

# Culturemondo

## 5 years on: where are we headed?



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[www.culturemondo.org](http://www.culturemondo.org)

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## Foreword

This report looks at the work of the Culturemondo network and tracks the changing landscape of what have been known as 'cultural portals'.

The impact of digital technologies has been transformative to all aspects of culture – online and offline. It is a landscape that is continuously moving and shifting, within which we need to hold on to a clear understanding of what we are trying to do and for whom.

The cultural sector as a whole is still, in many ways, at the beginning of its journey to exploit and use these technologies. There has been a lot of investment in the digitisation of cultural content globally, but this has not been matched by a desire to exploit this content fully. The digitisation agenda that grew out of a need for better auditing and cataloging now needs to be redefined to embrace a more user-focused set of values and drivers.

For the Culturemondo network, now is a moment to pause and look around the online cultural space with a group of like-minded colleagues from other countries, who share a belief that working, learning and sharing ideas enables all of us to work more effectively.

We are looking to empower each other and learn from our mistakes. We share a commitment to supporting innovation within our own communities, sectors and constituencies, trying to ensure that our sector is not left behind in the ongoing battle for online attention. To understand our role and how to develop it, we need to provide evidence of success and seek out new working models that will grow with us and help us take 'better' risks and have 'good' failures more often.

Optimistic? Naïve? Idealistic? Perhaps, but the evidence of the last few years shows that for those of us that the Culturemondo project has touched, it has been a great help.

Our ambitions are simple: to carry on this work, to remain 'light-touch' – focused on knowledge sharing and exchange; to remain informal, non-political and open-eyed; to connect more people to culture, in all its forms, voices and meanings.

*Jane Finnis*

*Culturemondo Chair – October 2009*



## 1. Background

[www.culturemondo.org](http://www.culturemondo.org): *Culturemondo is a network of people who are running, managing, building or editing cultural portals around the world. It is an open network and anyone working in this area is free to join, wherever they are from.*

The informal Culturemondo network is five years old. We have undertaken three international surveys of cultural portals, published a report *Cultural Portals: Gateways to a Global Commons* in 2005 and hosted four Roundtables: Japan (2005), Croatia (2006), Cuba (2007) and Taiwan (2008)<sup>1</sup>. The network has grown, embracing members from all continents and at many stages in their development as online cultural spaces. Members have gone through major changes, some have been completely closed down by the public authorities that envisioned them only a few years earlier, and some are just fledgling sites. Worldwide consumer demand and technology continues to shift at a relentless pace. We entered our fifth year as the world was reeling from a global economic downturn – a financial crisis.

So where are we now and where are we headed? Can the changes that we have experienced and the storms that we have weathered (or not weathered) help us to share our diverse experiences with our widening global network? The Culturemondo 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Cultural Portal Roundtable hosted by TELDAP in Taiwan (December 2008) was titled *Digital Culture and Heritage: New Thinking, New Models* and considered the shifts of the last few years as well as trends and directions to help shape the future of our digital spaces.

## 2. A glimpse in the rearview mirror: Key descriptors and drivers of the last five years

In 2005, Culturemondo published the report *Cultural Portals: Gateways to a Global Commons* that synthesised the findings of an international survey and the results of discussions that took place during the first Culturemondo Roundtable in Japan. We can use this as our Culturemondo starting point for considering global trends, both in terms of where we are and where we are going.

The first Culturemondo survey set out to “provide a basis for understanding the emerging phenomenon of the cultural portal”. In 2005 it was a relatively new concept – most portals had been initiated after 2000. Culturemondo took a flexible understanding and definition of a culture



portal and included in its study national cultural portals, such as culture.ca or culture.fr (31% of the study group); thematic portals that focused on a specific discipline (51%) and cultural observatories (18%). The portals studied were generally national in interest and scope although some were regional, international or supranational. Management of portals – how the work is actually done – was of primary interest. Additionally, since most of the portals rested most comfortably within the public domain, either by being government initiated or as a not-for-profit that was strongly government funded, the second interest was to consider portals from a cultural policy perspective, with respect to issues of access, participation, education and tourism.

In 2005, the key issues that were identified were partnerships (content, funding, planning), governance, content management, marketing and audience needs. The core business of cultural portals was the delivery of cultural information. Success was measured in sheer visitor numbers and in the provision of quality information. Looking forward from 2005, all portals were seeking greater interactivity in the coming years but at that time, only about 30% of the portals surveyed included blogs, forums, voting or any other form of interactivity.

