



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

Web Communities for Statistics for Social Innovation The mid-term results

Web-COSI project has the general aim to foster the engagement of society at large with statistics beyond GDP. Specific objective is to explore how digital initiatives, carried out - at different level - by NSIs, civil society, social entrepreneurs, International organizations and society at large, are functioning to engage citizens and involve communities to exploit the data available on line. This policy brief presents the mid-term results of the activity carried out in the first 12 months of the project. In particular, it is illustrated the debate generated by the on line discussions and the workshops organised and the initial result of the mapping exercise carried out so far.

Web-COSI is an FP7 coordinating action, funded by EC DG-CONNECT
G.A. 610422

ABSTRACT

Web-COSI capitalizes on the last 15 years characterized by epochal innovations for the world of research and beyond. The Internet explosion has radically changed the way in which information is produced and shared, opening huge new opportunities for stakeholders and citizens. The *liquid data* available in the Net - Open Data, Big Data and crowd sourced data represent new sources for the construction of new statistics to complement with the official ones. Contextually to the Web2.0 revolution, the debate on “GDP & Beyond” has dominated the statistical and economic research scene for the new measurement of well-being, societal progress and sustainability. Web 2.0 technologies - networks and platforms - have deeply contributed to enlarge and to foster the beyond GDP debate. These participatory platforms, enabling virtual communities to interact, change the way in which statistical producers and consumers of information access the data bridging the top-down and bottom-up approaches. It leads to narrow the gap between what statistics say and what people perceive. Web-COSI project is experiencing the interactivity between communities by enlarging the discussion and mapping the crowd sourced initiatives set up to share information and data at “real time”, contributing to social awareness.

Key words: Web2.0, information and data sharing, beyond GDP, awareness

Contents

Introduction.....
The Web-COSI activities carried so far.....
The discussion generated and the mapping exercise
PROJECT PARAMETERS
PROJECT IDENTITY

Introduction

Internet has given the possibility to connect without frontiers

Internet has radically changed the way of communicating, sharing information and accessing services and data. The process is inexorable and it has involved and it is going to involve increasingly people belonging to all societal contexts - consumers, workers, communities, citizens at large – as well as all stakeholders-policy makers, civil society organizations, entrepreneurs, researchers, practitioners. In the frame of Europe 2020 strategy, the ICT revolution was attested by the broadcast of the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) launched with the aim to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra-fast internet and interoperable applications.

Networks and platforms have built up awareness, contributing to the beyond GDP debate

In the last decade the development of Web 2.0 applications like Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter and concepts like “collective intelligence” and “crowd sourcing”, have fundamentally transformed the way information is created and shared and the way how to build up awareness within the society at large. Online platforms and networks where communities interact provide a measure of how the roles of producers and users of information are radically changing and how the relationship between policy makers and citizens has moved to a bottom-up approach.

International initiatives beyond GDP were promoted since the start of the new millennium

In the last 15 years the statistical and economic debate has been dominated by the topics related to the measurement of well-being and societal progress and the expansion of Web 2.0 has contributed to involve society at large into the debate on the topics related to “beyond GDP” involving the stakeholders and the communities to create a critical mass at local, national and international level without boundaries.

At the start of the new millennium, the well-being agenda started to have a worldwide dimension thanks to a number of international initiatives. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) began to work rigorously on this thematic since 2001 and has organised the World Forums to discuss these issues at a global perspective (Palermo 2004, Istanbul 2007, Busan 2009, New Delhi 2012).

In 2008 the then French President Sarkozy launched the famous Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission which stressed the necessity to move the attention from measuring economic production to measuring individual well-being [5].

Notable bottom-up initiatives are carried out to foster the engagement of society at large

Over time, the debate was carried on within different initiatives, promoted by both the public and private world of research and at institutional level. At a European level it was established, by the European Statistical System, the sponsorship group on ‘Measuring Progress, well-being and sustainable development’ with the aim of translating the recommendations of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission report into concrete actions in charge of the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) [4].

Taking advantage of Web 2.0 many European initiatives have been set up to enlarge the community involved in the discussion in order to share the knowledge, the information and the data on Measuring Progress. Now ICT Web 2.0 is pushing on implementing the new ways of collecting and producing information, requiring to involve communities and collect data from communities reshaping the “definition” of statistics requiring a bottom-up approach.

One of the notable bottom-up approach initiative is the OECD’s Better Life Index, launched in 2012 to answer one of the world’s most pressing questions: Are our lives getting better? The Index is an interactive tool that allows seeing how countries perform according to the importance the user gives to each of the topics that make for a better life (www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org)

On the side of the EU NSIs, in order to develop new official statistics “beyond GDP”, stakeholder’s consultations and discussions with society at large are currently carried out. In 2010 ISTAT has instituted with the Italian National Council for Economics and Labour (CNEL) the “BES” initiative for measuring Equitable and Sustainable Well-being in Italy giving great attention to the issues at local level (www.misurelbenessere.it).

