speaking notes

Social Times
The Internet is changing citizenship and our engagement in civil society

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check against delivery
No doubt, the Internet is fundamentally changing our economic and governance structures, indeed our whole society. How we live, work, and cultivate our leisure time will in the future very much depend on the ways we communicate globally, namely in the world-wide-web. On the one hand, the individual is empowered to more extensively diversify and widen one’s) horizons. On the other hand, more and more people assemble in special interest groups. Such SIGs - Special Interest Groups - are not per se contradicting the development of GIGs – general (and more diverse) interest groups. We will come back to this later.

My presentation today is about the challenges of in-betweening, of using the internet not just for ever more detail of economic or scientific specifics, but to be encompassing – including also even intangible social, cultural, and humanitarian concerns.

Our special focus today is to focus on voluntary services. On participative, self-organizing formats for societal and community applications for social and cultural concerns. For our regions, municipalities, and villages this means an opportunity and multi-purpose instrument to develop and strengthen the bond and cohesion in the civil society as a whole.

For our deliberations today I would like to outline in my presentation a few theses:

First,

let me explain why I believe, that the objectives of administrations will in the future need to safeguard and care increasingly for social cohesion, a feeling of connectedness, the much debated “Commons”.

This new administrative function needs to include building bridges between:

- the more and more differentiated and often “over”- Specialized Interest Groups (or SIGss). You see them in all subjects, fields, disciplines and faculties, …
and the

- **General Interest Groups (GIGs)** – concerned with interests and subjects of the more intangible societal and cultural matters – the very fabric of community.

This is why I believe that we need caretakers and facilitators: Not only the **Kämmerer** but all members of the communities will have to become “**Kümmerer**”:

(people who share and care, often even without volunteering or really wanting to, following an inner responsibility ....

**My Second Thesis:**

I believe that these communal, social, and cultural needs can and need to be supported and strengthened! Why? to counteract the increasing segregation in our society. I feel that the Internet in an Open Society can support open spaces, open fora, a social and cultural shared space, a revisited and widened concept of the AGORA.

I feel that community spirit and a feeling of belonging requires also a place in the new intangible, virtual worlds. New realities will not go away when we close our eyes... and they open up many yet untapped opportunities...

**Third:**

Subject to the immense changes and increasing dynamics of the world-wide-web are also the charitable and voluntary service organizations and associations, which, very much like municipalities, might need an overhaul to stay in touch with the changes we are facing today. And benefit from the exciting chances coming with these changes.
The structures, tasks (missions), objectives, and operation procedures are to be put to test and have to be pressed towards greater transparency, visibility, and efficiency …. and new value-added services.

Forth:

I believe, that hierarchical and monolithic silo structures and static, rigid systems with central command and control structures will be increasingly replaced by flexible, citizen-driven networks and worknets.

but also, on the other hand and at the same time - through the tendency to new virtual “groups or clans”, call it “communities”.
There is a phenomenon caused by the dynamics of “magnetic” portals in the internet, - think about gravity – a new binding and bonding takes place, which can also have detrimental effects, - a new form of group- or clan-think, with a new form of sectarianisms. This is an important issue yet little addressed that we must take note of…

A possible Mission and Message therefore should be to increase and include: integrated, holistic, and sustainability aspects and functionalities with the help of additional, integrated (comprehensive) services and concepts.
These trends and possibilities are rapidly growing, we might need new tools to address new challenges…

Further, I postulate

that for addressing social concerns, the internet will expand the possibilities and readiness to help, the degree of concern and reach, the willingness, and the ways and forms enabling us and others to help.

Citizens are becoming increasingly active, and concern themselves with issues beyond their immediate personal concerns - interests, as they can now more
easily get involved also on the meso- and macro-scale, in their home regions, as well as the world – this is great chance and challenge! to widen perspectives and horizons.

For example, in the case of catastrophes in Asia or hazards we observed in the vicinity, Bloggers who can immediately report about the situation, scales and impacts, today do not only call for, but have started organizing relieve actions themselves through informal, virtual networks.

I feel this trend of concerned activism is essentially empowered by the modern communication technologies. Images and Videos connected with wireless communications will in the future increasingly impact our subsuming and resonating, the professionalisation of life and work, but also the feeling of being emotionally attached or detached.

What's Next?

What we have been experiencing with the World-Wide-Web up til now - in the economy, in society, and in the states - is merely the first step of far-reaching changes in the years to come...

No doubt, computers will be available everywhere, at work, at home, in cars, in restaurants, and in public places, they will be ubiquitous and omnipresent.

We will have better access to unimaginable volumes of data. Global value-added chains develop and mature when these data are connected for down-to-earth and right-in-time pragmatic solution building.