This key interest in participation was a reflection of the shifting nature of the Internet itself as it moved from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 – a term coined at the end of the 90s that gained popularity around 2004 – exactly when Culturemondo began to meet and share challenges and opportunities. By the time of the second Culturemondo survey in 2006, issues of Web 2.0, the participatory web, international co-operation, virtual communities – and measuring success within this new context – were preeminent.

### **3. 2008/09: what is different now? Have we reached a crossroad in our (short) journey?**

In 2005 and 2006 a cultural portal was understood as a gateway, or a point of access to information on the Internet. Since then the digital culture context changed, together with expectations of users, so the concept of the cultural portal has also changed.

A brief survey of the timeline:

- Craigslist was launched as a very local online space in San Francisco in 1995, by May 2008 more than 500 cities and 50 countries have an active Craigslist.
- Amazon began selling books online in 1995, with a long-term strategy to win the trust of their users in order to sell many more products to them.
- e-Bay opened its online auction house in 1997 – putting together people and their stuff with other people and other stuff.
- Wikipedia and the iPod were both launched in 2001 and it is now impossible to imagine a world without them.
- SecondLife launched in 2002.
- LinkedIn launched in 2003, by 2009 there were 43 million users worldwide.

- YouTube was online in early 2005 and now boasts “100 million video views per day”. The photo-sharing site Flickr appeared in early 2004, in June 2009 there were 3.6 billion images – although an impossibility to actually count them!
- Friendster had its beginnings in 2002, followed by MySpace which began in late summer 2003 and the 100 millionth account was apparently opened in 2006.

Technology is ever more mobile – the iPod hit the market in 2001 creating the iPod economy or ‘halo’; the iPhone was lauded as invention of the year in the US in 2007 and according to Wikipedia, 21.17 million have been sold since its launch. In 2009, despite a global economic downturn and financial crisis, people around the world are still choosing to purchase these technologies (which are also dropping in price); they are committed to their phone plans and to Internet subscriptions. It has become a priority to be online and connected, no matter what – as a result, expectations and demands are very high. The digital divide, while by no means eliminated, has narrowed and prices are dropping. Technology has provided access, allowed engagement and empowered communities that previously had no access and no means of controlling their own communication ensuring authenticity and their unmediated voice. Technorati indexed 112.8 million blogs in mid 2008. In 2009 social networking and user-generated sites, such as Facebook, YouTube, Blogger.com, MySpace and Wikipedia all ranked in the top 20 of the Alexa.com rated sites.

At the same time, digital networks providing communication and cooperation tools and access to users have upended the traditional relationship between cultural producers and cultural audiences. DIY aesthetics, collective and collaborative creation and curation, mass contribution and ever-increasing search for personalisation challenge an “edited” or directed perspective on providing cultural content and information. Consumers have moved on from simply consuming –they are active, busy producing and sharing and as a result we are constantly playing catch-up with our audiences.

#### **4. Culturemondo International Survey 2009**

The objective of the third Culturemondo survey<sup>2</sup> and the roundtable in 2008 was to consider how cultural portals (or platforms) have responded to and managed the changes described above. What are the new opportunities to consider? Are we an emerging “sector” (that of online cultural content publication and information provision) that needs to bust out of the confines of cultural institutions and the cultural sector itself? If we do this, can we help to redefine the cultural sector? Do we lead or do we follow? Will our role become redundant if we stick to the old concepts?

There has not been a slowing of the interest in building cultural portals – new ones emerge every year. They can be placed in the same overall categorisation as in 2005,

that of general cultural portals (mostly national), thematic portals and cultural observatories. However what has changed is that these online cultural platforms have moved from the role of “portal” to that of “publisher”. No longer simply sign posting and providing a set of carefully collected links, they are producing, aggregating and organising cultural content and information, with a continuing commitment to providing reliable information and a trustworthy perspective.

Key words in the mission and vision of cultural portals and platforms in the 2009 survey were: *inform, exchange, monitor, encourage participation, connect, support*. Within the cultural sector, these sites are either professional facing or public facing and as a result either directly or indirectly have a goal to widen and deepen cultural participation by people. Survey respondents were fairly evenly balanced between those who provide virtual services to the cultural profession and those connecting directly and daily with audiences/consumers.

