

Participative Web, social utility and ICT adoption: An issue of alignment

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Participative Web, social utility and ICT adoption: An issue of alignment

Davide Dusi*

Introduction

This contribution is part of the debate on participative web. It attempts, without assuming any prior markedly pessimistic or optimistic positions, to investigate how to foster the adoption of collaborative web-based tools and how to promote sustainable projects. The term sustainable projects refers to those kind of initiatives in which the supervision of both the project and the single activities is gradually put in the hands of the users to foster their independence, so as to enable them to run the project autonomously.

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The research described in this paper refers to a collaborative storytelling project called S.C.A.R.ABEO (*infra*). The main aim of S.C.A.R.ABEO was to stimulate the use and the adoption of a participative web platform (Timu) (*infra*) in order to promote and help a voluntary association.

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2012. Presently, his research concerns productive paradigms in digital environments and related phenomena such as prosumer movement and user participation through social media.

One of the main goals of this research was to understand how to foster the adoption of participative web-platforms. Another goal was not only to comprehend whether this platform (Timu) could lead to the generation of a community around specific topics, but also to find out how to guarantee the sustainability of the project itself.

Therefore, in the first part of this paper I investigate the current approaches to the changes in the user-technology relation and to the emerging related phenomena. Furthermore, I describe an action-research on low-digital-literate members of a voluntary association engaged in the usage of a web platform to support a Paediatric Oncology Department. Particularly, I focus on the adopted methodology and the situated strategies applied to cope better with the contingent evolution of the analysed project.

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In the second part of the paper I present and discuss the results of this research, trying to detect the criticism of the current approach to participative web and of the analysed project itself. Moreover, I try to individuate general strategies to promote the adoption of collaborative web-tools as well as to guarantee the sustainability of participative online projects. Finally, I give an account of the importance of alignment between users' skills, technological features of the adopted tools and the context in which projects like this are promoted.

User-technology relationship and new socio-technical arrangements

The ever-increasing diffusion and pervasiveness of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has brought about rapid and progressive changes with respect to the user-technology relationship, particularly with regard to the users' role and agency (Van Dijck, 2009). This relationship has been discussed extensively in the theoretical literature and has absorbed the attention of several

scholars in many different disciplines, from *innovation studies* to *cultural and media studies* (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2008). Furthermore, the advancements of the ICT have facilitated the repositioning of the audience placing the emphasis not on the addressees of content, the mass or the individual, but on the processes through which the information itself is generated (Carpentier, Schröder, & Hallett, 2013).

“Always more frequently, users draw on web-based tools with the aim of helping each other”

In reality, technological improvements as well as the diffusion of the Internet on a global scale allow a growing number of individuals, users, to decide autonomously what and which kind of information to generate and to circulate (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Through diversified forms of Internet usage, the amount of user-generated content along with the development of online practices to share them have been considerably enlarged. Always more frequently, users draw on web-based tools with the aim of helping each other, finding solutions to their problems or reaching common goals (Raine & Wellman, 2012).

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The exploitation of the growth of the computers’ computational power, the increasing possibilities to work online, and the greater access to tools which allow the organization of activities and participation, have led to new forms of online collaboration and to the generation of new concepts such as *commons-based peer production* (Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006), *produsage* (Bruns, 2008), and *wikinomics* (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). These theorizations are only a few examples of several attempts to capture these new practices and new socio-technical arrangements.

The above ideas foster the users' usage of ICT in order to collaborate with each other, to satisfy their needs and to achieve common goals through the so-called *participative web*. This concept (*participative web*), as well as the theorization of the notion of *social software* (boyd, 2007) and the renowned term *social media* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), represents a strong relational part of ICT that must be considered in addition to the technological one. Furthermore, as already stated, the continuous progress of ICT and its pervasiveness have fundamentally altered the capacity of individuals and social groups, making them active participants in the public sphere as opposed to being passive readers, listeners, or viewers (Benkler, 2006).

