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Public Policy and Social Network in Brittany (Bretagne).

Studies about "Bretagne 2.0" and BZH Network

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Abstract: Brittany is the most western European peninsula. Rich from information and communications technologies inventions, e.g. the Minitel in 1979, the Regional Council launched from 1995 onwards computing programs in order to sustain information superhighway and users skills in computing and practicing the Internet. In the meantime the Regional Council became owner of fiber-optic fragments. In 2006, in the report entitled 'Bretagne 2.0, an ambition for a digital Brittany' the technical infrastructures were massively subsidized in order to reduce the 'digital gap'. All of these public policies were designed for politically managed territories. In the same time, the Regional Council supports a social innovative actions on community informatics. For instance 'BZH Network' a private initiative launched on the Internet by a Breton from Tokyo in the end of 2005. To date, this network counts more than 3, 000 Bretons from the diaspora *i.e.* 20 countries, and from the territory on various technical devices (Internet websites and communications tools). However, these virtual community remains autonomous and its development unforeseeable. The network's sphere of action exceeds the Brittany's territorial frontiers. Investing in such technical devices, the public leaders are not able to control the uses made by the community. Considering that, we ponder how a territorial policy is able to go with informal networks. Conversely how actions in this community is able to take part in located and territorialized policies ?

Brittany is the most western European peninsula

With an area of 27, 208 km², Brittany has 2, 730 km of marines coast which is one third of the French coasts length. This "four departements" region, is located at the western end of France. The infrastructures of communication, consist mainly of 1, 151 km of railway, eight airports, 1, 137 km of four-lane motorways. In 1970, there was only 31 km of four-lane motorways (Conseil régional de Bretagne 2003). In 1969, President Charles de Gaulle considered Brittany as a "*peninsula [...] naturally far away from the center*" (Alvergne 2003). The Breton representatives and social leaders have been gathering since fifty years to build infrastructures networks. The representative's speech during the sixties and the seventies stressed on the "economical" gap. These networks infrastructures are visible. The territory is then defined as a political unit, bordered by fixed and formalized lines. Commonly, the concept of territory means a physical relation of proximity.

In 1996, a high-speed services network, called Mégalis was set up for closed groups of users and in 1998, four hundred cyberscommunes have been created. Cybercommunes are multimedia areas and their aim is to support users skill in computing and using the Internet. All these public policies were designed for limited and politically managed territories. But telecommunication networks, and particularly the Internet, are invisible networks carrying immaterial flows almost instantaneously all over the world. In this sense, the territory as a stable standard, is challenged with *"moving territories"* ermerging with the arrival of telecommunication networks and worldwide scale (Beauchard 1999). Challenged with an unlimited on-line space, the borders of the territories seem to be porous. The trend followed by communication tools leaders is to exceed the territorial borders

According to that how a territorial policy is able to match with informal networks? Why public policies for local management would have to support innovation coming from virtual communities? How could actions coming from digital communities be part of local policies?

Let us take an example, the private and informal initiative launched on Internet, in december 2005, which created the "BZH Network" group. The regional councils of Brittany and Pays-de-Loire financially supported the initiative in 2006. "BZH Network", a *"social network of Breton collective intelligence"*, was created by a Breton manager living in Tokyo on the social network platform, Viadéo. This group of more than 3, 000 net surfers thrives through the web on several social network platforms like Viadéo, Facebook and the website www.bzhnetwork.com. This group and the way it is managed with communication tools question the definition and the concept of community. A starting definition of communities of practice is given by Etienne Wenger :

> *"Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis."*

Etienne Wenger's approach (Wenger 2002) takes place in an organisation point of view which does not care about the uses of information and communication tools. However, according to Madeleine Akrich (Akrich 1987), technical objects own a political content in the meaning that they are active elements in the organization of relations between human and their environment. This definition of the technical systems materials will be applied in this text to cognitive artifacts which are the computing systems of communication.

Firstly, this text will present the evolution of the telecommunication networks and the Breton public policies since the first program launched in 1995 on information highways, until the 2006 program, "Brittany 2.0. An ambition for a digital Brittany ". The sources selected are official documents of the « Third regional bases of Brittany's territories » (December 8, 2007), and the two websites published by the Regional Council of Brittany: www.bretagne20.fr and www.region-bretagne.fr. The major interest is to understand what are the words linked with these public policies and technical and financial means. Secondly, the evolution of the "BZH Network" group will be spoken of. We mainly scanned the group dynamics from inscriptions and written sentences let by the users on several technical platforms. This analysis offers an original approach to the link between a technical system and a thematic community built on shared value like being Breton. Lastly, this text will question the financial support brought by the public policies in virtual community projects. Could this support be linked with a kind of institutionalization of the web users experience?

