

civil society, media and ict: an open path

by sanjin bužo and valentina pellizzer

“Two sets of issues in ICT policy are critical to civil society at the moment: access and civil liberties. Access has to do with making it possible for everyone to use the internet and other media... Civil liberties includes human rights such as freedom of expression, the right to privacy, the right to communicate, intellectual property rights... now the internet, which began as a space of freedom, is also threatened ... there are new attempts to restrict users' privacy and to limit their right to choose...” (ICT POLICY: a beginner's handbook, Chris Nicol, Association for Progressive Communication)

intro

oneworld – platform for southeast europe started from a project that had as its core mission to create a regional online media for civil society.

When we started working, the focus was not around the means, the tool but around the content, the audience, the languages. But very soon while moving our first steps into the CMS world, chatting and meeting in virtual conference rooms day after day, we started thinking about and around the technology.

We were users of technology and we were alternating love and hate towards it, we were activists, journalists, facilitators and we felt that we could not use just any technology. Friends from Italy, Croatia, South Africa, France, Check Republic introduced us to the Free Open Libre Software and to the Creative Commons discourse. So when we moved from the project phase to setting up the organization and its strategic priorities, our crosscutting them was openness thinking of content, infrastructure and standards.

transferring information

Even though, internet is becoming widely used and broadband is brought to the main urban areas, what is still missing is a community dimension and with it a community that is actively monitoring the decision-making processes. www.ict-policy.ba is a website to inform on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) events and policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with networked information from across the region and globally.

ICT policy overlaps with four strategic areas: media, telecommunication, industry and technology this means that there is a need of redefining boundaries among institutions, sectors and regulations. Civil society is about citizens and their role in determining their own lives; civic activity is in the social or public domain and, as such, it is inherently political; that is from our decision came to explore the intersection between ICT and Policy. Civil society has to be part of the process to ensure a wider representation of citizens' needs and priority against particular interests.

That's way in the frame of our project we translate the Internet Rights Chart in albanian, macedonian and bhs to provide individuals, groups and organization with a tool that with its 7 themes elaborate around the connection, implication and relevance of internet from a human rights perspective: access for all, freedom of expression and association, access to knowledge, shared learning and creation – free and open source software and technology development, privacy, surveillance and encryption, Governance of the internet, and last but not least awareness, protection and

realisation of rights.

building up resources

access to information is just the first step towards becoming an empowered individual or organization, once curiosity, interest are geared what is important is to be in possibility to learn, practise, discover. For these reasons we started developing trainings curricula, modules that could provide our partners with some support. We did not start from scratch, we use, adapted, translated material that were already there.

So, the real basis for dealing with technological challenges is found in share and share alike philosophy of the open source software and independent systems formula. The field work is thought as an interactive system of building upon, typical of open and collaborative communities. We localize, customize existing documents and modules that are offered under Creative Commons' mode of licensing or free for further distribution and create our own in absence of appropriate material. The outcome is almost always under or GNU or Creative Commons license system, including software, training material and handbooks.

Floss migration and digital stories telling constituted somehow milestone in our work. The first was the development of a tri-lingual migration toolkit, from proprietary to open operative system and the on-the-ground assistance for the real implementation of the migration. The latter provide us with a frame that merge technology and issues in a healing and empowering process.

(Both projects will be presented through audio-video support)

monitoring and advocating information society

In 2007, owpsee engaged in the field of social research, aware of the importance to connect scholars and academia with practitioners. Global Information Society Watch www.GISWatch.org offered a route from advocacy to policy. A collaborative project and a global initiative that brought civil society perspective on information society scene.

The key words are: surveying the state of information society and communication technology at the local and global levels, encouraging critical debate and strengthening networking and advocacy for a just inclusive information society.

The report is seeing every year growing the number of country reports, but what makes it really unique is the effective creation and strengthening of a network of civil actors engaged from different perspective in promoting a critical understanding of the information society and its challenges. During the process of writing, the participant learn standard and way of researching while, at the same time, create resources that can be used for advocacy and policy purposes.

(GISWatch is a growing initiative supported and lead by the Association for progressive Communication (APC) and Hivos).

Conclusion

For owpsee, www.ict-policy.ba, migration to Floss, digital storie and the GISWatch represent a dynamic learning cycle. A modality of using, presenting and promoting ict to sivil society actors along the three steps of a learning cycle: accessing information (as much as possible in the own language), getting capacity and tools and eventually entering the advocacy and policy arena to monitor and influence changes that are

coherent with a social-open vision.

Bio

sanjin bužo: networking manager at owpsee foundation, peace activist, blogger, trainer. Advanced user of floss likes to experiment and try. Interested in video editing and its application to campaigning and social issues has produced short videos.

valentina pellizzer: executive directress at owpsee foundation, activist, feminist and mamager has an extensive knowledge and experience in the domain of: women/gender, media issues (citizen/advocacy journalism); ICTs advocacy/policy; western balkan region; development and organization management. Likes training and facilitation from digital stories to gender evaluation methodology (GEM); based policy research and analysis to ensure credible contributions of the NGOs sector to the policy process as well as building NGOs capacity to both lobby and engage constructively with state actors. Board Member of the Association for Progressive Communication (www.apc.org).