“Surely, utopian and dystopian attitudes towards ICT advance hand in hand with technological progress”

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Consequently, the current discourse on ICT and related emerging practices harbor a promise for social progress through technological development and power reconfiguration through participation (Lévy, 2002, 2005; Noveck, 2009; Schäfer, 2011). Optimistic visions on the usage of social media and web-based tools outline ICT not only as means of communication belonging to various socio-technical systems but also as a true and proper social ecology. They refer to successful social utility projects to demonstrate not only the potentialities of the emerging socio-technical arrangements (Lévy, 2002, 2005) and new productive paradigms, but also their positive influence on the current redefinition of social and economic systems (Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Noveck, 2009).

Notwithstanding the increasing importance of users' participation through ICT, some criticism has been raised. Examples include the attacks on user-generated content and user-driven practices, in particular those criticizing the absence of control of such content and initiatives as well as their reliability (Carr, 2007) and quality (Keen, 2007). Overall, a dystopic approach manifests itself as the dark side of the promise for social progress and of the potential social utility of information and communication technologies (Lanier, 2010; Carr, 2011; Schäfer, 2011). Surely, utopian and dystopian attitudes towards ICT advance hand in hand with technological progress, and the importance of certain web-based tools proves to be more and more evident in terms of social and economic reorganization. This is one of the reasons why some authors encourage guarding against the enthusiastic promises of the participative web, whereas some others urge to put ourselves in the hands of new ICT tools apparently able to conduct us towards the best among the possible futures.

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Nevertheless, whether we embrace optimistic or pessimistic positions, it would be naive to believe that the availability of digital networked technologies itself is capable of turning everyone into active participants (Van Dijck, 2009). Moreover, regarding participative online practices *a priori* as synonymous with low quality or short-term activities could be misleading in the attempt to deeply understand the emerging phenomena. However, at the same time, considering the usage of web-based tools for social purposes as simple, immediate or always spontaneous could affect our overall perception with regard to the adoption of ICT for socially relevant aims.

Therefore, the emergence of social media and of the participative web invites us to consider which practices of usage of digital media are able to generate not only other technological artefacts, but also new forms of participation. More specifically, one of the main goals of this research was to understand how to foster the adoption of a web-based

platform for online collaboration. Another important aim was not only to understand if this platform (Timu) could lead to the generation of a community around specific topics, but also to figure out how to guarantee the sustainability of the project for which the web-platform itself was employed.

Methodology

To find an answer to the above questions, an action-research on a digital storytelling project was conducted at ABEO (a non-profit organization). It is the only association that provides support to the Paediatric Oncology Department of the G.B. Rossi General Hospital in Verona, Italy. Its main aim is to sustain all initiatives for the benefit of child patients and their families forced to face the difficult situations and paths related to cancer, in terms of prevention, optimal treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration back into normal life.

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When this research began, in February 2012, the ABEO association was facing a lack of communicational strategies to promote its initiatives. In particular, the association's initiatives were promoted only through word of mouth, phone calls and an annual journal. Moreover, the majority of the members did not know each other and the journal itself was conducted by only one volunteer who had the task to put together members' contributions and testimonies. Again, at the beginning of this project the annual journal was nearing dismissal, due to the unavailability of the volunteer in charge of its publication. In addition, the association seemed unable to attract external members since its supporters were solely relatives and friends of patients or ex-patients of the Paediatric Oncology Department.

Research was initiated due to the request of some members of ABEO's management for my help in the transition towards new communicational strategies. All along this research I facilitated the collaboration between ABEO and

the <ahref Foundation, a civic media centre that develops open projects and web-based tools with the aim of increasing online collaboration. My task was to analyse the adoption of Timu, a web platform developed by the <ahref Foundation, by ABEO' s members.