As a whole cultural portals can be defined in similar terms to small cultural organisations or SME’s (75% of the portals surveyed have less than 5 staff). Many still are attached to or are an aspect of an offline cultural organisation. They are still generally not for profit and heavily subsidised from public sources, not surprising given the wealth of information that is provided freely – at a cost to “someone” – usually the public sector.

So the business model, for the most part, has not changed. However it has become even more evident in 2009 that new models need to emerge as the role of publisher is explored and defined. The current economic downturn will continue to have significant impact on the funding model in the cultural sector as public and private funding is reduced at the same time that there is greater demand on the system. New evaluation measures will be required to underline the role and value of our online platforms. There is an imperative, as with all cultural sector funding, to be clear about the added value that cultural portals provide as publishers.

With strong values of quality, timeliness and relevance, over 60% provide edited content, even within a wider context that is expanding in user-generated ways. The cultural sector struggles with the creator/audience shift and our online spaces evidence the same challenges. We are indeed slow to keep pace with our audiences and with global tendencies in general.

**“There is a tension between building portals for people and building portals for institutions.”**

Jane Finnis

Given these tensions, is there a ‘space between’ these approaches, is there a possibility for a rich intersection or must one choose and risk choosing unwisely? How do we balance the authority and expertise of the institution, with the openness and responsiveness of social networks?



## 5. Culturemondo 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Cultural Portal Roundtable

### Digital Culture and Heritage: New Thinking, New Models

**Hosted by:** The e-Learning and Digital Archives Program (TELDAP)

Coinciding with: TechnoCulture Expo 2008

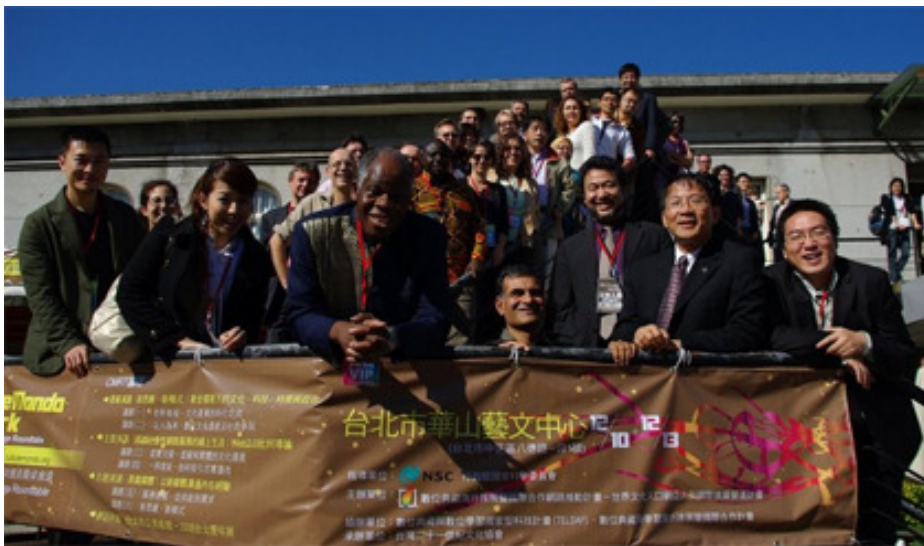
**Location:** Hua-shan Culture Park, Taipei, Taiwan

**Date:** December 10 -12, 2008

**Who:** 32 participants<sup>3</sup>: from 20 countries in Asia-Pacific (14), Europe (11), Americas (5), Africa (2)

**What:** Debate, discussion, exchange, case studies, master class

**Key question:** What is the future of online cultural content, resources and services?



Roundtable participants came from around the world and, as in previous roundtables, the specific geographic location and the local host ensured that there was strong attendance from the region, allowing for a rich and eye-opening exchange of diverse perspectives and experiences.

Casting back to the first portals that appeared online in the mid 1990's the content, the language, the users and the technology were all decidedly driven from the global north. As we near the close of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this picture is different, although still nowhere near balanced.

The commitment to cultural diversity and to ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly in positioning the authentic perspective of the non-Western world and the global south, was a clear and strong message delivered by the Minister of Culture for Taiwan Huang Pi-twan, the host, Dr DT Lee, Distinguished Research Chair Professor Department of Computer Science & Information Engineering, NTU – and the keynote speaker, Dr. Joseph O. Okpaku, Sr., President and CEO, Telecom Africa International Corporation.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.culturemondo.org/2008/attendee/list> <http://www.culturemondo.org/2008/attendee/map>

The theme of his speech was: *Culture, Technology, Time and Politics in a New Global Environment*.

