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Learning Together: Developing Civic Webs as an Innovation Experiment

Towards citizen-oriented communication

The development of an information society with interactive digital technologies and networks has not produced any revolutionary change in civil society so far. It is not clear, for example, how old policies can be transformed with technology as a promoter. Internet and other digital media have not narrowed social and informational gaps, on the contrary, the gaps have been widening. Although new technologies have always had an innovative potential, audiences or users' applications have not had priority over 'commerce, industry, military and bureaucracy' (McQuail 2000; Winston 1998).

There is nonetheless promise of transformation in terms of the perspective of communication. For example, the Internet differs from the traditional media at least in the degree of interactivity and social presence experienced by the user, and in the user's autonomy to produce and control content. There is also more shared public space than ever before. Interactive technologies have restored audiences up to the agenda of media studies: there has been a change in perspective from a sender-oriented to an active audience or social action theory approach. From this point of view the broader possibilities of audience activity call for more participatory media models for 'sharing and exchanging information, ideas, experience and developing active (computer-mediated) relationships' (McQuail 2000, 120; Servaes 2001).

The active audience approach constitutes a cultural sharing model of communication instead of the transmission of messages. The concepts of communication space and local public sphere also belong to this framework. According to Jürgen Habermas, the ground for an active, democratic society can be established with civic, rational thinking and communicative actions (Carey 1989; Habermas 1996, 364, 371). However, the notion of an 'active' audience needs to be seen more in terms of different receptions and actions of the audience as media consumers and agents or activists. Audience activity is not one single mode of participation, and there are many people who do not have the energy or motivation to engage for example in participatory processes on local public media (e.g. McQuail 2000). Studying young people participating on the Net in the UK, Sonia Livingstone (2005) distinguishes three types of participatory users: the interactors, the civic-minded and the disengaged. The civic-minded are concerned with political participation, while the interactors use the Net for more cultural and creative purposes. The disengaged were mainly those who had no net access at home.

Nicholas Jankowski, Martine van Selm and Ed Hollander (2000) argue that local digital networks are studied to a great extent without connection to history, even though theoretical and empirical research on active audience -oriented community media has a tradition. Small-scale media developments and community media research has been undertaken since at least the 1970s in community media studies. These action-oriented field studies, for example on community television, have been concerned to identify transformations in media use whereby residents could become producers of media messages and a sense of community among residents might develop.

One important objective in the Evolution of Electronic Communities (EEC) research project on Manse Square (http://

Sirkku Kotilainen

mansetori.uta.fi) has been to seek development towards active citizenship and communities who are not only critical media-consumers, easily adapting to the emergence of the information society, but who also are prepared to act in their own alternative terms in order to bring about reforms. In other words, the user does not merely survive and adapt to information society, but also seeks to influence its evolution (Freire 1973; 2001). This project was established as an opposite to a top-down development model, where people are expected to adopt new technologies as soon as possible (cf. Uotinen 2003; cf. van Lieshout 2001). The Manse Square network and portal in the EEC research project were established on the basis of the Freirean understanding of communication as a civic right, a social practice and a tool for increasing participation and local communality. This conception belongs equally to the background of participatory action research framework (Einsiedel 2001, 104–105; Dubell, Erasmie & de Vries 1980).

Civic webs have been implemented in Finland mainly as local, national and European short-time development projects. Many of them have been launched as parts of wider information society programs at least since 1995: one example is the project realised in eastern Finland, Carelia (Uotinen 2003). At approximately the same time several civic web projects were initiated abroad, for example the Digital City of Amsterdam (see e.g. van Lieshout 2001; Jankowski et. al. 2000).

The Finnish civic web projects differ from each other for instance in respect of their planned objectives, the web applications used and the research activities connected to them. Esa Sirkkunen (2004) names three typical objectives in such projects: (1) advancing the rights of and services for citizens, (2) facilitating progress in local communities and areas and (3) enhancing civic participation and communication via the net.

Improving local participation among special groups threatened by the digital divide is a common feature of many such projects in Finland.