The name of the project that arose from this collaboration was S.C.A.R.ABEO, acronym for Support, Collaborate, Assist, Recount ABEO. Its main aim was to stimulate the use and the adoption of a participative web platform (Timu) that facilitates the collaborative production of information. The initial goal was to encourage ABEO' s members, supporters and volunteers to share their experiences and testimonies with each other through the platform. The information posted on the platform was then easily shared with other people, for instance friends and acquaintances, by inviting them to join the platform itself and to share the information through other web-platforms or social media (e.g. Facebook).

The project aimed both to expand ABEO' s visibility with regard to its launched initiatives and undertakings as well as to maintain a constant dialogue with its partners and supporters who made such initiatives possible, with the hope of making the association known to interested potential volunteers who would support it herein afterwards. As stated, this goal was forced due to the fact that the association' s journal was dismissed for a period and it did not have enough reach to sufficiently spread and advertise all the undertaken initiatives. Moreover, one of the purposes of the S.C.A.R.ABEO project was to reach potential volunteers who were unable to communicate with the association due to their lack of direct contact details. S.C.A.R.ABEO also had the ambitious view of increasing its number of collaborators, in particular young people (18-30 years old), which the association lacked at the outset of the project. In fact, before this initiative, only 15 out of 100 volunteers were younger than 30 years old.

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To conduct the fieldwork, the method of an action-research was adopted because of its flexibility and dynamic combination of studying and analysing phases (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). This methodology is an articulated process that requires the analysis and evaluation of every undertaken action to reach a more effective planning of the consecutive one (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). It is a spiral of phases, each characterized by a cycle of planning, action, and recognition that investigates the results of the action itself (Lewin, 1946). Given its characteristics, this

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methodology seems particularly suitable to investigate digital media and related phenomena (Hearn, Tacchi, Foth, & Lennie, 2009). Indeed, the adoption and use of this approach enabled, through practice, an assessment of the effectiveness and potential use of social media, and the development of some intervention strategies that further and favour paths of ICT adoption and online participation. Data was mainly collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation along with documental analysis of ABEO’ s former journal articles and the conduction and analysis of video interviews.

Due to the choice of the action-research method, the researcher could work together with the organizational actors throughout the running of the project and with all those associated with ABEO (i.e. its stakeholders, members

and volunteers) who produced audio content, videos and paperwork to be published on the platform. As already stated, the action-research methodology was chosen for its efficacy in order to ease the analysis and evaluation of each adopted strategy, decision and path taken, and to decide consciously on the subsequent ones (Reason, 2006; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). In reality, there were meetings on a regular basis in which representatives of the association, along with the researcher, evaluated the launched actions. After evaluating their results the next steps were planned according to the status of the situation obtained, the problems to face and the goals to reach. In so doing, the action-research at ABEO characterized itself as a flexible and reasoned spiral process. In fact, this methodology is a process that allows action, in this case the transition towards new communicational strategies, and research to be achieved at the same time (Dick, 2002).

One of the main tasks I was assigned by ABEO's management was to detect the drivers of users' participation in the S.C.A.R.ABEO project, their level of appreciation of the Timu platform as well as their degree of engagement. The aim of the management was to elaborate strategies to foster the adoption of the platform by the members of ABEO. For this purpose I carried out discursive interviews with participants in order to understand the reasons for their activity and further engagement in the usage of the platform as well as their inactivity, or their abandon of it. Consequently, these interviews regarded different categories of participants: those whom were most active, those whom limited themselves to reading or spreading content without generating anything, and those whom decided to delete their account or not to participate at all after the generation of some content. Importantly, this took into account that in every project users place themselves in different roles according to the level of involvement or to their familiarity with the web-tool; these levels vary from creators to spectators and inactive (Van Dijck, 2009). Furthermore, the goal of the abovementioned interviews was

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also to individuate the strengths and weaknesses of Timu and to report my findings both to ABEO' s management and to the <ahref Foundation' s developers. In so doing ABEO' s management could think about strategies to foster the usage of Timu while the <ahref Foudation' s developers could implement the platform according to the users' feedback. Therefore, the project was concentrating on the goal of making Timu user-friendly on one hand, and of making users Timu-friendly on the other hand.