Globalization is accelerating and decisive for these trends - and so is the need! for smart and intelligent, maybe even wise!, and foremost humane! solutions, if we do not want to drown in the glut.
Next:

The old model of “Father State” is obsolete in view of the challenges mentioned.
• Too slow,
• too passive
• and too expensive,
and under pressure from the internet!
The web is the source of hitherto unprecedented power for the individual, but also for in-groups and communities!

Collaboration, participation and co-creation are the major trends of the 21st Century. They are amplified by the Internet. This, as I have outlined before, has much impact on our civic engagement.

People harness information and communicate very different today – take five seconds to remember pre-mobile-telephone, pre-e-mail and pre-Google times.

This new era is especially apparent and encompassing in the iPod-generation. Many students are constantly connected to the network, school and leisure activities also take place in the web. E-mail will be replaced by live-video chatting. Young people today spend more online time daily than others spent glued to TV-screens – they have an urge for interaction and communication – direct access and exchange, they want something concrete, for “hands-on”, use the new functions also for very intense and personal living encounters. They are not inclined to compromise on quality and immediacy. They can no more be compared to our, not to mention former generations.

Next:

The Web 2.0 is changing the way we communicate
Whereas the first Internet generation used to be merely a static network - you could inform yourself and others uni-laterally - the second generation has become a CoLab, a Co-Laboratory - a “Join-In” and jointly Have-Fun&Be Active Internet Virtual Space. Look at what we used to learn in school back then: that space is an apriority – a terra incognita and given – not to be questioned. This is what I mean with a “dramatic change of our concepts and percepts”.

**What do these changes imply and mean for our lives?**
任何人都可以跟随他个人的创业冲动：在互联网世界中提供服务，创办公司，亲自参与新闻媒体或广播电台。无需旧有基础设施，无需获取传输许可证。

例如，活跃的博主数量，Flickr的图片库数量以及YouTube上发布的视频数量正在爆炸式增长；网络用户数量巨大，并且持续增长。

所谓的“社交网络”如Facebook，My Space，WordPress，或德国的StudiVZ是这种流行趋势的典型例子。通常，年轻人在这些网络上交流他们页面上的内容，这些内容可能远远超过你和我所能想象的内容。内容反映了用户群体的多样性以及所涉及的危险和挑战。

**For us, this is prospectively appositive, but sensitive trend, very well potentially to be used for community-building and voluntary services.**

**It is yet** a widely unrecognized potential for civic engagement and sense-making, for testing, probing and finding orientation by learning to be useful, needed and appreciated by others.

It is very obvious that, in general, that the sense of social community has eroded. But on the other hand, and this is well illustrated by surveys and studies: Youth view the Commons as more important than ever. It appears that the more you
learn about different ways to be and to communicate, the more you will appreciate personal attention and care. The more aware you will become how people grow through sharing and the sensitivity of the information used.

Another major aspect affecting civil society is the profound change in forms and means of engagement.

Young people do no longer want to be restricted in their club (Verein) with fixed mandatory schedules and times. They wish but to float, search orientation and meaning, adjusted and according to their skills and multiple priorities.

When they feel other people’s special agendas, times or grids will limit them like a “straight-jacket” they will step out of the game. They will no more wait patiently, but leave and move on.

Looking back in history this has not really changed – youth has always and has the right to question and revolt against the old mould and to question dogmas. What’s new are the endless technology-driven alternatives – and the need for testing and probing, as not all ends are wanted and needed.

**Coming back to where youth can volunteer:**
One place is the internet, - definitely not the only one, - as trend offering satisfaction to the intensifying urge for a sense of belonging.
One simple application we envision for youth to contribute and find meaning is, for example, the creation of websites for oldies or institutions, for events of local nurseries, for voluntary exchange platforms and services in the web.

**Further:**

There is obviously an erosion of trust in large organizations, questioning their ability of solving problems pragmatically and un-bureaucratically, adjusted to the local conditions.
As a consequence, more people than ever before in history are active in voluntary support, interest groups and citizen initiatives. Exactly, because problems must be solved when and where they emerge.

Therefore, as a second step, we might then pursue ways to identify the stakeholders, risk-takers and observers in the community, find out how they connect and are rooted in the deep.

So we might be able to tackle the drivers of change, thresholds or tipping points as they are called today, as the problematique must not be addressed with oversimplified answers and overclaims that are still hiding the real issues or are self-serving…

Youth in particular, and any attentive person, sniff out disguised and hidden agendas.