Research activities in the Evolution of Electronic Communities (EEC) project on Manse Square fit the objectives presented above, and especially the third, also improving local participation among special groups threatened by the digital divide, this meaning for example gypsies and foreigners in Tampere. The various sub-studies of the project can be divided into sections according to the activities they involve: creation and maintenance of a public space and development of other possibilities for civic participation; development of civic innovations and digital applications to support civic groups; and scientific analyses of the dynamics of web-mediated publicity. There has been at least one academic dissertation and several master's theses in addition to research reports and articles published so far (see e.g. Heinonen et al 2001; Ridell 2002).

The media environment in the City of Tampere, with over 200,000 inhabitants, includes one regional newspaper, several local and neighbourhood newspapers (free of charge), a local TV-station and three local radio stations: a commercial, a public and a university campus radio. Further, the website Manse Square is coordinated by the university and situated at the server in the university. The Journalism Research and Development Centre was in charge of the project, with collaborative stakeholders from the local media, Finnish research funding institutions and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab Europe. The residents of the city of Tampere have been publishing on Manse Square since 1998.

Manse Square runs activities in three sections on the web (http://mansetori.uta.fi):

(1) Manse Communities is a website for local neighbourhoods and cultural communities, for example gypsies and

foreigners living in Tampere. Each of these communities provide a forum where people can exchange views and information on issues concerning their own living environment.

(2) Manse Forum is a web forum for public discussion and debate on locally important issues. The aim is to create more open interaction between city officials, politicians, economic actors and residents, and in this way to promote the development of a more viable local democracy.

(3) Manse Media is a journalistic section of Manse Square offering news from the Tampere region and contextualising information for discussions taking place on other sites. In addition, local residents working as neighbourhood reporters publish articles and pictures on Manse Media.

These kinds of websites may be designated civic web, although the term community web might be equally suitable. While the endeavour is to bring an alternative civic perspective to local publicity primarily by voluntary means, the activity as a whole is in many ways comparable to the early period of the introduction of electronic community media in the 1970s and 1980s, for example community radio or television: the intentions and expectations that community networks can contribute to development and bring improvement to localities. This community communication approach focuses attention both on the individual level, involving for example personal actions, motives and expectations, and at community level as a specific social context. Together, these publishing communities of Manse Square form a network both on the Net and in physical meetings (cf. Jankowski, van Selm & Hollander 2000).

The ideological roots of the Manse Square civic web activity lie also in public journalism by merit of the residents' central

role in local publicity in the sub-studies. However, the research and development projects in public journalism are implemented mainly from the viewpoint of professional journalism. For example Brian Massey and Tanni Haas (2002) note in their study of the U.S. that public journalism research concerns mainly journalists' attitudes and beliefs about public journalism, their public news work behaviours and public journalism's effects on news audiences.

By the same token Ari Martikainen (2004) makes a distinction between neighbourhood reporting and public journalism in which professional journalists ultimately work as providers and guardians of access to publicity. He considers the activities of Manse Media as representative of people's journalism or as a citizens' media in which small stories produced by individuals' are prioritised over larger common issues. This Manse Media section also provides citizens with a possibility to function as both providers and gatekeepers to publicity (cf. Rodriguez 2001). Manse Media's neighbourhood reporters come from different neighbourhoods of the city and form a cultural community, all of them interested in expressing themselves and reporting on local issues in the web-mediated public arena.

Particularly the establishment of publishing communities and the evolution of participants into publishing citizens have been encouraged in the sub-studies of the EEC research project. The Net Teams of Manse Communities and the group of neighbourhood reporters constitute such publishing communities, i.e. voluntary editorial boards who represent their basic neighbourhood communities. Residents participating in the work of Net Teams are ICT activists or are interested in exerting an influence on local issues. Communal activities in the Net Teams and their basic communities have been physically and geographically confined to particular residential areas of Tampere. These community members thus live very locally in their own

districts, and the online and real life networks overlap with each other (cf. Jones 1998, 5).

Previous investigations into community radio and television suggest that the potential contribution of the media to the community development process is limited. Community networks may reinforce the social capital of an area when components of it are already present, but contribute little to improving the actual situation faced by localities. It is nonetheless important that these earlier media investigations and results should induce researchers to become engaged in the creation of community networks through critical and constructive study and consultation (Jankowski, van Selm & Hollander 2000; cf. Massey & Haas 2002).

