

Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

An international conference on the role and potential of design research in the transition towards sustainability

Torino, 10th - 11th - 12th July 2008

Organised by Co-ordination of Italian Design Research Doctorates with
Conference of Italian Design Faculty Deans and Programme Heads.

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HYBRID ONTOLOGIES

Design knowledge in a hyper-connected fluid society

Abstract

In the knowledge society the continuous changing of instruments, framework and approach to collect and manage information requires the capability to construct scenarios to foresee the possibilities of the future. All these years the proliferation of the World Wide Web and its constant growth have furthered the development of evolved and complex systems to control and manage information, systems that have been designed according to guidelines to optimize the fruition and the retrieval of the data: many paradigms were born and among the most important there are semantic web and different models to create ontologies for the definition of exhaustive and rigorous conceptual schemes within specific domain of knowledge.

Close to hierarchical structures built to catalogue information using precise semantic models (Cyc, Wordnet, SUMO) have been discovered different modalities to manage the information, through metadata classification, to make more flexible the interpretation and the automatic elaboration.

The hierarchical construction of classificatory systems has guarantee the first footsteps for a formalization of the online knowledge, notwithstanding have gone growing some popular taxonomies (folksonomy) without default relationships among the elements and without a precise point of departure: these non-structures deserve to develop some spontaneous forms of classification and "bottom-up" collaboration, just to reflect the conceptual model of the users themselves.

This bottom-up process shows a trend of modernity, bringing the social aspect of the people relationships inside the net: it shows that every phenomenon is inter-related, that nothing exists self-sufficient or independent, and that is possible to manage a sustainable dimension of knowledge with a collaborative approach to the information.

This paper analyse these shapes of widened ethnoclassification (broad folksonomy) to explore which are the scenarios and the possibilities within design can improve on the construction of hybrid, bottom-up and collective ontologies, builded in itinere with the contribution of the users that trace definitions, associations and variations, in a kind of defective semantics, founded on the co-tagging, mash-up and syndication.

Starting from an academic research in communication design developed between Politecnico of Milan and University of Toronto, the main goal of the present work is to underline the role of design in a multidisciplinary environment, using an action-theoretical framework of inquiry and a methodology based upon a participatory dialogue with other fields like computer science, sociology and philosophy, to find out a sustainable vision of our world, where the information is no more related to specific schemas of profilation, but is embedded in the social networks of people, and is still growing basing its new standards of evaluation and classification less on stuff and more on human factor of relationship.

In a hyper-connected and fluid world the fundamental contribution of design research for the knowledge management would be to encourage to perceive things differently, to do things differently, and in the technology age this could mean transform not the core of the information, but the rules of the drivers that

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build this core, moving from a supervised and predefined ontological schema in a hybrid self-organizing ontology environment.

The relevance of this vision, based on a foreseen of the actual knowledge strategies, is not the dimension of design innovation in processes or in strategies, but the capabilities that design could really grant in a transition towards sustainability where the final aim is to build a people-centered world of information where criteria can evolve, overgrow, and disappear in harmony with the complex adaptive rules of the broad and narrow collectivities which they belong.

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