OII SDP 2007 (Epilogue): Last thoughts about Web Science and Academic Blogging or Why did not Academia came up with Wikipedia. And some acknowledgments too

By Ismael Peña-López (@ictlogist), 29 July 2007

TOC:

If I were asked to summarize everything that's happened at the Oxford Internet Institute Summer Doctoral Programme 2007 here at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society I would, undobtedly, quote Jonathan Zittrain in one of his comments past Thursday: **Why did not Academia came up with Wikipedia?**

To explain why, I can (1) draw a list of all the applications and/or online resources we used during the course, (2) write a little digression about academic blogging and (3) explain one of my recursive reflections during these days: what is Web Science.

Conferences 2.0

Speaking in public has changed, specially if you pretend the audience to interact. Solemn one way speeches are over; prettily packeted content is too. The full deployment of ways to interact with people and information during the course was astonishing. I might be forgetting some of them, but here comes a rough list:

- Presentation tools, such as PowerPoint or the like. Some speakers also used mind-mapping applications. Some of them uploaded here.

- The Live Question Tool, to publish questions on the fly why listening to the speaker

- Wiki, as the main reference, schedule and content manager of the seminar

- Blogs: many of them.

- Flickr, for the photos

- YouTube and other video streaming platforms to watch some footage

- del.icio.us, for the links

- BibCiter, for bibliographies…

- …and eMule and Ares to share them in PDF or other formats on P2P networks

- [H2O Playlists](#), for academic references in general

- Instant messaging, to keep in touch with people home or students

- [Skype](#), to call home

- One ring to rule them all: [OII/Berkman 2007 Summer Doctoral Programme planet aggregator](#)

- One ring to find them: [Technorati](#)

- One ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them: [Google Reader](#)

- [Facebook](#), with his [corresponding group](#), to build and manage the social network

- [doppler](#), for the followup geolocation followup

- Also for followup purposes and appointments [Twitter](#) or [Upcoming](#)

- In the meantime, some of the attendants are sharing their music tastes through [Last.fm](#)

- And, of course, there's always plenty of e-mail.

- And SMSs

- And phone calls

- All these things on mobile phones, public phones (using fixed liines), handhelds, laptops and desktops either connected via wireless or LAN, some owned, some accesible at public points.

- Somebody even watched TV

And yes, most of them we used simultaneously *all of the time*, some of them were for post-conference purposes.

The fact: number of business cards delivered? Just one, to Samuel Klein in our [visit to the OLPC Foundation](#).

The anecdote: Karoline Lukaschek asked me to borrow a pen for the card. I gave her a pen drive to download into it the photos on her camera card. Well, she just wanted to sign the greetings card for the Berkman staff. Weird.

Why Academic Blogging

The use and goals of these tools were many, but the main philosophy behind was absolutely the same: disclosure. **Disclosure and engage in the conversation**. As stated by [John Palfrey](#) himself the first day, blogging (and diffusion in general) will be the

default; anyone interested in not to be blogged or whatever, should manifest it explicitly.

I still remember the reticences around when the MIT set up the OpenCourseWare project: nobody's gonna enroll in your courses anymore, they said. Well, the reaction to this Berkman disclosure policy has been twofold and crystal clear:

- For those not being able to attend the course, infinite gratitude (I've got e-mails) for sharing the materials, the experiences, the reflections, etc.

- For those aiming to attend the course, **no crowding out effect** at all but the contrary: the awaiting of a long long year before the call for applications for SDP2008 is out. I've got e-mails too.

But besides this unselfish sharing of knowledge (I wasn't actually being unselfish, but just taking notes on my geeky notebook: WordPress) the real thing has been **networking**. On one hand, the ones blogging during the seminars have created a densest grid of posts, interlinked ones to others, and by thus enriching one's own posts about a subject or session.

On the other hand, some posts got out of the circle and were mentioned by some other people such as John Palfrey, Ethan Zuckerman or Doc Searls, to name some of the ones that linked to me. Other faculty linked other attendants as well.

And not just contact, but also good input, as Julen's on the XXVIIth session about IP incentives and peer production.