Against this framework, Web-COSI has started its activities on the 1st January 2014, willing to give its contribution in an era of “data revolution” [2].

The Web-COSI activities carried so far

Web-COSI is based on the slogan “statistics for everyone-increasing trust in collectively generated data”

Web-COSI is a two-year FP7 coordination action (2014-2015) funded by the EC-DG CONNECT under the FP7 Work Programme 2013, ICT- Information and Communication Technologies within the call launched by Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation (CAPS) (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/collective-awareness-platforms-sustainability-and-social-innovation>). Web-COSI is one of the ten projects funded under the CAPS vision [3] based on the idea that collaborate through crowd sourced platforms can produce solutions for a wide range of social needs. Web-COSI slogan is “statistics for everyone- increasing trust in collectively-generated data”. In this context, Web-COSI carries on activities contributing to support awareness, grassroots processes and practices to share knowledge and data on well-being and societal progress.

The consortium is well-balanced bridging the top-down bottom-up approaches

Web-COSI, coordinated by the Italian National Statistical Institute, sees the collaboration among two relevant Institutions (Istat and OECD - the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and two young civil society Organisations (Lunaria – the Italian Association for Social Promotion and i-genius - the Social Entrepreneur Business and Enterprise Community) representing society at large. The consortium is well-balanced and multidisciplinary in order to create synergies for a growing integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Web-COSI 2-year workplan

Specifically, in its 24 months' life cycle, Web-COSI work plan aims at: i) mapping the existing digital initiatives for communities' involvement carried out by NSIs, civil society organisations, social entrepreneurs, International organisations, etc. with the release of an interactive crowd-sourced map; ii) create a critical mass through: blogs, on line discussions, webinars, target citizens campaigns, data visualisation competitions, the setup of a European Wikiprogress University Programme, 'youth initiatives'. The organisation of face to face events: 5 workshops, 4 focus groups and a final conference; iii) 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.

Web-COSI outputs so far

Web-COSI outputs so far are: 1) Kick-off workshop (1/2014); 2) two on line discussions-Engaging citizens in well-being and progress statistics (4/2014) and Making data more accessible for society at large (6/2014); 3) one webinar-Civil society engagement in well-being statistics in Italy (6/2014); 4) two workshops on Using Technology to Engage Citizens with Well-being Statistics - in the Perspectives from Civil Society (9/2014) and in the Perspectives from Official Statistics and Government (10/2014); 5) the release of the first Beta version of Wiki progress data portal (8/2014) to test with users in the next months; 6) launch of the youth portal and of the European Wikiprogress University Programme (11/2014); 7) release of the initial crowd sourced map of digital initiatives in Europe and in the World (12/2014).

Complete documentation on these activities is available at www.webcosi.eu.

Aside these deliverables, Web-COSI was presented at various International events carried out in 2014. Several papers and articles illustrating the project were published. Web-COSI was presented at the International II level University Master of University of Florence and Istat as part of Wikiprogress University Programme (http://www.wikiprogress.org/index.php/Wikiprogress_University) and at e-Frame Summer School (<http://www.eframeproject.eu/index.php?id=107>). Web-COSI has worked networking with CAPS projects and with other European and abroad projects and initiatives. Mechanisms for information-sharing with Eurostat, is undertaken for a better dissemination and exploitation of project results and activities. The role and the presence of the relevant EU DGs and of Eurostat have actively encouraged carrying out the activities.

The discussion generated and the mapping exercise

The discussion generated so far has involved a large number of participants from different sectors of society

The discussion generated so far has involved a large number of participants. The two discussions on line and the webinar have been followed by: 84 different participants; 2.200 unique visitors; 300 twitter reaching about 180.000 accounts. The workshops counted 60 physical participants and were transmitted in streaming with a large number of followers: about 400 visitors for the live webcast for each event; about 1000 page views and 700 unique visitors for the Wikiprogress event page of each workshop; over 1000 people reached on Facebook via posts related to each workshop; over 50 accounts were engaged on Twitter during each workshop. Participants and followers represented different sectors of society, including government, research organizations, social enterprise, and civil society.

