First life, the neighborhood social network: A collaborative environment for citizen

Towards We-Government: Collective and participative approaches for addressing local policy challenges

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Abstract
First Life is a platform for Computer Supported Cooperation aimed at fostering co-production (in the sense of the Nobel Prize Elinor Ostrom) and Do It Yourself initiatives, providing a virtual place connected via maps to the concrete reality.

Author Keywords
Social network, social awareness, knowledge management system, collaborative system.

ACM Classification Keywords
H.3.5 Online Information Services, Data sharing, H.1.2 User/Machine Systems, Human information processing.

Introduction
First Life is a platform for Computer Supported Cooperation funded by the call "Smart Cities and Communities and Social innovation" of Ministry of University and Research of Italy for young researchers which consists in a new map-based social network capable of: to offer a geo-referenced representation of open and crowdsourced data through an interactive map; to be focused on neighborhoods, the scale where we live our daily life; to exploit the potentialities of

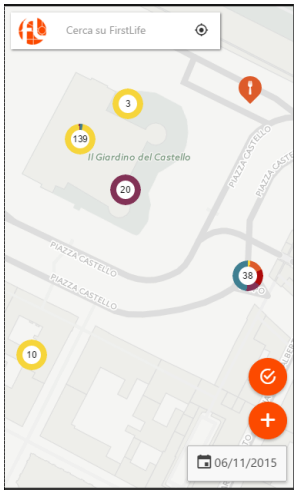

Figure 1: The visualization system builds clusters of entities according with categorizations, location and time filters.

social networks to create a virtual community and make it real at a local scale. First Life[1] can be compared both with social networks like FaceBook and maps like Google maps but it has the added value to be community driven and always contextualized on the city scale.

First Life aims at fostering co-production (in the sense of the Nobel Prize Elinor Ostrom) [1] and Do It Yourself initiatives, providing a virtual place connected via maps to the concrete reality. Thus the platform by itself is intended to involve the different actors in developing new services, from institutions to associations, from citizens to enterprises. People can not only get information passively but they can interact both with the map and other users, sharing opinions and information about every aspect of the local reality they live in, being more active and aware of what is around them. Thus, First Life can be used to visualize, integrate, share, comment urban data and make them useful for strengthening social communities in the real world.

First Life harvests the knowledge and the services which are now scattered around many websites often unknown to the wide public websites, focusing them on a local area. It reduces the overloading of information by filtering them on a locality principle. Thus, the platform will be populated with entities downloaded from open data (hospitals, shops, etc.) or added by users, which can create their own forms describing the fields of the entities and classifying them according to an ontology of social practices. For each entity shown on the map, users can add information and comments, blogs, pictures, organize online events and discuss place related issues. In this way we may say that raw data become information enriched with people perspectives and perceptions on places.

[1] http://firstlife.di.unito.it

First Life at work

There are several projects with different purposes in which First Life is currently involved, but all having in common the searching for a more inclusive, active and shared way of living the city. In this section we will list the activities we are now carrying on, while in the next section we will present the possible uses more specifically for co-production initiatives. So far, we have collected information about youngster's points of view of the city through two projects called "Campus Luigi Einaudi and the Territory" and "TeenCarTo".

The first one was organized within a seminar where university students were asked to map the surrounding of the campus thinking at important places of their daily life as students. The map legend was defined collaboratively since it is the most evident channel to collect and visualize the information and it has to express their points of view. In only three events, scholars collected 650 points of interest (following POI) about the area around the University Campus on the basis of how they experience and use urban spaces. The aim of this project was to make more evident the connection between the university Campus and its surrounding as a way for bridging the inside with the outside of the Campus. The presence of a University campus indeed strongly influence the nearby area. Showing what is correlated to the Campus presence,

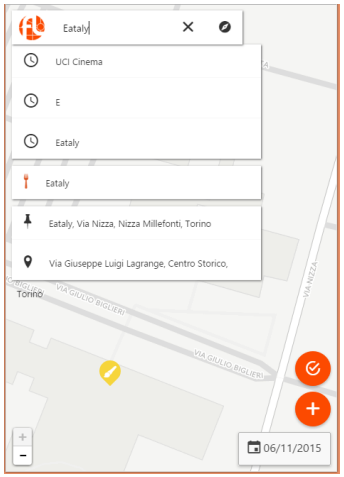

Figure 2: First Life search integrates internal search with external resources such as Open Street Map database (http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/Nominatim).

currently only in the way scholar live the neighborhood, is the first step to make people more aware of which nets are shaping the territory around them. One follow-up of this first project is Teen-CarTo. The project is involving high-school students for adding POI answering to specific questions about how they live, imagine and criticize the city. The result will be an interactive map with georeferenced post and comments describing teenagers lifestyles. At the same time the social network functionalities will open up to the opportunity to comment what is added by others students, engaging them in an exchange of opinions about places they live.

