications for a sustainable progress based on knowledge*” has represented a wrap-up of the Web-COSI experience with a large discussion among the panellists, the partners, and the floor in a looking forward perspective.

The key element pointed out during the conference can be listed as follows:

- Web-COSI has demonstrated that the involvement of Web communities for statistics and the exploitation of new technologies to empower the construction, the understanding and the usage of new statistics (towards an integration of official statistics with non-official statistics) is a great and inexorable challenge. Thus, this process requires new skills, culture and a radical change of mind set.
- The collective platforms are a great opportunity to catch. All protagonists can take advantage from the Web connection among citizens and stakeholders. It is undeniably a path for a democratic participation.
- The usage of such platforms to communicate and disseminate data is crucial. But it should be clear that to share crowdsourced data and information doesn’t mean to construct solid statistics.
- The NSIs, devoted to the production of official statistics, must use these platforms to collect data and information to complement the official statistics to give a real picture of the phenomenon of a certain territory.

Web-COSI has experimented the crucial importance of the partnerships among different sectors of society to create a shared awareness towards Social Innovation

In conclusion, Web-COSI has experimented the crucial importance of the partnerships among different sectors of society. Only joint efforts of traditional stakeholders and new ones – putting together expert and non-expert forces – can steer the exploitation of all the sources of data and information to create a shared awareness towards Social Innovation.

PROJECT PARAMETERS

Web-COSI was designed to respond to the call (FP7 ICT Work Programme 2013) launched by the Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation (CAPS), based on the idea that collaborate through crowd sourced platforms can produce solutions for a wide range of social needs. Web-COSI is a co-ordination action (2014-2015) with the general objective to foster the engagement of citizens and society at large in the area of new measures of societal progress and well-being using the opportunities given by Web 2.0. Specific objective is to implement tools for collecting, producing and visualizing information and data towards a better integration of official and non-official statistics. The release of a Wiki of progress statistics, at mid-term of the project, is envisaged with the aim to foster the use of locally generated data to bridge top-down and bottom-up approaches. Web-COSI is based on a consortium that sees the collaboration among two relevant Institutions (Istat and OECD), a civil society organisations and a social entrepreneurs' community, representing society at large. The consortium is well-balanced and multidisciplinary creating synergies for the integration of the different approaches. Specifically, Web-COSI work plan aims at: a) mapping existing digital initiatives for communities' involvement carried out by NSIs, civil society, social entrepreneurs, International organisation, and society at large; b) create a critical mass through: target campaigns, data visualization competitions, setup of a European Wikiprogress University Programme; c) facilitate the communities' access to statistics empowering the collection of civil society grass root locally generated data with the development of a Wiki of progress statistics. Moreover, various open events are organised to involve the greatest number of audience: 5 workshops, 4 focus groups and a final conference.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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Duration

January 2014 – December 2015 (24 months)

Budget

EU contribution: 589,000 €

Websitewww.webcosi.eu**Further reading**Research papers and reports are available at www.webcosi.eu**Main contact**rd-projects@istat.it

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