Community contributed content with web 2.0 social bookmarking tools

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Disappearing disciplinary borders in the social science library - global studies or sea change?

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Introduction

The United Nations is increasingly worried about Africa's brain drain and has warned

that it could have dire consequences for the continent. The continuous stream of its

professionals to Europe and the Americas is affecting Africa's development and

prosperity. According to Dr Lalla Ben Barka of the UN Economic Commission for Africa,

within 25 years, Africa will be empty of brains (UNECA, 2008). She argues that this

movement from developing African countries to industrialized nations is not a new

phenomenon. However, the magnitude of the growing problem demands urgent action

as the consequences of brain drain threaten to stunt the overall development of the

continent. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration argues that Africa

has already lost 1/3 of its human capital and is continuing to lose its skilled personnel at

an increasing rate. It is reported that there are now more African scientists in the United

States than on the whole of the African continent. Africa's share of global scientific

output has fallen from 0.5 percent in the mid-1980s to 0.3 percent in the mid-1990s.

At the same time, new technologies have been developed that increase collaboration

through communication. An example of such a technology is Web 2.0. Since 2005,

many experts (O'Reilly, 2005; Miller, 2005) are suggesting that the World Wide Web

has gone through a major upgrade. The World Wide Web has moved to a place where

people can build virtual applications by drawing data and functionalities from a number

of other sources on the Word Wide Web. In other words: the Web 2.0 is about sharing

code, content, and ideas. For several years the implementation and implication of Web

2.0 tools have been included in discussions about ways to support interdisciplinary

research. Although these discussions derive from different fields of interest they all assert that Web 2.0 will improve the creation and sharing of knowledge.

Focuss.Info as the knowledge management tool for global development matters

As outlined in the introduction, the global south is increasingly struggling with the problems of losing knowledge. However, new emerging technologies on the World Wide Web improve the creation and sharing of knowledge. Therefore, the latter could be seen as an opportunity to face the problem of Africa's brain drain. As a result, the Focuss.Info Initiative has been developed by a collaboration of currently 40 partners regional, national and international institutions from the northern as well as the southern hemisphere as the knowledge management tool for global development matters.

The Focuss.Info Initiative is a collaborative platform of people with interests in the international field of global development matters through which they store and share their knowledge of valuable electronic resources. On one side, the people are working for regional, national and international institutions and, on the other side, the Focuss.Info Initiative includes individual students, researcher, and practitioners. Together, they are storing knowledge of valuable electronic resources on the Internet through the Web 2.0 tool social bookmarking. Social bookmarking, a web-based service to save and share electronic resources, is an example of a virtual application that enhances the discovery and manipulation of information in which users participate (Miller, 2005).

Storing knowledge through social bookmarking

In the period of Web 1.0, Internet users used to save their favorite websites locally on their computers. As a consequence, these lists of websites could only be accessed from that same computer. While on a business trip, attending a conference, or just working from home, these websites can be difficult to access. Additionally, by saving useful collections of websites on only one computer, the collections are only available to and accessible by one person. Contrarily, social bookmark platforms such as del.icio.us and citeulike.org let Internet users save lists of websites on the Internet. This is a major improvement for our peers in the international field of global development matters who are increasingly using resources accessible on Internet while the number of digital libraries and sources of information increases daily. Consequently, Internet users can retrieve their favorite websites on every computer as long it has an Internet connection and share their favorite websites with others.

Specifically this means that people with interest in the field of global development matters can maintain their own virtual filing cabinets, also known as a social bookmark account, which builds into the creation of a knowledge network. Let's illustrate this with an example. Victor, a researcher in Cameroon, uses the Internet to find information about the analysis of agricultural projects. While surfing on the Internet Victor finds useful information in databases of journals; information he normally does not find through generic search engines. To make sure he can retrieve the found page next week or next month, he uses del.icio.us to save his favorite website. With one click of the mouse he adds the website to his social bookmark account. Additionally, del.icio.us

asks Victor whether he wants to label his favorite website with a keyword, also known

as tags, to improve accessibility. He tags the website and it is listed in his social

bookmark account. Additionally, Victor's social bookmark account also shows how

many people have saved the same website and, consequently, Victor is now able to

browse through the social bookmark accounts of those people with the same interests

and find new electronic sources about the same topic. Through this process Victor

builds a knowledge network through people who he never would have known without

using social bookmarking.