Consequently, another main task of my research stay at ABEO was to facilitate and to analyse paths of informal mentorship to foster a better understanding of the potentialities of the platform and to develop users' skills with regard to its usage. This is because the association decided to encourage its most digital-literate members to share their knowledge about web-tools, and particularly about the functioning of Timu, with other members and neophytes of the platform. With regard to this task, I mainly made use of participant observation to investigate the situated strategies adopted to promote informal mentorship among ABEO' s members and users of Timu.

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The action-research methodology led me to the analysis of every adopted strategy, to the evaluation of its results and to the participation in the planning of the next steps to take. Besides, it seemed to be particularly appropriate for continual change and unpredictable scenarios just as the S.C.A.R.ABEO project was.

A collaborative digital storytelling project

The S.C.A.R.ABEO project started in February 2012 and has been online since the 24th of May 2012. Throughout the project at least a couple of content items (e.g. audio, video) were uploaded every week. Generally, video, photos and documents were uploaded by participants. Nevertheless, during the first week following the outset of the

project unforeseen behaviour of ABEO' s members affected the launching of the project online, namely their unwillingness to register on the platform, including those who were willing to generate content. Indeed, thanks to the first interviews, I detected a prevailing skepticism towards web-based tools within the association. Therefore, one of the strategies adopted by the management of ABEO to counter this scepticism was to promote a positive image of

“In every project users place themselves in different roles according to the level of involvement or to their familiarity with the web-tool”

Timu and its potentialities among the members and volunteers. For this reason a persuasive narration of this web-tool was produced in order to make the platform seem as though it was the optimal choice to achieve ABEO' s goals and to find a solution to the shortcomings of the historical annual journal. A persuasive narration of the proposed web-tools as the best available choice and its alignment with our interlocutors' goals represent the first strategy to foster the adoption of new technologies (Suchman, 2000). In the case of the S.C.A.R.ABEO project the adoption of a positive narration of Timu worked well and an increasing number of ABEO' s members accepted to be involved in its usage to support the association.

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By the end of the project (March 2013), the majority of the associations' members showed a positive attitude towards the usage of Timu and its benefi Moreover, the association registered an increased number of volunteers, of which 35 were younger than 30. This means that the usage of Timu proved to be a good choice even regarding the attempt to attract young people. Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to claim

that all the merit of the increased number of members was due to this web-platform because all content posted on Timu was also shared on other social networks such as Facebook.

Furthermore, the S.C.A.R.ABEO project was characterized by the adoption of paths of informal mentorship through which the most experienced and literate users shared their knowledge about web-based tools with the low-digital-literate ones as well as with the new members of the association and the neophytes of the platform. Consequently, the most experienced users were encouraged to teach some available and willing participants not only how to generate content but also how to use Timu properly in order to upload and to share documents, video, interviewing etc. This proved to be an effective strategy not only to foster the adoption of Timu but also for its ability to benefit the entire project; a strategy by which new kinds of relationships between the members of ABEO arose.

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“The adoption of paths of informal mentorship through which the most experienced and literate users shared their knowledge about web-based tools with the low-digital-literate ones”

One of the best examples of these paths of informal mentorship was related to the generation and uploading of articulated and complex content such as the video-interviews. Indeed, during the beginning of the project some members of the management along with the researcher and the [Foundation](#)'s consultants detected a lack of expertise in generating video content among the participants of the project. Actually, at that time only two people

taking part in the S.C.A.R.ABEO project were able to edit and upload a video-interview, these being two participants involved as a result of their primary occupations in the media industry as editors of movies and commercials. In fact, the first video interviews were realized mainly with the help of these two participants and myself. However, I was only able to assist these participants in the generation of video-content after being taught how to make and edit a video properly. This is evidence that occasionally even the researcher must be enhanced when part of a larger apparatus.