Reversely, I could almost close the circle I opened when I first met online Tobias Escher, by meeting in person Helen Margetts and Ralph Schroeder, both working with him. The circle will actually close formally in September in York when I'll meet Tobias himself.

What Is Web Science

This eagerness to use these many online tools leads me to my next topic of reflection. Because, somehow, I think it can be used as some kind of proxy to measure what has been one of the recurrent subjects of personal analysis these days.

Related to the Internet, in particular, and this ICT enhanced society, in general (informational society, information society, knowledge society… whatever), I believe there are two opposite approaches to do research about it.

The first one, the **traditional approach**, is taking the changes in the society as a second derivative: I do research in Intellectual Property and I found that the Internet is changing my field of knowledge, the target of my research, hence, I will study the interaction between Intellectual Property and the Internet.

Second, the one I'd call the **Web Science** approach and is better explained with an example: I want to explore the concept of the *Digital Native* (I actually do, specially his relationship with the concept of e-Awareness). To do so, I must know about psychology and neurosciences (as Mark Prensky did), about how technologies work (Web 2.0, usability, server-client technical relationships, AJAX), sociological implications (social networks, digital identities), economical (broadband diffusion, mobile penetration), legal (cybercrime, intellectual property, spam), political (civic engagement, hacktivism, e-democracy), education (e-portfolio, personal learning environments, long-life learning, e-learning, game-based teaching), communication (citizen journalism), art and culture (mashups, rip-mix-burn), and the longest *et caetera* ever.

People I know range from one endpoint to the other, being myself, philosophically, no doubt in one of the furthest edges of the Web Science approach. I don't think there's a best or a worst approach, but I also believe that:

1. Some aspects of today's (and tomorrow's even more) life can only be fully explained (if possible) through a Web Science approach, e.g. Digital Natives

2. Some other aspects can be perfectly be approached in the traditional way, but will require a "digital effort" that, if not done, no valid conclusions can emerge from such researches. Cybercrime is, all in all, crime, but it will be absolutely necessary to understand what an ISP or an IP is, what and how works digital watermarking or hashing or electronic certificates, the technical difference between phishingh and pharming. Or why e-Democracy and e-Governance will be "2.0" (and what this exactly means) or they just won't be. Or why the number of secure servers is a good proxy to measure e-Business (I owe Michael Best pointing me to this last one, thank you!).

And I suspect that, besides our darkest geeky side, most of the scholars signing up to each and every new next killer app of the year just pretend to analyze things from the inside, to learn by doing, to catch up with our recent digital nationality.

The answer to the question **Why did not Academia came up with Wikipedia?** is, under this train of though, quite easy: we were far and outside. In another galaxy. In a dimension made out of atoms and time.

Acknowledgments

I can help but end this series of articles by thanking the people that made possible one of my best fortnights so far, both at the intellectual and emotional levels.

Amar Ashar, Suzanne Henry, Colin Maclay, John Palfrey, Jonathan Zittrain, Marcus Foth, Urs Gasser and Ralph Schroeder — the core organizing committee, if I'm not wrong — deserve my highest gratitude, the one you pay by giving them your home keys and a bed in your best room when they're around town, just that one.

The **Faculty** leading the seminars is one of that treasures you'd like to keep forever, specially when knowing that they came just for the pleasure of it — and how accessible, willing to share and how good *listeners* they were.

The attending **students** — my colleagues… my friends — are responsible for one of my worst headaches (knowledge overload) and heartaches (emotions overdose) ever. Never forgive you about that. I mean it. I just wish the hangover will last for long if not forever… or even get worse.

Last, but not least, I have a huge debt with **Tim Kelly, Pere Fabra and Julià Minguillón** for their support in me coming here. You all added up to make it possible: thank you, thanks a lot.

More Info

- [My SDP Square Metre](#), by Daithí Mac Síthigh

- [Wrapping up: SDP](#), by Daithí Mac Síthigh

- [SDP 2007; My Final Report](#), by Joris van Hoboken

- [Berkman Buzz, week of July 23](#), by Patrick McKiernan