Within this perspective, the fundamental condition for understanding this activity as collaborative learning is highlighted in the evolution of the civic web. A community is seen as a set of interindividual relationships which carry the participants' common understanding of the community's function and objectives. The compatibility of each actor's personal objectives and the community's common goals, as well as the dialogue between individuals striving towards understanding and consideration, are also crucial (see Kurki 2002, 50–51). Learning can be defined as a change in an individual's level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviour, and it can occur sporadically in various kinds of situations. The assumption is that in communal activity the individual and the community go through a parallel learning process. In this Manse Square project, systematic training and support have been taking turns and represent a part of the communal activity.

Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland (2001) connect this kind of social and dialogical learning to the process of civic innovation. By this they refer to the development work of people and their organisations or movements. The communal process

can help to solve local problems, enhance local democracy and empower civic agency. The civic innovation process is usually realised on the initiative of a local administration or is somehow connected to it.

According to Maryann Feldman (2001, 48–51), innovation is about problem-solving and the development of products, processes or methods which create novelty. The creation of something new thus becomes an important result. As a process, innovation is cognitive and social: individuals from different disciplines, competencies, vocabularies and motives together make knowledge creation and deployment; 'negotiations, clarifications and re-conceptualisations as an idea moves to become an innovation.' Civic innovation can be conceptualised as a process in its own right by reason of the public participation of citizens which often takes place in collaboration with professional actors and authorities (Sirianni & Friedland 2001). In several sub-projects of Manse Square, innovative actions have been proceeding and civic innovations have been created.

In traditional design and development processes in information technology, there can be seen a manifest practice to configure the user to meet the device and particular computer. This typical match-up is a systems view and neglects the experimental opportunities of the real user. M. J. van Lieshout argues (2001) that configuration and appropriation strategies should be understood more from the user's point of view with an experimental attitude and as a mode of social learning. Innovation, development and experimentation with tools and methods together with user groups (i.e. residential and cultural communities) form essential parts of the research project in Manse Square.

M.J. van Lieshout (2001, 147–150) describes social learning in the digital city of Amsterdam (DDS) during an open project which emphasised flexibility in design, adaptability of both

users and uses and explorative settings which lasted throughout the whole life cycle of the project. Opposite to this mode the author describes the mode of control, which has elements of central regulation, a clear separation between designers and users, values developed by the project organisers, a strict deadline for the project and an evaluation appended to it. The Manse Square project lies somewhere in between these modes, but has been implemented more according to the experimental mode. Although there has been some 'controlled' support, several results can be reported regarding residential and cultural communities, individuals and network media (cf. Sirkkunen 2004, 19).

The Net – A publishing channel and a tool to influence

Manse Square has established its position as a civic web medium in local publicity in Tampere and as a new form of communication for its citizens. A characteristic feature is that the number of citizens' home pages grows regularly by itself. Also, the City of Tampere has located the project as a part of eTampere project and supports coordination of the various communities. In 2005 there were altogether 23 online Manse Communities and 5 neighbourhoods lining up for a site on Manse Square, whereas the total number of real life districts in Tampere amounted to 80.

Compared for example to Digital City of Amsterdam, Manse Square attracts more female users (68%, N=236), while DDS users have been mostly men. According to the national civic web user survey (*Seutuverkkojen käyttäjätutkimus* 2004), the users of Manse Square are aged 25–49 and are employed fulltime or have the status of students. They have fairly high education, most of them holding a high school diploma and nearly half of them a degree in vocational high school or higher (44%) (cf. van Lieshout 2001). Nearly all of the respondents have a PC at home, and about half of them have a broadband connection. They can

be called active ICT users: 83% of them use PC, Internet, e-mail and mobile phone several times a day. The respondents do not necessarily act as content producers in the Net neighbourhood teams, but they are active website users in Tampere and elsewhere in Finland.

Pauliina Lehtonen's survey and thematic interviews (2004a) among active Net team members shows that these users consider the activities of Manse Square important, even if they do not visit the site very often, only once a week or more seldom. Among their favourites are the neighbourhood home pages and articles about their own residential areas in the Manse Communities section. This section offers possibilities to follow up current issues in a given district, read about history and visit online flea market or discussion board. The use of the journalistic Manse Media section with local stories is almost as common as the use of Manse Communities, whereas the section of Manse Forum is not so popular among residents in that it is concerned with issues in the whole area of the city and with political participation. Especially the designed participatory tools and services in Manse Forum have not met the needs of citizens or city officials as widely as was expected at the beginning of the EEC project. Such tools are, for example, the civic participants' handbook, an initiative filing system and an electoral machine for sustainable development. Respondents nevertheless consider these participatory possibilities very important.