The debate generated was very impressive. Its themes are deeply illustrated in the

The debate generated was very impressive and has highlighted many open issues on the usage of the liquid data on line

reports released on the project website. In a nutshell, the debate has highlighted that the new sources of data arise many open issues on their usage, especially in the perspectives from the NSIs which are moving from traditional to new ways of data collection and production [1]. In general the topics treated have been: the trade-off between having more and real-time information and the quality of the information produced; the validation and certification of crowd sourced data; legal aspect on data protection and privacy; definition of metadata and meta information; the need of a narrative and storytelling alongside data; the different weight of the usage of crowd sourced data at local, national and global level; how to complement non official data with official data (labeling); need of methodology to re-use open data; need of linkage of Open Data from different sources; new skill to treat new sources of data. Moreover, the crucial question: how to organize the statistical information beyond GDP (generated by non-official data together with official data) in an integrated framework to represent an understandable “real tool” for policy makers to drive policies close to the real citizens needs in terms of well-being ?

The mapping exercise brought to list a large number of Web2.0 initiatives carried out by various actors

The mapping exercise so far (http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2013/11/Web-COSI_Deliverable-2.3.pdf) brought to list a large number of Web2.0 initiatives carried out by civil society, NSIs, Governments and International organizations, interacting with citizens to share information and data, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches. The initiatives aim, in various ways and at global, national, local level, to: i) include people in the development of well-being frameworks (e.g. through online consultation tools and social media); ii) facilitate the access to the findings and analysis of data (e.g. through interactive data visualization tools); iii) engage people as data interpreters (e.g. through open data initiatives); iv) engage people as data producers themselves (e.g. through technology that allows for the crowdsourcing).

Key elements on the usage of Web2.0 technologies to engage citizens with statistics beyond GDP in different perspectives were pointed out

The mapping exercise has pointed out some key elements on the usage of Web2.0 technologies to engage citizens with statistics beyond GDP. NSIs are investing a lot to improve the communication and dissemination of statistics using Web2.0 tools and are beginning to develop tools to make “use” of on line data (Open data, Big Data, crowd sourced data). Civil society engagement with statistics through technology can take many forms: with the development of technology citizens can be collectors, interpreters, communicators, developers, and informed users of different types of data, ranging from unprocessed forms of open data, through to official statistics packaged in the form of ready-made visualizations. Opening up data by Governments, International organisations and others means more than putting it on a website: for data to be truly open, not only must it be freely available online, but it should also be presented in a format that maximizes its potential for re-use. Methodology to re-use data is needed. Linkage of Open Data from different sources is needed. Digital technology can be a powerful tool for social inclusion, but not everyone has the capacity to make the most of it: more effort needs to be made to combat digital exclusion and to build up capacity in marginalized groups (e.g. developing countries, the young, the elderly, the poor, and low-skilled).

Web-COSI will continue its work in different perspectives

Web-COSI will continue its work in the next months. In particular, it will be deepened the perspective from social entrepreneurs, and policy implications. While the Wiki of progress statistics will be tested with the communities of users

On line communities are central to build up better statistics, for increasing awareness to drive policies for the real citizen's needs

attracted by the next Web-COSI target campaigns. The debate and the mapping exercise so far have highlighted many points of strength alongside open issues on the usage of new sources of data available on line and on the data locally generated. Web-COSI experience is demonstrating that the integration of traditional official statistics with new sources of data is an inexorable process which requires new skills, culture and a radical change of mind set.

Web-COSI believes that encouraging communities to share, collaborate and make use of data and information beyond GDP at local and global level is a winning exercise. Create a critical mass on the importance of the usage of non-official sources is as an opportunity to catch. Web-COSI wants to push to create consensus, also at political level, to support research fostering partnerships between NSIs, academia, civil society organizations and communities at large. Web-COSI works under the conviction that as in the Web 2.0 era the power of online communities grows ever stronger, Institutions of diverse type and scope cannot ignore their centrality for the collection of data for better statistics, for better information, for better knowledge, for increasing awareness to drive policies for the real citizen's needs.

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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

Co-ordinator

Istat- Italian National Statistical Institute

Scientific Coordinator: **Donatella Fazio**

Project Manager: **Maria Grazia Calza**

Consortium

Istat - Italian National Institute of Statistics (www.istat.it)

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (www.oecd.org)

Lunaria - Social Promotion Association (www.lunaria.org)

i-genius - World Community of Social Entrepreneurs (www.i-genius.org)

EC Project Officer

Loretta Anania, European Commission, DG Connect

Duration

January 2014 – December 2015 (24 months)

Budget

EU contribution: 589,000 €

Website

www.webcosi.eu

Further reading

Research papers and reports are available at www.webcosi.eu

Main contact

rd-projects@istat.it

This Policy Brief is Deliverable 4.2 (a)

Author Donatella Fazio, Istat

Web-COSI has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 610422.