Additionally, to correct the members' lack of expertise, it was decided that the 3 most active participants of the project on the Timu platform should be encouraged to take part in the video-interview generation process; at first as observers and later as assistants. As a researcher, and mostly as facilitator of ABEO's transition process towards new communicational strategies, I was responsible for supervising and conducting this phase of mentorship as well as teaching those less capable both how to write a track for an interview and how to conduct the interview itself in addition to editing a video with the help and suggestions of the two video editors. Over time, an increasing number of tasks were delegated to these participants, until they were given complete control of these activities. Finally, on the 5th of September, approximately three months after this process had begun, the first video-interview solely conducted, edited and uploaded by one of the trained users was carried out. As a researcher, I took part in this video-interview and the consequent editing. However, this was only in the capacity of an observer and no longer as a facilitator or an assistant. This interview represented a turning point in ABEO supporters' approach to media. This turning point peaked when the management decided not only to continue the S.C.A.R.ABEO project but also to secure the support of the national TV (Rai2 channel), making the association's activities and undertaken projects protagonists of the program "Storie. I racconti della settimana" broadcasted on the evening of Saturday 10th of November

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2012. Evidently, this choice indicated a very powerful and effective initiative both to promote ABEO' s activities and to attract new supporters.

Certainly, the above described peer-to-peer practices had a positive influence on the increase of the amount of generated content. For instance, during the first six months of online operation (24 May 2012 - 22 November 2012), the S.C.A.R.ABEO project produced 50 content items. These included a corporate video, a music video, numerous articles and testimonies and 11 video interviews of the association' s various departmental representatives. These video interviews involved the chair of the association, the vice-president of ABEO, 3 other members of the management, a psychologist, a pedagogue, a doctor of the oncology department, 2 volunteers and the parents of a child patient. Overall, the described project did not have a precise target group even though in the beginning the management proposed to focus on the involvement of young people as a consequence not only of the lack of volunteers younger than 30 but also of the fact that older ABEO-volunteers were either unfamiliar with social media or not equipped either with a personal computer or with an internet connection. Notwithstanding the management' s assumption that younger generations were probably more familiar with ICT and in particular with social media, I observed the necessity to work on the design of the platform in order to make it similar to other web-based tools they were familiar with (e.g. Facebook). This resulted in the attempt of the Foundation' s developers to align the platform' s features with the participants' technological skills and expectations. Moreover, many of the young participants had to be taught how to use the platform, how it worked, but primarily what it was. On the contrary, in certain cases the high competences of a small number of young or high-digital-literate users did not guarantee their participation or their interest in the usage of the platform.

The S.C.A.R.ABEO project was carried on until March 2013, when the users completely abandoned the Timu platform. This abandonment was due to the fact that in the first months of 2013 the association created a new website with the help of new high-digital-literate members and supporters. The new web-based tool clearly adverts to the Timu platform, both with regard to the structure of the website itself and the kind of content generated, uploaded and shared. Interestingly, what initially seemed to be the abandon of a proposed and promoted tool was in reality an expression of acquainted complete independence by the members of ABEO.

Suggestions from the S.C.A.R.ABEO project

During this research I set myself not only to the task of facilitating the association' s transition towards new communicational strategies but also to investigate strategies through which to foster the adoption of collaborative web-based tools and to promote sustainable projects. Moreover, another important aim of this research was to understand if this platform (Timu) could lead to the generation of a community around specific topics, in this case the issues related to a paediatric oncology department and its support.

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The results of the S.C.A.R.ABEO project suggest that the availability of the Timu platform by itself was not enough to generate a community around a specific topic. On the contrary, it needed to be integrated with specially situated strategies to foster its adoption by those who might need it to promote their activities or to reach their goals. What was described in this research leads to the realization that sometimes the translation of the theory in practice through actual and concrete projects is not easily achievable. Indeed, the translation of the theory in practice represented one of the main problems in the attempt to foster the adoption of Timu.