As positive results of this EEC research project, some changes among residents and their neighbourhood communities can be reported (Kotilainen 2004; Lehtonen 2004a):

- A publishing channel for web publicity for communities
- Alternative genres and other new participatory forms on the web

- Citizens' influence on local issues and digital competencies
- Networking of residents and communities

The web has become a publishing channel and a tool of influence as a result of the activities of the neighbourhood home pages and cultural interest groups on Manse Square. The total duration of the research projects realised during the six years has helped to consolidate web activities. Genres alternative to the mainstream local media and other new participatory forms have been tested and built up during the project. Software and narrative forms have been created to support citizens' public interaction with local authorities. Thus the whole Manse Square project has constituted a civic innovation and experiment in itself (cf. van Lieshout 2001; Jankowski et al. 2000; Sirianni & Friedland 2001).

It emerged in all sub-studies that the civic web projects have not only promoted participants' own local issues and influence on local democracy, but have also contributed positively to the development of individuals' and communities' external contacts. This has taken place through networking at research project gatherings with other e-publishing communities and persons. In addition, networking has proceeded in many projects with local schools or certain administrative officials. Networking has obviously supported this kind of citizens' web activity, and has encouraged citizens to publish and participate on the web. Skills have been learned in all the abovementioned areas. In addition to digital skills, influencing skills and networking skills have also accumulated (Lehtonen 2004a; Kotilainen 2004). This development may have taken place in communities which already have some social capital as a civic or individual resource, for example in the Net teams (cf. e.g. Jankowski, van Selm & Hollander 2000).

Pauliina Lehtonen (2004a; 2004b) describes the evolution and the results of Manse Square within the framework of social

capital: residents' networking has increased trust, reciprocity and sense of community in neighbourhoods. As an example, Lehtonen (2004b) gives an account of the development of a so-called citizen jury. For about one and a half years the citizen jury in the Tesoma district attempted to act politically and to participate in the development of their own neighbourhood. As a part of their deliberation jury members in Tesoma contemplated how new information and communication technologies should be developed into a meaningful instrument for local participation. During the project one of the jury's proposals was introduced to the city representatives, who considered it useful. The proposal concerned the website of the city, how the web designers and officers of the city could improve the structure and presentation of issues to render the service more friendly to civic users.

During the process people on the jury became more self-confident when expressing their opinions. They started to listen to different views and arguments and began to evaluate their own opinions more reflexively. After the research project citizen activism in Tesoma did not fade away, since the members of the jury were involved in founding a neighbourhood association in the area. This body has grown from a few to some two hundred members and has among other things organised various happenings in the area. This represents a new mode of acting in web publicity, but the citizen jury can also be classified as a civic innovation (Lehtonen 2004b; cf. Sirianni & Friedland 2001). This local jury is also a good example of the active audience approach as experimental, critical and constructive study and consultation (Jankowski, van Selm & Hollander 2000; van Lieshout 2001).

Information technology as the restrictive factor

Activities in the Manse Square project have been restricted by a variety of practical problems, a low level of technical competence, unfamiliarity and the high costs of the technology.

The functionality of web technology cannot be trusted on an everyday basis, and interaction between web experts and users does not always run smoothly. Unfamiliarity with web activity and a low level of skills have also been mentioned as problems among residents and local authorities. In Manse communities, however, almost half of the residents with basic web publishing skills have reported having instructed others in devising neighbourhood home pages. In addition, the communities have experienced problems with voluntary work: there have not been enough volunteers to update the web pages or to lead discussions. The prime reason, especially for families, has been found to be the lack of time to take up new hobbies. This observation also reveals who has the time and the interest for such a demanding citizenship: those with no job or family (Kotilainen 2004). It must also be noted that active citizenship as an active audience assumes different modes in human activities which do not all take the physical form of participating in community or movement actions (cf. McQuail 2000; cf. Livingstone 2005).