**“Given the glaring challenges we face as a global community, we have a strategic and moral obligation to craft new paradigms that empower all of us, each from his or her own unique culture, heritage and perspective, so as to unleash our genius to build a new and more enlightened and fulfilling global human culture and society.”**

<sup>4</sup>

Joe Okpaku

While the Culturemondo network that gathered in Taiwan travelled from all corners of the world, they shared many common challenges – albeit framed in very different and, in some cases, extreme contexts. For example, Drik<sup>5</sup>, which produces, among other things, an online photography gallery in Bangladesh, works in a dangerous environment of political unrest and curtailment of individual and media freedom set against a backdrop of an acute lack of infrastructure.



In advance of the roundtable, participants were asked to share information<sup>6</sup> about the work they do, the context within which they work, and the problems/challenges they face at the moment. Challenges identified mirrored the issues of the last five years and could be grouped into three themes, which shaped the discussions during the Taiwan Roundtable:

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.culturemondo.org/story/2008/12/30/117>

It was seventeen years ago. A small group of people set up a picture agency in the unlikely location of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Named Drik, the Sanskrit word for vision, the agency set out to represent a group of media professionals that other agencies did not cater for, practitioners living and working in the majority world. In the years that have followed, many others from Asia, Africa and Latin America have joined the original group. All of them share a common vision; one that sees the majority world, not as fodder for disaster reporting, but as a vibrant source of human energy and a challenge to an exploitative global economic system.

<sup>6</sup> . [add link slideshare].

***Issue 1*** *Moving from supply to demand. Or: shifting thinking from inside to out.*

***Issue 2*** *Content hell. Or: managing, maintaining, collaborating and collecting content.*

***Issue 3*** *They don't get it! Or: how to bring policy-makers, funders and board members on board?*

***Issue 1: Moving from supply to demand.***

***Or: shifting thinking from inside to out.***

If we recall the 2005 Culturemondo survey, almost all of the portals surveyed were looking for greater participation by and interaction with users. However relatively few had even experimented with some of the then newer user generated approaches. Early online engagement by the cultural institutions, governments and agencies was either all about digitisation of cultural content, to ensure wider access, or focused on marketing and communication of offline activities.

Cultural portals were information providers, striving for excellence and a competitive edge within a busy marketplace. We were feeding the supply side, certainly with a growing awareness of a need for a closer understanding of the demand side of the equation (as we increasingly talked about getting to know our users, responding to needs etc) but not yet ready to look at things radically differently – to turn things inside out. Five years ago Web 2.0 had begun to take a firm hold and in our rather linear way we considered how we could use this but still keep to our old patterns and safeguard the cultural content to which we are the custodians.

Our objective is to creatively manage the intersection of the Web 1.0 world with changes and expectations brought on by Web 2.0, keeping in mind that Web 3.0 – whatever that entails – is already upon us! In 2009, many have moved well beyond digitisation: adding context and deeper connections to digitised content. As in all of the challenges presented, there are two sides to this coin: one – our ambition as content providers to enrich the content using all digital means possible and two – encouraging users to add meaning and value to information through their personal experience, remixing or re-purposing content that was previously not available to them or 'allowed'.

The launching of The Commons on Flickr<sup>7</sup> in early 2008 is an example of major heritage institutions taking their collections into the virtual domain in a new way – allowing the public to interact with and add value to the collection – connecting people and their experiences with cultural content and often also specific geographic locations. The Commons is a way for content to have a life beyond the institution while still being clearly branded and linked back to the source. Users engage directly with the content – mixing historical and contemporary – and bringing added value back to the institution's collection.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/commons>

Online cultural platforms recognise the need to respond to an increased interest in collaboration, collectivity and distributed public creativity. We can and should be “building architectures for public knowledge generation.”<sup>8</sup> Integrated platforms and technological changes can facilitate this, but must be led by a change in perspective and a willingness to rethink and change our past approaches.