First Life has also being used to put in contact the local administration of a neighborhood in Turin, Mirafiori Sud, and the citizens. Crowdmapping Mirafiori Sud is a project started in 2013 which had a first experimentation using Ushahidi (), mainly focused on mapping urban barriers in the area, and now it is based on First Life. This project is about reporting problems and potentialities of the neighborhood and directly communicate them to the local council. The platform indeed is connected to a system for managing workflow that will be used by the public officer to handle citizen's reports. Since the Eco Borgo Campidoglio Festival in June 2015, First Life has started a collaboration with Eco Borgo Campidoglio a Turin no-profit association. Their objective is to strengthen the ties between Borgo Campidoglio inhabitants organizing festivals, events and collaborative activities within the neighborhood. During the festival which took place in June, lots of people walked around the Borgo Campidoglio area stopping at the spots mapped on First Life where specific events were set up such as exhibitions, tailing of neighborhood stories and particular small shops and atelier showing their products. First Life is planned to be also used for: accessing information about commercial activities and services; facilitating the coordination of working groups, supporting local events and the co-production of services, to help disadvantaged people; promoting activities of urban renewal such as street art or environmental sustainability.

How to use First Life

To use First Life the user has to be registered on the platform available at http://firstlife.di.unito.it providing his real name. To register he/she can eventually use also other accounts such as the one on Facebook or other social networks. After the login the user is presented with a dashboard with a summary of information such as: posts and activities concerning groups to which the user belong; posts selected from his/her areas of interest and from POIs he/she registered to; posts from people he/she is connected with. Users can visualize the map (see Figure 1), locate themselves, places or events, and select the time interval of interest to get an overview of what is going on in the surroundings. The user can perform queries by selecting the categories of information or by text search (see Figure 2) with keywords. He/she can open one the POIs and look at the information there (see Figure 3). If interested he/she can register to the POI or connect to the author of the POI or to other people who made comments on it. Depending on the POI type (Place or Event), the user can: registering for upcoming events; joining groups, and, if he/she is already a member, the user will be allowed to participate at the organized activities, posting information, etc. With under construction functionalities users will follow POIs to get notification of new posts and comments; or being

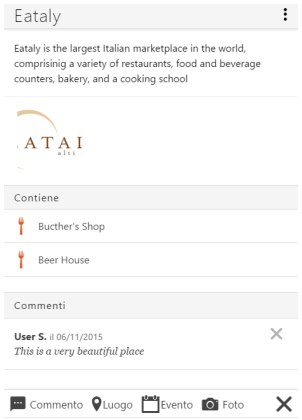

Figure 3: First Life handles geo located places and events, and the composition relations among them, such as parenthood. Any entity can be also commented and enriched with pictures.

administrator of POI. Information on the map can be filtered specifying a temporal interval, by posts concerning something of general utility (e.g., searching tags); by groups on specific issues, in relation to some place on the map.

Following, we present two show cases: the first involving also the Public Institution and the second only based on self-organizing citizens. In the first case we have User 1 which is a citizen who wants to report a small park completely full of garbage and show it on the First Life's map. User 1 can therefore add a marker on the map, sending at the same time the report to the local council administrative staff. The public officer who takes the report has the duty of verify it. After that the marker changes its status from reported to verified. The public officer is now in charge of solving the problem in the due time and then marker's status changes again in solved. The marker's pop-up will show the date in which the park will be cleaned. Other users can see the marker and User 2 and 3 add comments both agree about the need of cleaning the park but also leaving it unused is really a pity. So, User 4 came out with a proposal saying that since in the park there are trees that gives a nice shadow, it could be nice adding some table and benches for eating or studying outside. User 4's proposal will be sent to the local council which can discuss the opportunity of realizing it or not. Also, administrative staff can directly answer citizens posting comments via the platform. Another case relies completely on people self organizing. Some users decide to create a Group for arranging an event involving commercial activities within the neighborhood. Thus, Group's participants could be both User 1 who lives in the neighborhood and User 2 who lives in an other neighborhood but he/she is interested at the event or User 3 which is a library's owner involved in the event. Each user will eventually receive information about the Group such as seeing all the spots where there are planned activities or comments added to places. Clearly, during the event the map will be a useful tool to get oriented and also to be updated of what happens during the event.

Conclusions

Our general approach is to find a way to reconnect people to the local reality they live in, realizing an online tool to be more active in the real world. This is an objective surely valuable and it is also quite recognized that ICTs could help the increasing of awareness and participation of citizens. However, this is a complicated and full of obstacles path. Collaboration is the result of a cultural attitude that in the nowadays mainstream channel of communication receive not so much attention. At the same time, the Internet has given a tremendous and powerful space of information exchange where many grassroots movements and collaborative initiatives are finding their place in. However, all these information are now scattered all over the Internet and difficult to access. Since collaboration is made by not only communication but also by real life practices, the center of our reasoning to start reorganizing important but difficult to access information such as bottom-up community initiatives, has been the locality where that meaningful practices happen.

References

[1] Ostrom, Elinor. 1996. Crossing the Great Divide: Co-production, Synergy and Development, World Development, 24.6: 1073-1087.