The traditional local media in Tampere have reported on Manse Media and other Manse Square events, but the sub-projects have not reached any wider publicity. Reporters have searched for ideas from the website and this is how the Manse Square has influenced a broader local arena: its impacts can be seen for instance in the construction of themes and in reporters' choice of viewpoints. Local authorities have used Manse Square as a source of information for civic issues and opinion. So far, however, they do not consider the website a significant means of communication between residents and authorities, and they have not been eager to take part in civic discussions on the web. Also, the active audience approach in the form of civic innovation experiments has remained strange to the local media, and these experiments have not extended to the mainstream media (Lehtonen 2004a; cf. Jankowski et al. 2000).

The research project as a sociocultural animator

One essential factor in the development of Manse Square has been the role of the research project itself as a promoter of development and learning in the frameworks of action and design or development research (see e.g. Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998; Bereiter 2002). Both of these research frameworks have the objective of reforming, developing and changing actions or models. The action research framework implies research 'for the people and by the people'. Changes can be implemented by several research methods and the focus is on problemsolving together with other involved partners: planning, acting, evaluating and reformulating processes. Participatory action research has its roots in the social sciences and education, while design and development research also draws upon media, arts and technology studies (Dubell, Erasmie & de Vries 1980). Regarding Manse Square, the research project has been a public development institution which has implemented the progressive cycle of needs and conducted mediapedagogic interventions in publishing communities in a digital media context on the worldwide web and in real life.

Media Pedagogics means teaching about media, and with media. In this project, residential communities have been developed by imparting skills to residents to create for example home pages by practical hands-on methods. The researchers have also been helping residents to participate in current local issues in many ways: for example by organising seminars and other possibilities of public discussion together with residents (e.g. Buckingham 2003; cf. Giroux & McLaren 2001).

From the point of view of development work, the process can also be compared to sociocultural animation. It is a movement evolving in the sphere of Social Pedagogics, particularly in Latin America, in development and research projects. The objective is

Sirkku Kotilainen

to prevent marginalisation and to support the development of individuals and communities towards conscious construction of life and citizenship. According to the main underlying theory, Paulo Freire's pedagogy of liberation, an individual does not really require teaching, but learns in the process of communal participation. Essential in this process are the animators of various kinds and the community itself. Authorities, associations or other organisations are usually involved with sociocultural animation in some way or other, functioning as public enablers (Gillet 2004; Kurki 2000, 42–43; Freire 1973; 2001). The Manse Square project may be envisaged as such an enabler, the sub-studies as actions of animation and the researchers and other actors in the project as animators who are supporting dialogical learning.

Community Net activists, researchers and web designers have had a significant role as animators. The awakening of individuals and communities to understanding web publicity and specify their personal needs, has built on motivational acts of sub-project researchers during the planning stage. This process has continued throughout the actual web activity, as the actors have gained better technical skills and understanding of web publicity. Also, peer critique and reflection with researchers after various undertakings, have been crucial in some of the sub-projects. The reflection of learned skills and experiences generates new viewpoints. Thus, the needs and practices of a community, or the web-democracy of a city, can be seen in a new light. According to Paulo Freire, action which leads to the evolution of a community should be realised through a triad of awareness, action and theory (reflection), which is the process of dialogical learning (cf. Kurki 2000, 134–137; 2002, 57; Freire 1973, 84–87, 123–126).

For example within a sub-project dealing with neighbour-hood reporters, emphasis has been laid on reporters' strong commitment to their own webmagazine. Ari Martikainen (2004) depicts neighbourhood reporting as inter-reflection between

peer learners. An example of inter-reflection is the art of making commentaries on stories, where the researcher's task has been mainly simply to summarise. Some dozen residents, aged 8–72, in different districts in the city of Tampere have been acting as voluntary neighbourhood reporters. They have been publishing stories with pictures from their own suburb in the webmagazine Manse Media via the publishing platform on the Net. The reporters are interacting closely with their interviewees in the various neighbourhoods, and reflection has also taken place with reporters and interviewees. This sub-project in the Manse Media section is a clear example of citizen and community media activities in digital networks (Rodriguez 2001; cf. Jankowski et al. 2000).