Our global network is also attempting to respond to multi-language needs and interest. Many sites still are unilingual, often English, and managing multi-lingual sites is complicated and costly. TELDAP for instance, aggregates 200 collections, 2 million items and 400 websites – and would like to provide content in Chinese, English, Japanese and Spanish.ulti-lingual online collection of millions of digitised items from European museums, libraries, archives and multi-media collections,

This inside-out approach will surely bring unexpected developments – not all of which are easily managed. On the one hand we encourage and hope for new perspectives and less-heard, unmediated voices, on the other there are concerns with respect to security, hacking and freedom of speech run amuck.

***Issue 2: Content hell.***

***Or: managing, maintaining, collaborating and collecting content.***

Technology allows us to collect and amass huge databases of information – as cultural publishers and institutions, we are sailing on and often tossed about in oceans of content and the waves never cease. There is an ever-increasing public appetite for information, hand in hand with a demand for personalisation of the information. As information providers we have built our platforms on a directory model, which becomes more difficult to manage as the information grows and as each individual user is seeking to collect information in their own way.

**“There has been a growing tension between the search paradigm and the directory paradigm – can they fit together?”**

Geert Lovink

Given this changed public demand, our question is how to position ourselves as mediators in this information search and connectors between people and cultural content online.

Currently we are faced with three possible editorial methods: edited content, user generated content and database exchange (a technological solution). On a purely economic level, considering human and financial resources and capacities, as the sea of information swells, it may not be possible for cultural portals and platforms to continue in a purely edited fashion and we need to find means to gain value from a combination of all or some of these approaches. Managing content can be a costly business. Turning it all over to free or low cost options raises a host of issues: copyright, standards, languages, taxonomies and more.

<sup>8</sup> check x10 – whose quote is this?

In 2009 and beyond, sustainability will require new business models across the cultural sector and in specific environments within which online cultural platforms operate.

***Issue 3: They don't get it!***

***Or: how to bring policy makers, board members and funders 'on board'?***

Most constituents of the Culturemondo network are situated within the public sector – either initiated by or primarily supported by public funds. Survey respondents were primarily from the global north, as a result most of the reflection in this paper is from this perspective. Increased affordability of technology and access to connectivity around the world has meant that other online spaces in both the global north and south have been able to develop from strong grass-roots initiatives, with very limited resources.

There is a decided gap between policy and practice and a need to embed digital culture in cultural policy-making. It is not only an issue of cultural content online or of the shift in the cultural production and distribution as a result of technology and connectivity – it is more a need to recognise that the digital shift has changed the way people learn, think, work and live together, solve problems and view the world.

Recent years and particularly 2009 have seen a shift in the funding priorities of public and private funders. As noted, some of the Culturemondo network have ceased operations<sup>9</sup> all together. Online initiatives have responded with a search for cost-effectiveness and synergies. Top down initiatives are seeking a bottom-up engagement, buy-in and energy.

However, it is not only a question of influencing and working for change with funders and policy-makers, it is also about pushing the cultural sector itself to engage more with digital technology and work in more networked modes. As in the early days of cultural portals there is still a need to manage change and to balance competing or divergent expectations.

**6. The movement from portal to publisher: Case study: Culture 24**

When cultural portals first began to appear around 1999/2000, they served many of the purposes now ascribed to search, providing authentic, reliable links out to cultural websites and adding a (thin) layer of curation to the online cultural content available.

Fast-forward a decade, and the role of the portal has changed so much as to be almost unrecognisable from its origins. Search engines can now reliably, and authoritatively, point users to the sites that will interest them the most – so what role is left for the cultural portal? Jane Finnis presented the case study of Culture24's journey from a directory/portal site to a new kind of web and cultural publisher –

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<sup>9</sup> Culturenet Sweden and Culture.Ca

and the very practical evolution of the organisation and the websites it produces as the web changes and evolves around it.

An updated version of this paper was presented at [New Zealand's National Digital Forum](#) on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009.



The screenshot shows the Culturemondo website interface. At the top is the 'culturemondo' logo in purple and orange, with a colorful abstract graphic of overlapping lines to its right. Below the logo is a navigation bar with links for 'About Us', 'Documents', 'News', 'Past Meetings', and 'Join Us'. The main content area features a news article titled '5th Culturemondo Roundtable in New Zealand November 2009'. The article text includes: 'Joining the network simply means joining our Email List. From here you will be connected to cultural portal specialists around the world - to share your ideas, ask questions and discuss common issues. You can also find out about all of the Culturemondo surveys, reports and annual face to face meetings.' The article is attributed to 'cmr09 Roundtable meetings' and 'Submitted by charlesc on 2009-10-21'. It mentions support from 'TELDPAP', 'Culturemondo', and 'NZLive.com', and states that the roundtable will be held at Victoria University's Rutherford House on Wednesday 25th November 2009. Below the text are logos for 'TE MANATU TAONGA MINISTRY FOR CULTURE & HERITAGE', 'nzlive.com NEW ZEALAND CULTURE ONLINE', and 'TeAra.govt.nz The Encyclopedia of New Zealand'. On the right side of the page, there is a search box and a 'Cultural Portals' section listing links to 'a4a Info Portal', 'Ålands kulturdelegations hemsida', 'Arts Institute', 'Collections Australia Network', and 'CUBARTE'.