Sharing knowledge through a subject specific search engine

Previous example about how Victor is now able to browse through the virtual filing

cabinet of others is an important feature of social bookmarking. Not only you are storing

your favorite websites and sharing it with others who can access your social bookmark

account, you can also look into the social bookmark accounts of them. Consequently,

Victor stores and shares his knowledge of valuable electronic resources, and creates

new knowledge of valuable electronic resources through others. Thus, if social

bookmark tools already enhance the knowledge management process for the people in

the international field of global development matters, why is a collaboration of currently

40 regional, national, and international institutions managing the Focuss.Info Initiative

as *the* knowledge management tool for global development matters?

The Focuss.Info Initiative also aims to share knowledge of valuable electronic websites

stored in social bookmark accounts by making the social bookmark accounts retrievable

through a subject specific search engine. This subject specific search engine is being offered by the Coop-project of Google. Whereas the social bookmarking tool shares knowledge of favorite websites by letting people browse through the tags assigned by others, the subject specific search engine shares the knowledge of favorite websites by letting people search through these websites full-text. In respect of the Focuss.Info Initiative, the social bookmark accounts of people – who are active in the international field of global development matters – are being indexed in the Focuss.Info search engine. This makes their hand-picked favorite websites full-text retrievable. Additionally, these people are also adding tags that describe the content of the favorite website. These tags are not generated from a collection of terms described in an existing taxonomy; the tags are generated personally from people and are part of a folksonomy (Vander Wal, 2004). The tags which are part of a folksonomy are an important feature for the accessibility of the knowledge of valuable electronic resources, because research on folksonomies has shown that 80 percent of the tags are not mentioned within the electronic resource. Consequently, the tags are also a valuable source of knowledge as it puts an electronic resource in its social context.

Where generic search engines, such as Google, Microsoft Live and Yahoo, are only full text indexing electronic resources from different disciplines, the Focuss.Info search engine indexes electronic resources from one discipline with human made tags which describe the context. As a result, the relevance of the search results of Focuss.Info is much higher than the search results of generic search engines (Lalleman and Wesseling, 2008).

Knowledge management through Web 2.0

Because both the social bookmarking tool and the subject specific search engine are Web 2.0 technologies from independent developers, technical maintenance of the Focuss.Info platform is minimal and, consequently, the promotion on using social bookmarking tools is maximal. This promotion consists of the shift in thinking that the ones involved in global development matters should start abandoning saving favorite websites locally on their computers and beginning saving favorite websites on the Internet. In other words, the international field of global development matters should move away from Web 1.0 approaches by embracing the Web 2.0 approach.

As the amount of social bookmarkers are increasing and the Focuss.Info Initiative is becoming a platform with rich community contributed content, it is also important to promote this community contributed content back to the regional, national and international institutions, as well as the students, researchers and individual practitioners in the international field of global development matters. The introduction already outlined that Web 2.0 tools are significant because it is about sharing code, content and ideas. In this respect, the Focuss.Info Initiative enables knowledge sharing in two ways. First, the partner organizations and students, researchers, and individual practitioners are sharing their personal knowledge to the community through the Focuss.Info Initiative. Second, the Focuss.Info Initiative shares the code of the subject specific search engine with anyone who is interested in adding this search engine to their own website. Consequently, the Focuss.Info Initiative enables individuals as well

as partner organizations in becoming knowledge brokers by sharing the community

contributed content captured within the Initiative.