However, not all the sub-projects have applied this dialogical model of learning with reflection; in some cases the publishing process in the community has begun more as a top-down activity emanating from the researcher to the residents instead of via communicational needs arising from the community itself. In these cases, publishing on the web has remained no more than an experiment and net activists have not been committed to continuing their publishing activities after the research project closed in spring 2004. According to Paulo Freire a number of pedagogical situations have failed when they have been carried out without taking into account the views of the participants in the communal program (Freire 1973, 83). The activities and discussions on the Manse Forum section have been led mostly by the researchers. After a lively beginning they have sought to keep activities alive and get local political movements and groups interested in web-mediated publicity. They have moreover organised discussion series trying to unify physical and net discussions between residents and local administrators, with the result that mainly the net has not induced participants to become

involved. In 2005, there were hardly any civic actors. In this section the focus of issues may also be too broad considering the local politics of the whole city (cf. van Lieshout 2001).

Maarit Mäkinen (2004) reports on the sub-study among gypsies in Tampere, where the main purpose was digital empowerment, meaning learning which may have resulted in significant development in the community's and individuals' interaction with the surrounding society. The purpose was achieved with the gypsies especially on the individual level, but within the gypsy community as a whole the process of empowerment has remained in progress. The community's needs for web media and the development of web communication skills turned out to be essential factors in the launch and progress of the empowerment process. The gypsies interviewed felt that there had been changes concerning the essential points. They also experienced an increase of confidence in their own capabilities and growth of their personal networks. This case shows, for example, that the important factors in individual and community development are individual and communal motivation and experienced needs, together with probably already existing social capital (see also Lehtonen 2004a; cf. Jankowski et al. 2000).

Researchers as participatory agents

The researchers participating in the project have together with residents created and supported public web space and other requirements for civic participation. Researchers and web designers have worked as teachers and consultants over and above the execution of their basic tasks, that is, research and development of web tools. In the interviews they name their own roles as follows: *technical resource, producer, consultant, trainer, preacher* or *inspirer*. It is essential that the researchers should feel that they were also mostly learners with other actors in the

development process (cf. Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998; Dubell, Erasmie & de Vries 1980).

Communities go through different stages in their development, which was noted during the research project also in Net team evolution. Usually there has been marked activeness at the outset, which has decreased as the number of volunteers has started to decline and residents have become better aware of the limitations of their digital competencies. In communities which have already been involved for several years there has been considerable variation in the levels of activity, for example in terms of net activists' interests and the amount of time they have devoted to the project.

In the initial stages of the sub-projects researchers designed and produced the communities' first websites in collaboration with citizens participating in Net teams. Subsequently the role of the researchers in the maintenance and further development of websites gradually diminished. Since completion of the research project there has been a half-week coordinator with the funding of the City of Tampere: the project offers server space, lends technical equipment, provides helpdesk services and gives training in web publishing for community Net teams. The coordinator also organises monthly network meetings for all actors on Manse Square.

The aim of sociocultural animation is to induce communities to grow independent and build their own norms of activity. For example, the activity of the citizen's jury in Tesoma has during the process developed into official resident association activity. Also the work of neighbourhood reporters is so far continuing. These two sub-projects are good examples of civic innovations which have re-constructed web-mediated local publicity and empowered the online communities. As M. J. van Lieshout (2001) has surmised, such concrete issues and actions on a local scale can lead to empowerment. In these cases development has taken

place not only in an experimental natural mode and with control, but with dialogue and reflection as sociocultural animation. As noted by Jankowski, van Selm and Hollander (2000), also here the community development process has been limited and has concerned mainly the actives and Net teams participating in the development processes themselves.

Innovative development: Studying together

The worldwide web has served in this research project as an information network, a subject of study and a tool, and as a public environment for community development and research. The evolution of the civic web as a participatory means of communication has been studied in the perspectives of active audiences, innovative development, sociocultural animation and learning. During the evolution of the Manse Square website and its online communities, researchers could identify and increase knowledge of the process involved in civic web construction and the support of individual and communal growth in digital participatory environment. The research project has touched on residential geographic communities, communities of interest and also cultural communities, developing local participatory web-mediated publicity with them.

The knowledge we have acquired reflects the local characteristics it stems from, and it is difficult to generalise from the evolution process, for example with regard to factors which prevent the spread of good practices. Some concluding remarks may nonetheless be offered regarding the identified commonalities of civic web construction and development work.

