

Zagreb Innovation Ecosystem for Good Journalism

R&D project proposal to eSTUDENT organization

Draft January 23, 2012 by Dino Karabeg

The purpose of this document is to provide a concrete starting point that will motivate and orient immediate action. However, everything in it is negotiable.

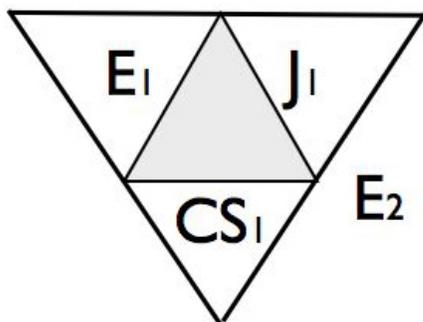
To facilitate international collaboration, I propose to conduct this project in English.

A minimal version of the Zagreb Innovation Ecosystem for Good Journalism (ZIG) project will result in

- 3 + 1 theses (PhD or MS) in Economics, Computer Science and Journalism
- an experimental media channel
- several startup ventures

Each of the 3 + 1 thesis projects will be a clear contribution to its native field, conducted in cooperation with a local faculty member. At the same time, this project as a whole is a contribution to systemic innovation which, as an emerging paradigm, offers additional incentives, as explained below.

The starting point of the ZIG project will be to implement the socio-technical solution for good journalism that has been developed at the Knowledge Federation Workshop Barcelona 2011 [1]. However, the student researchers are encouraged to challenge this solution and to improve it further. Each thesis project will begin at a well-defined starting point and develop as a trajectory through an idea space filled with learning opportunities. The guidance along the way will be provided by two advisors – the local advisor and an international one (who will by default be myself), as well as by the community of international researchers organized within Knowledge Federation.



- Thesis J1 will investigate, develop in detail and implement the systemic solution for good journalism outlined in [1,2]
- Thesis CS1 will analyse, develop in detail and implement the IT part of the systemic solution in [1]
- Thesis E1 will develop the relevant business and revenue models (micro-financing, value-based marketing...)
- Thesis E2 will develop and coordinate the resulting innovation ecosystem for good journalism and spin off corresponding startup ventures

Systemic Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Draft by Dino Karabeg, January 14, 2012

Enabling systemic innovation

At the workshop that Knowledge Federation organized within the Triple Helix IX conference at Stanford University last July, it was explained that the core purpose of Knowledge Federation is to ‘enable systemic innovation.’ This requires an explanation.

A new wave of innovation is often enabled by a new technology (think about the transistor, the VLSI chip or the computer). The Web too in principle enabled innovation to expand into a new domain, where new socio-technical systems for knowledge work (journalism, education, research, governance...) are created. Yet this new wave of innovation has not yet reached us. The Web – as well as other information technologies – are largely being used to power the patterns of use and interaction that have been developed based on old technology, such as the writing desk and the filing cabinet (in the user interface of the personal computer) and the printing press and the classroom [3].

We are now in a paradoxical situation: While our children are solving the challenges of World of Warcraft by collaborating globally and in real time using state-of-the-art virtual world technology, we serious researchers still try to tackle increasingly urgent and complex real-world challenges by publishing old-fashioned articles and going to conferences. This state of affairs obviously cannot last. But what is the alternative? And who will create it? While Blizzard Entertainment had no difficulty creating World of Warcraft within a traditional company setting, no game manufacturer can re-create the ‘game’ of journalism or of academic publishing and education. The journalists, and the academic researchers and educators, i.e. the people practicing in those professions, need to evolve new ways of working themselves. But they cannot do this on their own, because they lack the relevant technical and other expertise. And because ‘their job’ is to practice within their professions as they have learned them, not to recreate their professions.

Knowledge Federation self-organizes as an answer to the above challenge. In Knowledge Federation field experts, such as journalists, researchers and educators, collaborate with knowledge media researchers and developers, and with other stakeholders as needed. New systemic solutions are created and tested by using ‘bootstrapping’ or self-organization – the community uses itself as a sandbox to develop and test solutions.

As a result of several years of such self-organization, at our Stanford workshop we were able to introduce Knowledge Federation as a ‘missing

piece' that is still needed to trigger this new wave of innovation. Knowledge Federation has deliberately been conceived as a collaborative 'Game-Changing Game,' where 'winning positions' are new systemic solutions for key areas of knowledge work put to use. In other words, an explicit goal of Knowledge Federation is to change the practice.

To get an idea of the 'winning stakes' in this game, for each of the 'players' and for the society, think of a new systemic solution for knowledge work as a new piece of machinery, whose 'nuts and bolts' are the information technologies and the people engaged in knowledge work, as researchers and students, journalists and readers. The usefulness of each nut and each bolt in a piece of machinery is of course limited by the machine itself – whether it's properly or poorly designed, and whether it is well functioning or dysfunctional. It will turn out that the possibilities for improvement on the systemic level are enormous: those large-scale 'machineries' we are talking about have never been designed; oddly, the intensive waves of innovation that gave Information Age its name have so far been focused only on individual nuts and specific bolts; they have entirely ignored the whole thing – the way those nuts and bolts are put together.

As the following example might illustrate, the 'winning stakes' in this Game-Changing Game are uncommonly large, even for a new wave of innovation.

