Web-COSI Project

Duration: 2014-2015

Coordination and support action

FP7 Call ICT 10: Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation

Web Communities for Statistics for Social Innovation

www.webcosi.eu

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Summary of Web-COSI experience - December 2015

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The Web-COSI context

The involvement of web communities and the exploitation of new technologies for 'better statistics' is a crucial theme at the forefront of the current research scene. The process capitalises on the two epochal revolutions that are characterising the present phase: the ICT explosion and the 'beyond GDP' movement.

On one side, Web2.0 applications are profoundly transforming the way information is created and shared and the way in which knowledge is built up within society at large. The process is having an increasing and inexorable impact on statistics: from new ways of collecting data to new ways to disseminate, visualise and recover them.

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).

This process serves to enlarge the traditional vision on how to construct and deal with statistics and data, thus opening the dialogue between 'experts' and new 'non-expert' elements of society. Furthermore, this definitively provides 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.

On the other side, the 'beyond GDP' debate for the definition of new measurements of societal progress in terms of wellbeing and sustainability has grown enormously, creating a critical mass without boundaries at the local, national and international levels. Alongside the traditional stakeholders, citizens and communities are involved in the discussion; they are willing to lend their voices to the need to go beyond GDP, to narrow the gap between what 'cold' economic data says and what people perceive in terms of quality of life related to societal progress and sustainability. The beyond GDP debate (supported by Web2.0) has thus become a global movement, pushing for transforming society.

The powers generated by the 'new technologies' and by the 'beyond GDP movement' push for a new conscious knowledge towards a social innovation, putting the needs of society as a whole at the centre of the progress, rather than the needs of private individuals.

The Web-COSI exercise

Against this context, and amongst the multiple recent actions supported by the EU, stands the experiences drawn from the FP7 Web-COSI project – Web Communities for Statistics for Social Innovation. The project, funded by DG CONNECT, was designed to explore the potential of Web2.0 communities for statistics beyond GDP – and is willing to contribute in an era of data revolution in which "new technologies are leading to an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available, creating unprecedented possibilities for informing and transforming society."[1]

The project is based on a four-partner Consortium, led by Istat – the Italian National Statistical Institute – in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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

(OECD – www.oecd.org) and alongside Lunaria – the Italian Association for Social Promotion (www.lunaria.org), and i-genius – a Social Entrepreneur web community from UK (www.i-genius.org).

The significant challenge involved in opening up statistics exploiting the internet and interacting with communities means that the consortium interacts with multiple protagonists – traditional stakeholders (national statistical institutes (NSIs), academia, international organisations, government agencies) and new stakeholders (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.

Web-COSI project has conceived a work plan aimed at reaching two main objectives: to foster the understanding and usage of new statistics beyond GDP; and to push for a better integration and complementarity of official and non-official statistics, exploiting the new sources of data available in the net.

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

- 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;

- 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 - among these the 5th OECD World Forum in Mexico, 13-15 October 2015 - networking with other EU and global projects);

- The fostering of the engagement of young people through the set-up of target initiatives – a European Wikiprogress University Programme and a Youth portal; and

- 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 debate generated by Web-COSI is impressive and the conclusions 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 on their results is available on the Web-COSI website (www.webcosi.eu).

The engagement of citizens and stakeholders reached by Web-COSI is also extraordinary. 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 stakeholders' involvement

Web-COSI has carried out a number of activities to connect and interact with the different stakeholders (both old and new) to empower the dialogue around the theme of the project. Four on line discussions, five workshops and four focus groups have been the occasions that, together with the participation in National and International Conferences, have contribute to create a critical mass on the central theme of Web-COSI. The dialogue set-up by the project has permitted to highlight the role of the different actors involved 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.

National Statistical Institutes
NSIs, the historical producers of official statistics, are now called upon to open the door to a new way of operating so as to be able to take advantage of the liquid data available on the internet generated by a diversity of providers (public and private) as well as that locally generated by crowd sourced platforms. In this direction, NSIs are setting up Web2.0 initiatives to foster an interaction with citizens and to empower statistics via the usage of the internet as a new source of data. They are also moving from fostering the communication and dissemination of statistical information to the exploitation of new ways of collecting data from the internet, evaluating the potential of crowdsourced platforms for a knowledge closer to citizens' needs.