In reality, in the literature related to the participative web and to the reconfiguration of users' role there is a tendency to stress the potentialities of web-based tools by showing virtuous examples and successful projects (Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Raine & Wellman, 2012). Moreover, these projects are often proposed as best practices that should be followed (Noveck, 2009; Cottica, 2010). Nevertheless, if we investigate further the proposed best practices or virtuous examples we discover that those good results or impressive endeavours were achieved mainly by already digital-literate users. This contrasts with the context in which the S.C.A.R.ABEO project was developed, mainly characterized by the participation of beginners or neophytes of web-platforms rather than experts. Moreover, always in opposition with the virtuous examples proposed by several authors, not only were the participants of S.C.A.R.ABEO

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“It needed to be integrated with specially situated strategies to foster its adoption ”

not able, in the early phases of the project, to use properly the tools at their disposal, but also they did not know what the potentialities of those tools were. Thus, they were unaware of what they could do with them or, more simply, of the reasons why those tools could be relevant for them and their association. Consequently, what emerges from this research is that in order to foster the adoption of collaborative web-based tools we need to stimulate first and foremost the interest of our interlocutors in certain tools and their awareness of pros and cons of ICT. Secondly, we need to foster the participants' acquisition of the essential skills to use the proposed tools in order to reach their goals.

The adoption of ICT to promote socially relevant initiatives does not seem as easy and spontaneous as proposed by the enthusiasts of the participative web. Instead, there seems to exist, at least in certain cases, a gap in the connection between the availability of ICT and their actual adoption and usage. For this reason, in the S.C.A.R.ABEO project the first step to foster the actual adoption of Timu was focusing on the narration of technologies rather than being solely suppliers of web-based tools. This suggests that it is preferable to make our interlocutors aware of the different possibilities at their disposal rather than merely providing them with tools of which they might not feel the need. It results in the necessity to align the narration of the proposed tools with the desiderata and expectations of our interlocutors (Suchman, 2000). This proved to be a key element in the analysed project. In fact, when this strategy did not work, even some digital-literate users or members of ABEO refused to participate and regarded the platform not suitable for their goals or not relevant for their needs.

As already stated, another key factor of the S.C.A.R.ABEO project was the development of users' skills. What the literature suggests is that, with regards to the adoption of ICT, people's level of access to information and communication technologies in terms of skills, interpretation and usage, is decisive (Potter, 2012; Rice & Haythornthwaite, 2006; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Particularly, what makes the difference are the strategies through which the development of users' skills is fostered according to the context in which they are applied and to the tools we want to promote (Jenkins, 2009). In the case of S.C.A.R.ABEO the management opted for paths of informal mentorship to enhance users' digital skills. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that some strategies thought and designed to stimulate participation (e.g. informal mentorship paths) consist in complex, demanding, challenging and articulated processes, not only for the management and the researcher, but also for all the involved actors. Consequently, what is theoretically proposed as media education (Jenkins,

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2009) with the aim of promoting digital media literacy (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009) sometimes appears as a more complex and less linear process than the one described in the literature. This seems true especially with regard to projects that require a non-economical time (Adam, 2013), namely where the participants are volunteers who exploit their free time to participate (Shirky, 2010). In the case of ABEO the paths of informal mentorship were influenced by the participants' will to dedicate themselves to such a demanding task. As a consequence, the time they spent and invested in the project was strongly affected by their availability; an element of further complexity to guarantee the sustainability of the project itself.

“The best way for the continuity of the project would be to work on obtaining progressive user independence”

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What emerges from this project is that having both a good idea and a well-designed technological tool is not sufficient to reach our goals. Instead, the condition by which all the involved actors, humans and non-humans, collaborate with each other to reach a common aim is decisive. This is possible only by making organizational and socio-technical elements dialogue with each other (Strati, 2000) through a continuous and dynamic process of alignment (Suchman, 2000). The end-user is always decisive in the success or the failure of the project itself. Engaging the users with the goal of fostering and promoting the development and the evolution of the entire socio-technical apparatus means, primarily, helping them to enhance their skills and, in so doing, even their independence and agency. During the running of S.C.A.R.ABEO it became clear that the best way for the continuity of the project would be

to work on obtaining a progressive user independence, not only in the production of content, but also in the management of the project itself which would then gradually give the users full control. This implies a process of subjectification of the user base that builds on the understanding of their communication skills and their abilities of becoming media users.

