Networked Communities:
Strategies for Digital Collaboration

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In the title of this book, a remarkable accent is given to the concept of network society, currently an object of intensive study everywhere. The authors view network society from the perspective of those societies busily constructing these networks. It should be noted that M. Castels, author of *The Rise of Network Society*, used instead of the term "information society" another one "informational society," meaning by this that information is not just a thing of importance in our time; rather, it is the ready access to information via telecommunication networks that gives local planners and entrepreneurs a special source of power. The networked communities are those with increased capability to create products and services that people need for a better quality of life.

Albert, Flournoy and LeBrasseur have studied not just the features and effects of the global network, but the enterprising communities that serve as hosts for the greatly expanded traffic flowing over this vast inter-network, and the innovative uses to which the network is put by local producers and distant collaborators. Communities in Ukraine, in North America and everywhere else are all interested in knowing how these global networks can be useful for them as tools for transformative change.

From a theoretical perspective, what we tend to first think about networked society is the inevitable conflict of global and local, which sometimes is represented as nationalism, or anti-globalism. In this book, a more positive technological position is proposed for resolving such conundrums: that is, the public at large can now be encouraged, enabled and incorporated into a process of global development that works to the benefit of all. The Internet is making it possible for people to get their own aims met while joining with others in implementing programmes of mutual

interest, without depriving others in the process. In this context, the specter of network society need not be viewed solely in terms of who is directing and controlling the global network. Rather, the focus is on democratizing opportunities for obtaining the good life for all through actualization of a common global potentiality: public networks that are accessible to common people.

This book reports on those strategies of effective digital collaboration that have resulted in communities producing and developing qualitatively new knowledge and innovative practices that are perceived to have been transforming in terms of linking schools to the Internet, providing government information resources on the Internet, addressing the problems of the digital divide, developing a knowledge-based workforce and so on. The authors are focused on those conditions, refreshed by technologies that allow for creative expression and the application of citizen innovation and intelligence, by which forward-looking communities can gain traction serving the common good.

For the Ukrainian audience, this book is interesting first of all because of its numerous examples and specific guidance that might help to make online collaboration more common and more professional. We do note how some internal contradiction appears here, because for new media, based upon the democratization of the Internet and diminished provider controls over customers, de-professionalization has become a distinctive modern-day feature. The phenomenon of citizen journalism is a recent illustration. Now it seems everyone can become not just a consumer of news, music and video, but also an independent producer/creator of all types of digital media content. What this book illustrates so well are the ways network society empowers not only individual members, but also provides the incentives and the means for towns and villages, non-profit organizations as well as commercial businesses, to initiate communities of interest online based on common goals.

The authors have researched the multiple ways communities around the world are using the special tools of digital communication to accelerate economic development, improve organizational performance, link to citizens and improve the quality of local living. The authors suggest a "change framework" for more active and informed community development in which local businesses and institutions transform themselves by being better connected locally, regionally and globally. Such an approach is of interest to the people of Ukraine, where more than 20% of the population are now regular users of Internet, and the number of online enterprises keeps growing.

In Ukraine as elsewhere, people are attracted to the World Wide Web because they are seeing that this is a new way to develop businesses, to get an education, to access government offices, to conduct library research, to promote tourism, to create a culture of digital use. For these reasons, community leaders are investing in broadband networks, asking for workers trained in informational and communication technologies, and seeking to create new Internet applications and software that better meet public needs and expectations. This book tells how community leaders as well as business managers have found more efficient and successful ways to get their needs met in this new online world where digital technologies and digital languages dominate.

It should be mentioned that the Internet played an extremely important role in Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004. Since the Web was beyond the control of the authoritarian government, the new online media were able to provide Ukrainian society with honest and unbiased information. The Internet also helped the revolutionaries to attract a following and to organize and execute their demonstrations. The Orange Revolution was, first of all, a network revolution. Today we need much more honest information about political events, effective communication among citizens in the society, and more productive and sincere dialog between citizens from one side and institutions of state government from another. That is why this book will surely kindle a big interest in Ukraine. In ways such as this, the technological capabilities of the global Internet will further extend democracy and freedom of the press all over the world.

The true meaning of the Internet is that the world is open for the first time; the result is that individuals and groups from any nation can exchange ideas and experience, can cooperate across national boundaries and can more fairly compete. Although the concept of digital communication had not yet emerged in the 1970s when these ideas were being aired in the United Nations and in UNESCO, the authors remind us of those debates over a New World Information and Communication Order that offered great hope for positively influencing global development, hastening and improving exchange of modern technologies and information between all the societies without distinctions—rich and poor. These debates were held under the umbrella concept of Information Society and, later, Network Society.

Albert, Flournoy and LeBrasseur refer to networked communities as the communities of the New World Order. What they write about is not just the realization of some projects; this is a story about economic and social justice and the realization of basic human rights. These big issues are now being addressed at the community level where cultures for using network technologies and democratization of these digital tools are developing within the general population. Building an infrastructure for broadband communications and assuring that there is an educated workforce should be among the priority interests of all states, and Ukraine is no exception. In some measure, what we are talking about is the necessary digital literacy of the modern society.

Whether they are called wired communities, smart communities or broadband communities, this book proves that in our digital epoch nobody with connection to the Internet resides beyond the main-line processes of development; any community can join the networked society to reach a new age of prosperity. Their size can be small or large; projects can be commercial or non-commercial. Whole towns, cities and even regions can turn into networked communities. Such communities regularly report their achievements at yearly conferences of the Intelligent Community Forum (http://www.intelligentcommunity. org), held in New York. Although uniquely distinctive in each case, the activities of these communities are aimed at widening their possibilities and increasing their effectiveness in places where people reside. This is how a real civil society emerges; sometimes the local communities mobilize for support, sometimes for mounting opposition, sometimes for collaboration with distant partners.

Networked Communities: Strategies for Digital Collaboration is more than a handbook on information technologies and citizen journalism. In Ukraine, a special programme of the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy: Mohyla School of Journalism, called the Digital Future of Journalism, is oriented to a similar set of tasks. But this programme is only for journalists. It is for the next generation who will work with online technologies, content and business development in new media. Yet, we now understand that this group can if it wishes easily position itself as a networked community anywhere in the world, and contribute to forming new smart and useful societies that do not currently exist. That is why this book will be really useful for university courses applied in all institutions of higher education in Ukraine.

The book has good composition, clear style, and is easy-to-use in Ukraine both in English version and (for the future) in Ukrainian translation.

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