

Chapter XXVI

The Personal Research Portal

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ABSTRACT

The author of this chapter proposes the concept of the Personal Research Portal (PRP) – a mesh of social software applications to manage knowledge acquisition and diffusion – as a means to create a digital identity for the researcher; an online public notebook and personal repository, and a virtual network of colleagues working in the same field. Complementary to formal publishing or taking part in events, and based on the concept of the e-portfolio, the PRP is a knowledge management system that enhances reading, storing and creating at both the private and public levels. Relying heavily on Web 2.0 applications – easy to use, freely available – the PRP automatically implies a public exposure and a digital presence that enables conversations and network weaving without time and space boundaries.

INTRODUCTION

In a *Knowledge Society*, the main problem knowledge workers^a have is invisibility: if people don't know that you know, and people are not aware of what you know, you are not. In a *Network Society*, the main problem that nodes have is being kicked off the network: you are worth what you contribute, if you don't contribute, you are not worth a dime.

Digital technologies have forever changed the way knowledge is disseminated and accessed, in at least two crucial ways. First, diffusion procedures

(publishing, broadcasting, etc.) have been getting infinitely easier and cheaper for those digitally initiated (the 'digerati'), but still remain surprisingly arcane for the ones on the dark side of the digital divide, less digitally literate and, thus, less prone to benefit from all the advantages of 'online casting'. Second, intellectual property rights – and their trade – have seen their basements dynamited by the fact that a digital copy has certain characteristics of a public good insofar as it is a copy and as such can be duplicated and disseminated. Under this approach, the tension between 'coffee for all' and private property has caused an increas-

ing strengthening of copyrights with a parallel adoption of new licenses aimed for the maximum spreading and sharing of content.

In view of this scenario, researchers, scholars and civil society organizations from developed and developing countries^b, are pressing governments and institutions to foster Open Access (OA) for their documentation: this means that documents are ‘digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions’ (Suber 2005a). OA can be considered a way to achieve universal reach of research diffusion at inexpensive and immediate levels^c. Most OA efforts have been aimed at the institutional level, devoting little energy to what the individual can do to contribute to this goal. Even though there are some valid reasons for this imbalance, there is ample opportunity for the individual to make a difference.

The philosophy and tools around the web 2.0 seem to bring clear opportunities so that these people, acting as individuals, can also contribute, to build a broader personal presence on the Internet and a better diffusion for their work, interests or publications. A Personal Research Portal, fostered and built individually, with the help of Web 2.0 applications and services, helps bringing into the spotlight underrepresented researchers and subjects, such as researchers from developing countries, junior experts or vanguard disciplines and topics not yet into the mainstream scholarly landscape and academic publishing systems. Indeed, the nature of ICTs – and the Internet in particular – do open a new landscape for knowledge exchange not necessarily mediated alone by institutions.

This paper aims to explore how individuals can contribute to the diffusion of research in the OA paradigm by means of social software and web 2.0 technologies. The example of the Personal Research Portal – a concept more than an artifact – can contribute to making knowledge more accessible to other researchers, but also

provides a model by which international research networks might be fostered. In detail, the paper analyzes how the PRP can contribute to creating an ‘online identity’, how this identity can help to create a network and how digital publishing is the currency of this network.

A Background Note on the Open Access Paradigm and Open Access for Development

Before entering the core of our article, we would like to expand a little bit the fact that access to knowledge is crucial for the development of research and, hence, for the progress of the society. In 2002 the Open Society Institute initiated the Budapest Declaration, supported by a group of scholars and seconded since then by thousands of signatories. The Declaration states:

Open access to peer-reviewed journal literature is the goal. Open access to peer-reviewed journal literature is the goal. Self-archiving (I.) and a new generation of open-access journals (II.) are the ways to attain this goal (Budapest Open Access Initiative 2002).

This set the basis of OA was later complemented by the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing (2003) and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003), with the aim to both give some definitions and commitments related to the OA paradigm. The transposition to a developing world framework took place in Brazil more than three years later with the Salvador Declaration on Open Access: the developing world perspective (2005) and was revisited at the Bangalore Declaration: A National Open Access Policy for Developing Countries (2006). As stated by Suber and Arunachalam (2005) “[f]or researchers in developing countries, OA solves two problems at once: making their own research more visible

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