> ➢ *In this sense, the trade-off between having more and real-time information and the quality of the statistical information produced is an open issue.*

Civil society
Civil society (CS) plays a major role in providing data on wellbeing: it complement official statistics whilst covering relevant dimensions and aspects that determine, or have a direct impact on, the quality of life of citizens with adequate, updated, and fit-for-purpose information. Civil society actors involved in the production of statistical information on wellbeing show a broad number of objectives: increasing and 'democratising' scientific knowledge; stimulating advocacy for better public policies; pressuring public institutions; engaging citizens; disseminating to the public at large the 'fundamentals' (e.g. statistical data, indicators, indexes and so on) to read and understand changes and challenges occurring in our complex societies. The role of CS is crucial at the local level.

> ➢ *In this direction, the development of local portals, conceived as data warehouses and tools to enhance the dialogue among all sectors of the locality, must be implemented.*

Social entrepreneurs
Social entrepreneurship is an emerging and important force for a new economy based on societal progress from a wellbeing perspective. Social entrepreneurs are young users of data but often lack the necessary resources to be able to analyse them at a consistent high level. Greater emphasis should thus be applied to enabling social entrepreneurs to partner with analysts and, indeed, an increased awareness on how to access existing sources of data facilitated by Web2.0 technologies.

> ➢ *In this direction, 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 organisations
International organisations such as the OECD and UNECE push for the usage of integrated (official and non-official) datasets in a wide perspective. The main effort here is to harmonise the processes and the data in order to permit a comparison among the national realities and a ranking system in terms of societal progress.

> ➢ *The indicators so constructed demonstrate the matter of inequality among the different areas of the world.*

Governments
Governments are working to open the data related to their actions and results in favour of public transparency and participation. The availability of free, accessible, comprehensible, and updated

data and information allows citizens to consciously participate in democratic life. Opening up data by governments means more than just putting it on a website; for data to be truly open, it must not only be freely available online, it should also be presented in a format that maximises its potential for re-use.

➢ *Methodologies to re-use data and the linkage of open data from different sources are ongoing issues that need further attention.*

Business
The business world is an actor which deals with new sources of data from different perspectives. On the one hand, private ICT companies (Google, Facebook, etc.) can be data providers. On the other, businesses need to know their consumers and their needs in order to understand what to produce and how to produce it.

➢ *In the first of these perspectives, the set-up of Private and Public Partnerships (PPPs) is a matter which needs to be investigated. In the second, a close interaction with communities and a careful reading of new measurements of societal progress is an opportunity that should be grasped.*

Academia
The academic and research worlds are involved in the exploitation of new technologies, in partnership mainly with NSIs, to study how to use the liquid data available on the internet by testing new techniques (e.g. text mining, text grasping, open data linkage, geo-referenced data) alongside the use of crowdsourced (locally generated) data.

➢ *Academia is beginning to complement traditional statistical and economic courses with ones on new statistics and on new ways of dealing with data and information.*

Young people
Finally, the crucial role of young people. They are key stakeholders with a fundamental role to play. New generations are particularly eager to be involved in the data and information available, and for what purposes; they are willing to contribute to the call for the push for societal progress that ties in to their own expectations for the future. Young people are also the ones who will contribute to the construction of new and better statistics thanks to their proactive efforts in using new skills and technologies.

➢ *The set-up of new curricula and training courses to learn new skills is therefore another matter that will need to be addressed in the near future.*

Web-COSI main outputs

As a result of the activities carried out to open-up the dialogue among experts and non-experts on its central theme, the main outputs delivered by the project are:

1. An interactive crow sourced map of digital initiatives beyond GDP, that so far has listed 148 notable initiatives carried out by more than 111 organisations, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches;
2. The set-up of a Wiki progress data portal where to download and upload data and information beyond GDP;
3. The set-up of a Youth Portal;

4. The launch of the European Wikiprogress University Programme;
5. The data visualization competition on well-being statistics.

The above digital initiatives have been developed on the Wikiprogress platform hosted by OECD (www.wikiprogress.org).