## 7. Notable Trends

There has been exponential growth in online activity in the past 5. Given the speed of change up till now and the inability to keep pace, it is reasonable to assume that change will continue its relentless pace, as a result “predicting the future” – even five years away – is impossible for business and policy makers alike. Nevertheless, the roundtable participants are certainly situated at the forefront and had a great deal to say about trends.

Given this growth, there are “many new users but a dearth of literacy”<sup>10</sup>. The ever-growing sea of information – coming from all sources – is increasing, so we need to consider how best to facilitate the tasks of sifting and filtering. We need to be able to bring together all of the potential knowledge sources or knowledge spectrum and to move from piles of unrelated information to shared understanding and knowledge. The important role of the publisher or curator, building a voice that is trusted by users was acknowledged and that voice can be equally valid and compelling from either inside or outside the institution.

This growth is even faster in the non-Western world. For instance, Bangladesh now has the highest growth rate of mobile phones. Growth in China is astounding where 80% of Internet usage is gaming. There is a marked increase of non-English sites, where English previously dominated the online world. Roundtable participants urged

<sup>10</sup> Geert Lovink

a move away from the concept of a global “digital divide” towards an understanding of global “digital opportunity”.<sup>11</sup>

Our new reality should not be seen or evaluated through the lens or pre-conceived notions of the past. A generation of digital natives is about to enter higher education and the workforce – and soon to assume leadership and policy-making roles. Parallel to this new wave, we see new archival/heritage approaches, such as Te Ara in New Zealand: which is the “first national, digital born encyclopedia in the world”<sup>12</sup> – rather than a digitised encyclopedia.

There has been an emergence of ‘sharism’ in that social networks have bridged a public and private gap. Mobility of technology has bred “digital nomads”<sup>13</sup> – individuals roaming within a social context. The rise of social networks combined with the mobility of technology and how these two factors interact will have an impact on how information is shared and knowledge is built.

Through sites such as Flickr, we see individuals and communities of interest taking on a curatorial role through tagging and aggregating. How can this be used by our cultural platforms; who are the new curators and how can they be empowered?<sup>14</sup> One growing trend is towards moving content to where the people are online – e.g. Flickr Commons – and to connect this to location-aware devices and geo-coding. Also to re-working and re-using cultural content and connecting online and offline experiences and providing content in multiple locations.

There is well-founded concern that with the fragility of the economy – free Web 2.0 spaces will not be sustainable and if they are not – who will step in to own them or will they collapse?

Online participation is intensely active with respect to current affairs and news. Global Voices Online describes this as “lots of people committing acts of journalism”. Global Voices curates, translates and contextualises the contributions from 500 volunteer journalists. However, does this level of participation extend to the cultural world and how can we harness the online habits of the digital natives?

It was noted that 85% of visitors arrive at websites via search and less than 5% enter via a home page, reinforcing the concept that information ordered and delivered in a directory mode has been replaced by the practice of search. Roundtable participants were guided through a ‘Search and Find’ Masterclass underlining the power (and practice) of search, which explored and extrapolated the issues of getting cultural artifacts into the places that people frequent on the web, in what could be termed traditional search engines (e.g. Google) and non-traditional, discovery-based sites (e.g. Flickr Commons).

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<sup>11</sup> Isaac Mao – Social Brain Foundation

<sup>12</sup> Jock Phillips, Te Ara

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Mao – Social Brain Foundation

<sup>14</sup> David Sasaki - Global Voices Online

The masterclass investigated the virtuous circle of putting stuff in the ‘stream’, and the returns – both physical and virtual – for cultural institutions and portals that engage with audiences beyond the confines of their own websites.