The need for and the role of different ways of supporting development activities have not been discussed enough nor made visible enough. One of our key observations has been that the web media alone do not lead to any significant changes; this applies to

both open natural experiments and the control mode. I would argue that in this kind of innovative development, manifold support is needed in order to bring about civic and community digital empowerment and promote participation in web publicity, as this research project has sought to do over a number of years. The project's main aim has been to function as a sociocultural animator in various ways in a process which has been new and open to citizens and communities. Intervention has been part of the process generating needs and empowerment in the various communities. The civic innovation process takes time, it is interventionist and attains value in individuals and communities aware of the potentialities of web-mediated publicity (cf. Bereiter 2002). Another observation has been empowerment; when it has evolved, it has been in the service of individuals as their personal growth and in the service of community need and growth. The development has also partly reached some communities near the digital divide.

Where there is a desire to provide independent web media one needs to provide the actors not only with Net access but also with different accessible and easily operated web tools, software and alternative genres for civic expression, as well as with information about them. Awareness of communicative needs in residential and cultural communities regarding the Net has been one crucial point in the development. When needs and ideas spring from the community, then a commitment may emerge among residents to continue publishing on the web. In this project the Net teams and other web actives, the training and guidance organised by the project as well as the consulting attitude of the researchers have served as media pedagogic support resources in the development process. In the case of other development situations, the structures of the civic web procedure should come from municipal actors, cooperation added with other partners interested in local communication via the Net.

Sirkku Kotilainen

If the aim is to enhance empowerment, civic innovation and participatory action, development activities should strive to create such publicity and support which provides participatory residents with insightful questions, the ability to see new connections and a readiness to communicate via the Net and a better understanding of the possibilities of democratic participation. In the case of Manse Square, the foci of civic participation have shifted since the outset from efforts to influence local political issues on the Manse Forum towards more narrative forms of self-expression in the Manse Communities and Manse Media sections. Residents wish to make public in these local alternative media such everyday neighbourhood issues which are not regarded as news in the mainstream local media. Thus the residents' relationship to web publicity is focused more upon the subjective and community levels in the city's districts than upon the whole city and active political participation. For example, the amount of participatory discussion on the Net has remained very limited.

The residential Manse Communities and neighbourhood reporters' community publishing on Manse Media have been stabilised online communities on Manse Square. These digital and social networks do not necessarily demand committed political participation from either residents or local administrators, but instead offer digital possibilities for civic self-expression and local neighbourhood micropolitics with a cultural dimension. These audiences are 'communicating back' and they use various levels of active audiences as activists experimenting and producing on web-mediated publicity, consuming online services and also taking the position of non-participation (cf. McQuail 2000; Livingstone 2005).

According to this research project's experiences the key building blocks in the development and management of digital network projects and especially in the construction of civic websites can be summarised in three points:

- Understanding of the innovation and learning processes
- Dialogue with different participants as a basis for development
- Openness to experiment and visionary participants

In order to enhance commitment in civic web activities, project workers need to understand the dynamics of innovation and dialogical learning processes. In the beginning they must direct their energies towards awakening subjects and communities to see the possibilities of communicating in the Net. This leads on to the concrete work, and then follows the most important part: a collaborative reflection on what has been done, why it was done and how one could perhaps have acted otherwise. A reflective touch is the key element in the whole development work, and it must be reached through a dialogue connecting different partners of the project: the civic, municipal, academic and business actors. The whole design and development process is at its best a process of studying collaboratively together. Because of the continuous development of information technology tools developers and users can learn from each other. The greatest difficulties in such collaboration have arisen from the different competencies in skills and understandings of ICT technology within the Manse Square project. These have shown up as questions of language and power, for example when civic participants have attempted to develop web tools with the designers.

The EEC research and development project was realised within six years and still many questions remain open. Cultural habits and ways to communicate openly in terms of politics among residents and local administrators have not changed much so far, as has been noted by previous media researchers. This research also supports the notion that the innovative process needs time, continuing openness to experiment and the input

of visionary participants. The Manse Square project has focused on the Internet, but there is equally an opportunity in taking advantage for example of cell phones or other technologies. Also, there is a possibility of expansion in innovative experiments as a more integrated process in people's lives.

From the city's viewpoint, it would be important to enhance civic participation via the Net when the local government is trying to develop its own services. From the university and research perspective it would be important to continue these kinds of experiments to give the next generations of students and researche's an opportunity to observe and further the evolution of a civil information society. There are also many potentials for civic innovative development which should be taken seriously in the mainstream media. Active audiences are here to stay online.

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