This is only one example of several tasks to be solved with more integrated, non-dualistic, and flexible approaches. And we need to look at identifying and finding youth who are already used to tackle issues from many ends and perspectives, with tools and concepts, models and games. There is a lot to learn from them! Also, we have yet little understanding how computer games can and are being used for co-creative problem-solving and getting broader and other pictures, new perspectives…

**Another Thesis:**

**Implementing and using advanced community and communication applications help to develop more realistic approaches.**

Decentralisation, subsidiarity and Subsistence are growing, reinforcing trends worldwide. We see that global trends exist as a spectrum, local trends changing global trends and vice-versa - as all life and so ecological, social and cultural matters exists beyond single issues and scales.
I feel in addressing such issues we often tend to forget that we should not only focus on the specifics, but step back, find a higher stand and see how issues connected in various shared, known and agreed upon frames of references… Tackling and Grappling with Social Times and Social Turns we might need to include also such extra perspectives as all business and life is not only Local.

The central and critical question is how we can provide the climate and fertile ground for seeds in incubators and real life, to give impulses, advice, so that existing budding social engagements of young people - via Social and Cultural Networks - can blossom and unfold their full potentials.

**My next Prognosis (thesis) is that**

**ONLINE-VOLUNTEERING will become an increasing reality in Germany**

People can use the network or help others with certain tasks. Tangible and intangible goods, purposes and values are facts of life - and imagination has no limits.  
This applies to the world of translation, support and communication activities, as well as the large segment of tutoring and on-line learning.

[[Saber in Brazil??]]

For people who are **restricted in their mobility** or can not find suitable and needed possibilities in their direct vicinity **ONLINE-VOLUNTEERING** is a true alternative to the growing isolation and frustration, **enabling autonomy** and creating a deep source of respect of self and others.

**Civic engagement in the web is also increasingly important for municipalities.**

Both, information requests and offers are typically local and specific - and require the local “expert” or neighbour for producing relevant and appropriate answers.
Experience shows that for most applications voluntary exchanges on the internet are only practical and feasible in small and coherent work environments.

A promising way is to facilitate individual, small scale commitment on a voluntary-services “stock”-exchange market. This is prone to be more successful than large-scale activities and operations.

My last but one thesis:

The Internet can be a cradle for civic engagement, a CITIZENS work-NET (BürgerNetz)

Donating time, money and in-kind volunteer services in such civic engagement networks will become more and more common practice.

Local volunteer agencies exchanging or trading voluntary commitment are enjoying strong and increasing demand in Germany.

Initial investigations show that through the use of such internet-based technologies the average age of the volunteers and helper is reduced drastically, from 48 to an average of 36 years. This is a massive and fundamental change as voluntarism used to be the domain of the “grey panthers” - retired and elder people, still looking for contact and meaningful activities. They are very much needed!! BUT are suddenly sometimes in “competition” with active youth, eager to learn and be useful. Often bringing in high quality competences and proficiencies. Therefore, it makes much sense to identify and offer well diversified means of engagement suitable and appealing to the highly differentiated pool of potential volunteers.

Making use of tailored and targeted measures, such as newsletters, social events and community building, volunteers and helpers have been and can be connected (in less appropriate business-terms: bound) for longer periods to institutions. Meaningful work and social cohesion go hand-in-hand in our times - where proper work is often for a privileged few - while dissatisfaction and
isolation is growing.

My final thesis:

A virtual town hall also includes a virtual office to support voluntary engagement and services

The municipalities have to install in the internet for consulting and moderation tasks tools and services needed to support and strengthen their citizens, institutions, and organizations.

Each town-hall or municipality internet website or even building should have a prominently visible frame for "commitment" for volunteering.

It should not only provide offers for donor or fund-raising campaigns in the region - but also offers for volunteers to find appropriate openings, places and vacant positions.

It very much makes sense for the town-hall to support or provide technical advice, support, procedures, and look for alternative solutions and implementations, so that not each and every community needs to develop and host such services with their limited (wo) - MAN-power on their own municipal websites. This way, quality assurance and further development can be ensured.

Summing Up:

It would be too naive to believe that Youth and Civic Engagement alone can tackle and solve the challenges we face with technological and societal change – moreso: rapid change and technology-driven changes.
The challenges are gargantuan and unprecedented – and so the adjustments and remedies have to be equally innovative and utmost creative. This is and must be a domain for highly creative minds. For people, who stayed or are young in mind.

The very fabric of society is endangered when people – especially young people - see no purpose and direction, have little orientation in life. Creating opportunities to make a difference and be helpful, feel needed is the first duty of everyone, and so foremost for our administrations and civil society organisations.

Closing our eyes and putting the head into the sand is not the answer to the challenges of the so-called “Cyberculture”. We need to strengthen our youth and civic organisations – even when they seem petrified and old-age – so the whole exercise is not just for the kids. AND we need to start something intergenerational – something not only bridging old and new people and concepts – but also old and new technologies. And - put them to test! Check thoroughly whether they are truly