Risks of Web 2.0

The Focuss.Info Initiative fully relies on Web 2.0 technologies to improve

communication among peers in the international field of global development matters by

collaboration. Although, after Web 2.0 was being coined by O'reilly (2005) it also

received criticism.

One of the more vocal critics is Andrew Keen (2007) who argues that Web 2.0

technologies are driven by the tyranny of the majority and of the motivated. Despite a

platform consisting of experts, the motivated majority consists of an army of amateurs

who are threatening the manipulation of the new mode of knowledge creation,

dissemination and authentication by pressing particular political ends. By having these

strong beliefs, Keen (2007) constructs a false opposition between the expert and the

amateur in order to dismiss the skill and expertise of amateurs.

The Focuss.Info Initiative, for instance, has embedded quality-control tools which are

based on additional Web 2.0 technologies,. First, before the social bookmark account of

an individual contributor is being indexed by the Focuss.Info search engine, the

coordinators of the Focuss.Info Initiative are deciding whether the social bookmark

account should be indexed. In other words, the personal and institutional social

bookmark accounts are being checked beforehand. Second, after personal and

institutional social bookmark accounts are included in the index of the Focuss.Info

search engine, every new item that has been added is made visible on the website of

the Focuss.Info Initiative. Consequently, the users as well as the coordinators of the

Focuss.Info Initiative can check who is adding what. Third, and finally, the Focuss.Info

Initiative is publishing a register of individual and institutional social bookmarkers. The

social bookmarkers register summarizes information about where the social bookmarker

is working, what the fields of their interests are and how to access their personal or

institutional social bookmark accounts. The social bookmarkers register has not only

shown its value to control the quality of indexed social bookmark account; it also

connects individuals and institutions from all over the world. For instance, a Kenyan

project manager was recently asked to set up a community health program in the Gusii

district. Through the social bookmarkers register he found a contact who was living in

the United States of America and had worked within the discipline of health education

program design, planning, and management in Africa as well as South America. As a

result, the Kenyan project member is currently being supervised by the American

expert.

The future of the Focuss.Info Initiative

This paper started with the comment that the Focuss.Info Initiative is the knowledge

management tool for global development matters. The valuable electronic resources

stored by individuals and members of partner institutions are being shared throughout

the international field by adding these valuable resources in the Focuss.Info search

engine. However, throughout this paper it also becomes clear that the Focuss.Info

Initiative is more than only a knowledge management tool; it is also an expertise

management tool in the international field of global development matters. But can a

knowledge and expertise management tool such as the Focuss.Info Initiative tackle the

problems of Africa's brain drain?

The answer is yes. By letting individuals, groups, and institutions/organizations create

content-rich communities through social bookmarking tools, the Focuss.Info Initiative

can harness the people and their knowledge on one virtual platform. However, it is not

proposed that social bookmarking is the total-solution for knowledge management.

Polanyi (1958), one of the first persons to introduced knowledge management within a

business-context, argued that we only know what we know, when we need to know it.

Hence, we will only know what has been social bookmarked by our peers. Thus, the

more people who are social bookmarking in the international field of global development

matters, the better electronic resources will be mapped. Eventually, the shared

knowledge of interesting resources in the international field of global development

matters results in knowledge creation among peers. In other words, knowledge

management within the international field of global development matters is about

moving from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and moving from technology to people, because the

people within our field are the ones who should start storing favorite websites on the

Internet and become part of a cross-border knowledge management initiative: the

Focuss.Info Initiative.

In short, the coordinators of the Focuss.Info Initiative are continuing their work by promoting social bookmarking. This development is in line with what knowledge management expert Larry Prusak thinks how the future of knowledge management will look like. Prusak (2008) argues that there is no role for training in working with knowledge. He believes most of the training is an "industrial-age activity" that will eventually disappear. Where he does see potential is in teaching people how to work with knowledge, to develop meta-knowledge and mentoring for learning purposes.

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