Information and data is increasingly being presented in a citizen-centric way. Examples such as ‘Fix my street’ in the UK or ‘Every Block’<sup>15</sup> (increasing awareness and combating crime in Chicago neighbourhoods) are online spaces that visualise, demystify and personalise data.

While we are unable to describe all of the potential of Web 3.0, colleagues point to the role of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), the “Internet of things” wherein the digital identification of objects will allow them to be freely connected, which certainly have implications for the cultural sector.

Rob Van Kranenberg has written about this extensively here: <http://www.theinternetofthings.eu/content/art-and-internet-things>

## **8. Choices: Which road do we take and where will it lead?**

The timing of the Culturemondo Roundtable, at the close of 2008, when the world was facing an impending global financial upheaval and the location in the east with a diversity of perspectives around the table brought a rich exchange. We considered whether it is now a post-portal world in which the first generation of cultural portals have been overtaken, closed and replaced by a new wave.

**“We straddle the end of nation states and new organized networks – [our question] is how to act and when?”<sup>16</sup>**

Rob Van Kranenberg

While there are challenges, the Culturemondo roundtable participants saw many opportunities. Our global reach brings new partners, invaluable international connections and exchange. Jean K. Min posed this ‘Big Question’:

**“Every web service is uniquely homegrown and reflects its cultural idiosyncrasy. Then how can a web platform overcome the cultural barriers and be transplanted to other cultures? If it can succeed in doing so, what would be the transcendent element that would have a universal appeal across different social and cultural contexts?”<sup>17</sup>**

<sup>15</sup> [www.fixmystreet.com](http://www.fixmystreet.com) [www.everyblock.com](http://www.everyblock.com)

<sup>16</sup> Rob van Kranenberg, Waag Society

<sup>17</sup> Jean K. Min joined OhmyNews as a director of international division in early 2004. Since then he programmed and executed the launching of OhmyNews International, its English language edition with an aim to replicate OhmyNews' success home on the global stage.



User generated content will be our richest resource.

**“Every citizen is a reporter. Journalists aren’t some exotic species, they’re everyone who seeks to take new developments, put them into writing and share them with others.”<sup>18</sup>**

Oh Yeon Ho

OhMyNews: 60,000 citizen reporters combined with 54 staff reporters.

There is a multitude of pathways to new knowledge – in Ghana this is a process “one village at a time”.<sup>19</sup> Wireless opportunity circumvents the need for some of the previous infrastructures.

Above all we must exploit our connecting power to the fullest and expand the intersecting spaces between: continents; government and civil society; practice and policy; online and offline worlds, in a time that demands global reflection and global leadership.

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<sup>18</sup> Oh Yeon Ho, founder and CEO, Ohmynews, Seoul, S Korea

<sup>19</sup> Kafui Prebbie – One Village Foundation

## 9. Recommendations

Given these trends, what role should Culturemondo play?

- Exchange of experience and learning from one another is invaluable. This is particularly heightened in a regional context and future roundtables should build on regional strengths enriched by international exchange.
- Enhance global digital opportunities (vs digital divides) – the global north and south are beginning to be able to exchange in a more balanced way – as technology allows more affordable access. Content will be developed and shared FROM the global south.
- A global network is challenging to maintain. Face-to-face encounters are extremely important, enhanced by a network that can respond in an online way to the day-to-day needs and issues of the individual portal members.
- Culturemondo can more effectively share its combined knowledge, by engaging a small team of some members to support the development and growth of others.
- Analytical data concerning web statistics is difficult to share. Less than half of the Culturemondo survey recipients use Google Analytics, for example. As a network we should strive to be able to collect and compare data that will assist each individual member by providing a wider context for their own work. Good data will allow new means to assess value that are not based on the old cultural sector approach of number of bums on seats or people past the turnstile. It is clear that there is a need for more work to be done exploring how to evaluate and define success.
- Despite the ever-expanding web of information, there should still be a space for culture – and we need to safeguard this. Our role is also to encourage the cultural sector to catch up and ensure this online cultural space. We also need to position our cultural content in a wider frame.
- The digital shift has had a profound impact on all areas of society. We must actively encourage a shift in cultural policy in response to the overall digital shift.
- Culturemondo has a real leadership opportunity – we are a virtual think tank – one that brings a deep global experience in a growing field. We have learned ‘on the fly’ – we have made discoveries and we have made mistakes. We have learned from our diverse situations and we know that we are richer through collaboration and exchange than through competition.