Conclusion

The idea proposed by this project was to align users' needs and their ICT skills to the technological artefact and its features by acting simultaneously on both aspects. Thus, while the technological infrastructure was being developed according to user requirements, the latter in turn was being enhanced through increased competences and knowledge, creating a truly enabling construct. Through the usage of Timu, ABEO was able to tell its story and that of its volunteers, members and benefactors who, notwithstanding their diversity share one common ethic, that of commitment and solidarity towards their initiatives. Timu represented a powerful instrument both for the constant updating of information and for the participation and involvement of those who wanted to get closer to the ABEO world.

The criticism emerged from the promotion of the platform and its usage suggests the necessity to actualize an alignment between a persuasive narration of ICT capable to encourage their adoption, and paths designed to foster the development of users' skills. It is clear that the above process consisted of different steps that influenced each other mutually and that made S.C.A.R.ABEO a project of users' empowerment. As emerged from the duration of the project (February 2012 - March 2013) and the time spent from the beginning to reach the first moment of users' complete independence, represented by the video-interview mentioned above (5th of September 2012), it is easy to understand that this kind of initiatives require time, patience and flexibility in their conduction.

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In addition, analysing different contributions a theme that associates even vastly different theoretical approaches and also characterized the S.C.A.R.ABEO project emerges, namely the commitment for users' skills. In fact, users' skills are almost always called into question, even if sometimes in an implicit way. Particularly, the users are urged to develop and become literate in digital skills to be aware (Potter, 2012) and able to act in a more effective way (Jenkins, 2009). In other words, and as showed by this research, the development of users' skills seems to be the *conditio sine qua non* to face the current shifts in ICT usage and to promote sustainable projects.

Consequently, the result of this project was the awareness that the advancement of any information and communication technology implemented or proposed to potential users, if it is to function at its best, must necessarily be matched to the advancement of technologies that it supports or complements (Kranzberg, 1986) as well as users' skills; therefore not only from a technological point of view but also from a relational and social one. In fact, the opportunities provided by mediated participatory practices are not sufficient in themselves to easily involve the users (Carpentier, 2009) or to guarantee the participation in or the sustainability of projects like the one described in this paper.

In the end, it is about the alignment of different elements that often assume conflicting roles and positions (Suchman, 2000). In this way not only the technology but also the entire project is characterized as an enabling construct capable of assisting the end-user not only to adopt the proposed tools but also to be autonomous during the phases of use of ICT. Media education, the name given to the attempt at helping the user to develop the necessary skills (Jenkins, 2009), seems to be the crucial factor not only to enhance the effectiveness of the technological object (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012) or in terms of the efficacy of individual activities and initiatives, but also with regards to their stability and sustainability. As a consequence, the

always more powerful web-based tools (e.g. collaborative platforms) must be integrated with users' online and of-line activities and skills. All this, taking into account the strong coexistence of creative, technological and relational elements that characterizes the usage of ICT (Jenkins, 2006; Carpentier et al., 2013).

“The development of users' skills seems to be the *conditio sine qua non* to face the current shifts in ICT usage and to promote sustainable projects”

Finally, the analysis of this project shows that the adoption of ICT and its usage in an effective and useful way is not simple and always spontaneous. It depends on different variables, namely the context in which the adoption takes place, the users' skills and the features of the proposed ICT themselves. The relation between the promises of the participative web and the adoption of ICT to pursue socially relevant aims is certainly a complex topic and cannot be reduced only to the value we assign to it nor to personal dispositions. Therefore, a holistic approach, capable to conduct to a large-scale effort comprehension is warmly suggested to those interested in this topic. Evidently, the researcher must always consider the consequences of dealing with non-neutral tools as well as the different approaches towards users' skills and dispositions.

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