Systemic innovation in journalism and academic research

At the workshop "Co-Creating an Innovation Ecosystem for Good Journalism," which Knowledge Federation organized in Barcelona last November, a zero-version plan for a radically changed public informing has been created. Its details are now being developed within Knowledge Federation. In this designed systemic solution, journalists collaborate with academic researchers, the 'crowd' and other stakeholders, by using recently created collaborative knowledge-work technology, to co-create – and then operate – media information as it might be needed to enable contemporary democracy to tackle contemporary challenges. The details of this scheme are provided in a separate document [1]. What I would like to highlight here is the shadow this new way of organizing knowledge work might cast upon the conventional practice, where the vast proportion of the knowledge created in academia remains locked in academic specializations or 'silos,' while the journalists seek for the next sensation that will attract the attention of their readers... The Game-Changing Game has so far been played in the manner of positional chess: By making 'moves' that make other good 'moves' possible or more likely to succeed. In a recent letter, I have illustrated the nature of the 'position' we are in after Barcelona as follows:

I remember this brief story from one of my first school books: The grandmother prepared a 'remedy' for a sick boy, which consisted of a frog leg – so that the sickness would spring out of his body, and seven pebbles –

so that it may jump over seven mountains etc. Then his mother gave him a real medicine, and the boy recovered quickly.

I mention this story because it illustrates the notion of a paradigm: if you happen to see some part of our conventional social reality in similar terms as you see that grandmother's 'remedy,' then you might be on the track of a new paradigm. At my recent lecture in Europe House Zagreb, which you attended, I showed how Knowledge Federation is developing a new paradigm in knowledge work as a whole. We are not claiming that the sciences are like that grandmother's 'remedy;' and even the commercial journalism has its place and its reason for existence. It is, however, not difficult to see that the whole thing – specialized, isolated sciences, journalism whose aim is to attract attention... – is neither the best way to take advantage of human talent and of technology, nor a 'collective mind' that can give meaning and direction to an advanced civilization.

This letter was addressed to Iva Rašica, a gifted third-year student who leads eSTUDENT's Team for International Cooperation. eSTUDENT is a student excellence network at the University of Zagreb, which includes students from Economics, EECS and Mathematics and Natural Sciences. I wrote this letter as part of a dialog, through which some of the forthcoming moves in the Game-Changing Game are being prepared:

- I am proposing to create in Zagreb a mini- student version of the "Innovation Ecosystem for Good Journalism," which was created in Barcelona. The eSTUDENT organization already has the required kinds of expertise, only journalism is missing. Professor Nenad Prelog, who leads the study of journalism in Zagreb, and I have already talked about creating a project with eSTUDENTS where also his students would also participate.
- To streamline the process of putting the results of this development into actual practice, we are organizing a Startup Weekend in mid-September, where we will design and put into practice suitable entrepreneurial undertakings, as explained below.
- Through the IUC Dubrovnik, more concretely through the already planned Knowledge Federation-staged course "Systemic Innovation for Collective Creativity" we would 'internationalize' the mentioned project.
- I know I am not alone in desiring a (academic, entrepreneurial and cultural) scheme where the young people are developing elements of global positive change. Already in Spring 2012 we will begin contacting potential sponsors.

Systemic innovation in entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship streamlines human and other resources to provide benefits to society and jobs and wealth to participants, by creating new impulses in business. Reportedly, however (owing to the obvious difficulty to find yet another gadget that fits into the existing scheme of things, and which has not

yet been invented) entrepreneurship has often resulted in ‘new shaving razor with four blades’–type of entrepreneurial ideas.

Systemic innovation, backed by the Game-Changing Game, offers to entrepreneurs the first-mover advantages in a completely new game. the following metaphor might illustrate the nature of those advantages:

While an investment into oil drilling and gas stations would make little sense in a world where the only means of transportation is the horse, it made lots of sense in the world where Ford had just undertaken to mass-produce automobiles. Systemic innovation in any domain offers similar first-mover advantages to its participants.

Hence the project that Knowledge Federation may now begin in Zagreb is also an instance of systemic innovation in entrepreneurship.

The knowledge federation approach to systemic innovation

What we have just seen illustrates a particular approach to systemic innovation, which we are calling ‘knowledge federation.’ Political federation brings together formerly independent political units in a way that preserves their identity and part of their autonomy. Knowledge federation organizes various actors in knowledge work (scientists, journalists, students, entrepreneurs...) in an analogous way.

What I find particularly attractive about the project we are proposing to begin in Zagreb is that its goal is to design a single, concrete system (an ‘innovation ecosystem for good journalism’), and yet its outcomes are systemic innovations in all major components of knowledge work: journalism, research, education, entrepreneurship and governance. Through this act of systemic innovation, those areas are brought into a harmonious, synergistic relationships with one another; each of them benefits from all others.

Notes

[1] See “An innovation ecosystem for good journalism” – synopsis given in the detailed view (right-hand column) of <http://debategraph.org/IEforGJ>

[2] DK’s Prezi “Wikileaks for Insights” provides hints for a federated media channel, http://prezi.com/y-9_x-zu_2_p/wikileaks-for-insights/

[3] See the translation of Drago Pilsel’s article “Knowledge Federation” (subtitle: “What will the creation of knowledge look like in the future?”) in Croatian Novi List of Dec. 7, 2008) at <http://heim.ifi.uio.no/~dino/KF/NL2008.pdf>