From "digital town and country planning" to "Brittany 2.0"

In December 2006, the Regional Council of Brittany started a program named "Brittany 2.0. An ambition for a digital Brittany" (Conseil régional de Bretagne 2006). This program was preceded by a study launched in June 2005, entitled "Brittany digital town and country planning" (Conseil régional de Bretagne 2005). In only one year, the terminology changed passing from digital town and country planning to Web 2.0. But each one of these expressions should lead to different public policies. Indeed, the concept of *"digital territory"* appeared at the end of the 90's because of three factors, according to Pierre Musso (Musso 2008) :

- *the deregulation of telecommunications (end of the public monopoly),*
- *the role given to local government agencies in the field of communication and telecommunications,*
- *a managerial logic and need of competitiveness regarding town and country planning.*

Competitiveness is particularly studied by the local representatives due to the question of economic mobility wich can be dramatic for some areas (Paul 2007). In this field, Brittany got from the French Government in July 2005, the telecommunication competitive official cluster, "Media and Networks". In this field, it exists 50,000 full jobs in Brittany. The competitive cluster link together various leaders from research institutions to companies with the aim of reinforcing competitiveness and develop employment on a territory. The

competitive positioning of this cluster is audiovisual, telecommunications, and information technologies like TNT or HD TV. The "Brittany 2.0" program seems to be directed by the cluster's activity. Culture is mentioned in this program under two items, digitalization of the cultural materials, and diffusion of images on various terminals like television, the Internet and mobile phone. But the link between cultural materials digitalization and diffusion of these materials is not mentioned in this program (Conseil régional de Bretagne 2007) . However the initial definition given in 2005 by Tim O' Reilly (O'Reilly 2005) for Web 2.0 mentions constitution of databases. The seven points developped by O' Reilly to present Web 2.0 in its article are :

- *The Web As Platform,*
- *Harnessing Collective Intelligence,*
- *Data is the Next Intel Inside,*
- *End of the Software Release Cycle,*
- *Lightweight Programming Models,*
- *Software Above the Level of a Single Device,*
- *Rich User Experiences.*

The "Brittany 2.0" program does not rely on constitution of databases, nor on user experiences. During the period 2007-2013, the budget is 40 million euros for uses and 154 million euros for infrastructures. As Pierre Musso underlines, "*digital territory"* concept corresponds to a technologized territory, *i.e.* equipped with hight-speed internet to ensure territorial attractiveness and modernity. Dominique Boullier, in his "Brittany 2.0" criticism, underlines this prevalence of infrastructures: Linking Web 2.0 to heavy territorial infrastructures, the development of wich is managed by engineers, goes on the opposite of services and empowerment logics of Web 2.0. The "Brittany 2.0" program relies on ultra high-speed network, *i.e.* optic fiber access for each Breton home. Whereas 1% of Breton homes do not have broadband access, the coming of ultra high speed in big cities lead the public policies to reduce the digital gap by investments in rural areas, considered as nonprofitable by providers (Boullier 2007). The question of the digital gap is the local representatives first concern. According to Pierre Musso, the *"digital territory"* is becoming the first challenge of the territorial public policies, dramatized by the digital gap. The second concern is a *"territorial marketing"* as called by Dominique Boullier. This *"territorial marketing"* is scanned in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness.

"Brittany 2.0" compared to the first project of network Mégalis, creates concerns, not about technical networks, but about services, uses and social networks. The web can also be a tool used by a group of Net surfers sharing interest on a given topic, referring more or less to a given territory. The user skills, their abilities to create web sites are part of the enlarged definition of web 2.0. *"Like many important concepts, Web 2.0 doesn't have a hard boundary, but rather, a gravitational core. You can visualize Web 2.0 as a set of principles and practices that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core."* (O'Reilly 2005)
But in the "Brittany 2.0" program, the users are categorized according to their competences fields like health, teaching, research, secondary schools or e-administration. However the manual crawl of the "Brittany's web" suggests that these categories and fields are not relevant on the web. There are much more fields, and also *"group's shapes"* (Boullier 2008) wich appear on the web. The example of the "BZH Network" group shows how the Breton diaspora uses several web tools, using each one according to different needs.

A Diaspora network: BZH Network

Evolution of the BZH network and public policy

BZH Network was created by a Breton migrant worker in Japan as a forum, called hub, inside a social network web service named Viadeo. Six months after, the manager of a data-

processing service company, Zindep offers his resources to equip BZH Network with a collaborative website. In December 2006, a mail sent to all BZH Network subscribers presents BZH Network as

"*an open community of individuals and decentralized groups working inside networks, from local to global, in a collaborative way of exchanges and project management. As a collective intelligence BZH Network aims to help sharing professional experiences and skills between individuals and generations through installation of a technical platform of information and knowledge management*".