Moreover, the Consortium has released **six documents** which deepen the theme of the 'communities' involvement and new technologies exploitation' in its different perspectives:

1. *Web communities' engagement. Exploitation of new technologies for statistics. Web-COSI experience.* Web-COSI deliverable 3.7, Istat, September 2015. Available at: http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2014/12/Web_COSI_Deliverable3.7.pdf

2. *How to do (good) things with data. Civil society data-driven engagement for societal progress and innovation*, Web-COSI deliverable 3.6, Lunaria, August 2015. Available at: http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2015/09/Web_COSI_Deliverable3.6.pdf

3. *Better Practice Models for Social Entrepreneurship*, Web-COSI deliverable 2.5, i-genius, May 2015. Available at: http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2014/12/WeB_COSI_Deliverable2.5.pdf

4. *The involvement of communities for statistics: the National Statistical Institutes' experiences*, Web-COSI deliverable 2.6, Istat, April 2015. Available at: http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2015/04/Del-2.6_The-involvement-of-communities-for-statistics_NSIs-experiences_Istat.pdf

5. *Report on Engaging Citizens in Web 2.0 Technology and Data, Citizens' Campaign, Youth Section and Data Visualisation Competition on the Wikiprogress Platform*, Web-COSI deliverable 3.5, OECD, December 2014. Available at: http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2015/04/Del-3.5_Report-on-Data-Visualisation-Competition_OECD.pdf

6. *Mapping initiatives and best practice: the results of citizen dialogue on well-being and societal progress*, Web-COSI deliverable 2.3, OECD, August 2014. Available at: http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2015/04/Del-2.3_Mapping-initiatives-best-practices_OECD.pdf

Web-COSI insights and further implications

In general terms, the Web-COSI project has confirmed 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 with non-official statistics) is an enormous challenge, but is also an inexorable process which requires new skills, culture, and a radical change of mind-set.

More in detail - besides the specific insights in the perspectives from the various stakeholders highlighted above, the Web-COSI debate has pointed out some cross- cutting issues which require further implications.

- The need to foster the powerful role that the communication of data has to play. Web2.0 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.

- The need to invest in data visualisation tools. Data visualisations can be very appealing, but their importance goes beyond aesthetics: they provide a unique means of highlighting new patterns in statistics and looking at the world in a different way. The visualisation of data usage is thus vitally important in enhancing its understanding and engagement.

- Storytelling and narrative is similarly needed to foster the understanding and usage of data. This offers a way to help people understand data and to feel that data can provide them with a picture of the reality close to their individual status and, moreover, that it can contribute to change behaviours and actions for both individual and collective growth.

- There is also the necessity to combine quantitative indicators with qualitative ones, and to use comparable data (for instance, by explaining that a certain phenomenon is equal to four tennis courts in size, etc.).

- Statistical knowledge is boosted by digital technology. In this sense, more effort needs to be made to combat digital exclusion and to build up capacity in marginalised groups (e.g. developing countries, the elderly, the poor, and the low-skilled).

Finally, a crucial open issue is the policy use of new statistics, which presents certain difficulties of its own, and the citizen engagement empowered by Web2.0 is essential here. If citizens are educated about the role of statistics in society and policy making and, moreover, of the need to put issues of wellbeing, sustainability, and inequality front and centre, then there will be much greater political incentive for decision makers to enact reform and, indeed, to override entrenched interests opposing those reforms.

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In summary, Web-COSI experience has demonstrated that encouraging communities to share, collaborate, and make use of data and information at both the local and global levels is a winning exercise. The creation of a critical mass on the importance of the usage of knowledge (data and information) is the way to build up a society 'aware and conscious' of its possibilities (and limits), able to drive individual and collective behaviour alongside policy actions for sustainable societal growth.

Web-COSI has experimented with the vital importance of the partnerships among different sectors of society and can thus argue that only joint efforts by 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.

The participation of Web-COSI, as an outstanding exercise in opening-up statistics to new audiences, in the 5th OECD World Forum on 'Transforming Policy, Changing Lives' in Mexico (October 2015) confirmed the importance for the EC of supporting such projects.

While the project's lifecycle formally is concluding at the Final Conference - Web-COSI does not end here. The nature of the project means that it is just a starting point, and its main outputs will be implemented in the future to keep the debate alive amongst citizens and stakeholders, and so continue to work jointly towards a real social innovation based on knowledge.