Is (Web) Science Ready for Empowerment?

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Interdisciplinary collaboration: ICT/CS, Social Sciences, Business, Cultural Studies

Researchers from VU University Amsterdam, together with partners from World Wide Web Foundation and Sahel Eco-Mali travelled sixteen days through the Sahel, exploring local information needs in remote rural areas. The outcomes will be used for development of innovative web services based on voice technologies.

The tour starts in Dakar, capital of Senegal, next to Bamako, capital of Mali, descending the Niger river towards Segou, then via Tominian, Bandiagara, in the direction of Bankass downhill the Dogon valley. Next, crossing the border to Burkina Faso, heading for Ouahigouya, and Gourcy and subsequently Guamézogon, capital of Burkina Faso. A final trip is made to the Upland area, a very remote area, against the country side near Tamale and vice versa.

Hans Akkermans

About Me

ANNAN BON
Plantage is where my home is. The World is where I work.
My professional objective is to help bridge the digital divide. Knowledge and information must be available for all!
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Ballabara Cucharion African Regreening Initiatives

WebSci '11, Koblenz, D, 17 June 2011
Launch Web Alliance for Regreening in Africa (W4RA)

World Wide Web Foundation (Nov. 2009):

• (1) Web Science (Trust/net); (2) Web standards (W3C); (3) Web in Society

W4RA

[Network Inst/VUA-WebF]
Is the first project of The Web in Society program
Mobile Web & m-Agro Knowledge Sharing in Africa (W4RA)

www.w4ra.org
www.webfoundation.org
www.mvoices.eu
Regreening

- Knowledge sharing issues
  - Distances between rural communities in Sahel
  - Infrastructure and access
    - Commonly: no electricity, no computer, no internet
    - But: mobile and radio
  - Lack of relevant content
    - Literacy and education
  - Languages
Use Cases & Requirements: “W4RA Roadshow” Field Research

• Demos, field visits, workshops, etc. (Jan. 2011)
Integrate Web with mobile & voice services

- Field pilot use cases Mali (to start end 2011):
  - Web-based market info by mobile voice service to radio stations for broadcast
  - m-event field organizer facilities Web-mobile-voice
Project aims

- Generic service development toolbox how to do this, and make a sustainable business out of it
The Question of Scientific Research
1: W4RA, Web in Society

- Is this applied research? No
  - Application of what then? [But neither is it pure research]
- Is this a kind of development aid? No!

• Q1 [immediate]: Can the Web (be made to) mean something for knowledge sharing even under very constraining conditions?
  - No internet, no computer, no electricity
  - Multitude of languages, levels of literacy

• Q2 [Web future]: Can we have a Web of Speech?
  - After all, human communication: talking >> writing
The Question of Scientific Research
2: Interpretations of Web Science

• The **Web as phenomenon**
  o As natural, social-empirical, subject-experienced
  o Consistent with [different!] external spectator-based philosophies and paradigms of research
  o Nat. sci style, social-quant.empirical, qual./interpretive

• The **Web as engineered artefact**
  o As technology, socio-technical design, innovation
  o Consistent with [different] engineering, design, CS research paradigms: techie eng, HCI, Sci o/t Artificial

• The **Web as empowering mechanism**
  o WebSci: Spectator or Engager? WF; action research
Under-recognized paradigm: Agora and Phronesis in Science

- Science is taking place in the “agora”
  - Nowotny et al.: mode-2 knowledge production
  - Co-evolution of science and society
  - Changes concept of what reliability and validity of produced knowledge is
    - Cf. Living Lab methodologies of research in the field

- There are more types of knowledge and goals of science than episteme and truth alone: phronesis
  - Practical reason: is/ought and fact/value separations not sustainable (not to be confused with distinction)

- Cases: W4RA, Web as empowering mechanism
Additional Slides
What is so special about the Web?
What is the Science in Web Science?

• The argument **cannot be** that Web is something totally different (like black hole vs. normal star)
• Rather, acts as massive **aggregator / integrator / concentrator mechanism** for wide range of social and technological tendencies **already at work**
• This at unprecedented **scale** (global & local)
• And **depth**: communication and information is key human thing; **transformative** in many domains of society; **constitutive** in some; so: their **dynamics**
  - My hypothesis: That’s also why the idea of Web as empowerment makes sense