During the summer 2006, BZH Network answers, through the Zindep company and the university research laboratory LAS to a public project call entitled "New Services, New Uses in high speed internet". This call, from Brittany and Pays-de-Loire Regional Councils, aims at supporting (Conseil régional de Bretagne 2006) *"the development of really innovative services (in term of use or technology), around three priority topics:*

- *sound, image and multi-media contents,*
- *increasing solidarity (reducing the digital gap and creating social links),*
- *improving the image of the Breton and Loire territories through collaborative or project management tools.*

These topics are also part of the "Brittany 2.0" program, like the digital gap, and Brittany attractiveness. Financial support for the collaborative web site is due to its position between the creating of social links and improving regional image.

The 18 months project is half financed by the Brittany Regional Council for an amount of 64.000 € in order to implement and improve the collaborative web site www.bzhnetwork.com. The Zindep company manages the data-processing development and a scientific team (sociologists and researchers in information and communication sciences) manages exploration of new service types. This collaboration has led to a succession of three versions of the web site. It started from the analysis of the community activities. Without relation with the project, a member of BZH Network opened during the summer 2007 a group entitled 'BZH Network' on Facebook. Within a period of four months, a thousand of subscribers signed in.

These milestones allow to understand the general evolution of the 'BZH Network' group and its relation with its tools. BZH Network colonizes various platforms and services. In addition to the three quoted web sites, members of BZH Network discuss and exchange by email, through mailing lists, personal blogs articles and the VOIP tool, Skype.

In this project, the public financial support aims at supporting a social link creation tool bounded with the territory. The evolution of the group shows the emergence of new tools as Facebook. According to that phenomenon, it appears difficult to limitate this virtual community to one web platform only.

Technological differentiations

Indeed these three BZH Network platforms are not identical. The analysis of members profiles shows different social grade between platforms. On Viadéo, the hub gathers mainly commercial managers. The Facebook group attracts mainly young migrants and, www.bzhnetwork.com website is mainly used by students.

The two years observation of BZH Network shows how the community diversifies itself on each Web platform but remains linked in its speech and its "values". Activities are heterogeneous. On Viadéo, the contact management functions, inspired by the professional customer relationship management tools, support the construction of bonds through a summary discussion tool, *i.e.* the hub. The website www.bzhnetwork.com is complementary

to Viadéo. It does not offer relation management tools but supplies co-operation production functions, centered on the contents. Consequently, the "technical shape", *i.e.* the whole functions available, draws a different audience, a "*productaire*" (Boullier 2008) which is the representation of this audience built by the designers of the collaborative website. In this meaning, the *"technical shape"* (Boullier 2008) of bzhnetwork.com transforms the community by "*interesting*" (Akrich 1988) a part of the members registered on the Viadéo's hub. Www.bzhnetwork.com *"technical shape"* attracts new members who were not on Viadéo. Similarly, the Facebook group is almost created in reaction to this collaborative platform. Facebook brings a new dimension in BZH Network: many, fast and fun interactions.

The Facebook group "interests" another subset of BZH Network which is not attracted by a" knowledge exchange" platform. Hosting a 'BZH Network's part, Facebook injects its own style of interactions (exchanges of photographs, short and friendly messages…) different from those on the Viadéos hub (press review, promotion of marketing activities). Through the successive platforms, the community gradually builds personalized tools, without strategic vision but with the liking of opportunities. So, this analysis shows the way employed for technical platforms and the shape they propose to redraw the community. The 'technical shape' is a mediator within the meaning of Bruno Latour. It acts in its near autonomous way and it transforms the relations.

A similarity of the territorial regroupings abroad

Parallel to the technical tools, BZH Network also exists through local groups in the United States, Europe or Asia. These groups are made from Breton migrants and they carry out similar activities: organization of evening sessions and traditional meals, creation of association to promote and represent Brittany... Thus, during the 2006 winter, the BZH-NY association accomodated a Breton folk group in New-York. BZH Network as a community, becomes then a tool for the promotion of this event. In the same way, on May 19, 2008, these located groups organized concerts worldwide for the "Saint-Yves" a celebration created for Brittany on the model of the Saint Patrick's day.

Conclusion

To sum up, it appears that Breton public policies for ICT or innovatives web projects do not take in account web users categories, fields, or expectations. Moreover they follow the same logic as in the management of physical territories, that is setting up infrastructures. The public financial support brought to a Diaspora community is software development. But it is difficult to determine the impact of this public support. The analysis of the BZH Network's evolution shows how a community remains autonomous and its development is unforeseeable (Wenger 2002). This community develops over various 'technical shapes'. A socio-technical network such as BZH Network, produce *in fine* a materiality for the Breton diaspora in a virtual Breton territory.

To conclude, public policies on the Web could support many private initiatives, gathering heterogeneous actors. The achieved objective is not clearly the initial one. In our example, it is almost unwittingly that a territorial council develops a social link's policy on the Web. Unwittingly because in this project, it is the association of a research laboratory and a company that develop new services. The financial participation of the Regional Council made it possible to carry out one of the platforms that delivers original services like geolocalisation and a scientific follow-up of this community.

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