Virtual Network

Objectives

The development of an electronic platform for the NoE should not only be seen as the construction and delivering of a technical tool for the members of the NoE. The acceptance by users is the most important argument to be made for the integration of community-building and intercultural aspects into the developing process of technology. Thus the way of building software for the electronic platform is designed as a progression and as a part of community-building itself.

Collaborative and gender-sensitive designed projects help to create better software and render the process of development faster and more efficient. Integrating and building a Virtual Network will help to rethink the very idea of culture by looking at the links and discontinuities between the local and the global and will also show how this virtual process can create new spaces for women working within different cultural environments to access knowledge and transform it. A strong emphasis will be placed on the interaction between the dynamism of culture, technology and of communication.

The platform itself is open technology, which can be tailored to actual needs and can be adapted and expanded when new challenges are encountered.

It provides a high degree of autonomy to the members of the NoE by giving them training and education in administrating and moderating the system themselves. For this reason, the developing process includes a combination of development, practice and schooling. Alternating development intervals with phases of learning how to use and to design the web platform and how to create new content can make this process more efficient. At the same time, this is an important condition for the sustainability of the platform's use for networking purposes.

Goals and substantial components of the platform

The intention of building an electronic platform is to provide a Virtual Network to enhance the possibilities for cooperation in the NoE and to improve information access. In addition, the platform offers a public space and visibility for the GARNET network and its research findings.

Substantial components and goals should be the following:

Information Architecture

- **Expert-database:** An expert database is part of the system, which contains information about its members. This database should grow to a knowledge management system and can then be used to find experts and expertise in every field and method concerning the network.
- **File sharing:** The Electronic Workspace includes tools for an effective way of exchanging information and to collaborate on a common document. A file-sharing function makes it possible to exchange files which consist of different types.
- **Content:** The content module is an opportunity to present the network itself and its research results. A Content Management System is used for this purpose. It will be possible to incorporate different types of documents: text, graphics, video, sound.

Virtual Networking

Beside the usual tools for working together and for gathering and sharing information that is building and managing a website for the presentation of the public face of GARNET special attention has been paid to design a platform which serves community, communicative and cooperative needs, for example by evoking interaction and fostering awareness through design decisions. Therefore it is intended to enable virtual networking by an interactive toolset. Interactive tools would be a way for community-building and to find out new potentials of cooperation and exchange.

The process of platform-building

The platform-building is a user orientated developing process based on Open Source. This means that the platform has to focus on future users: their needs, beliefs, abilities and background has to determine the design process. The different needs and characteristics of women's access to the communication and information technologies in their local and global settings will be integral to the process of building the platform.

Quite often problems occur (such as difficulties with usability) when users gather first experiences with the platform. This kind of user experience will be used to influence the development of the Platform and can contribute to quality assurance. An appropriate way to reach this goal is to combine both development and use from the start within one process. The development of an
Quite often problems occur (such as difficulties with usability) when users gather first experiences with the platform. This kind of user experience will be used to influence the development of the platform and can contribute to quality assurance. An appropriate way to reach this goal is to combine both development and use from the start within one process. The development of an electronic platform should not focus on the final product first but on the process of developing and adapting software. Conceptually the software development is based on a cooperative, participative and evolutionary understanding of how software is developed.

Coordinator

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