

Extrait du MARSOUIN.ORG

<http://marsouin.telecom-bretagne.eu/spip.php?article187>

Projets M@souin 2003-2004

Evaluation of the PAPI's public policies: results of phase 2

- Publications / Projets de recherche - Cybercommunes -

Date de mise en ligne : Monday 13 September 2004

MARSOUIN.ORG

To give all the Breton people, whatever their ages, their activities and their cities of residence, the opportunity to get familiar with the information technologies, and so within 20 km from their homes, so was the intention of the Breton region when the project to public access points to the Internet (PAPI) was launched in 1998. The goal of this project was to open public spaces in 381 towns or communities of towns in which the access to multimedia tools such as PCs, Mac, printers, scanners, CD-Rom and to Internet is offered. Since the beginning of the project, more and more citizens have been frequenting multimedia spaces and got attached to their spaces and hosts. Public access points to the Internet are now part of the Breton landscape.

However, such a success implies other issues: are these spaces used the way it was expected? Do they have any social utility? Is the use of e-towns linked with the development of the Internet in Brittany? Why are new technologies rather used in public spaces than at home? Eventually, as far as regional development is concerned, does the familiarization still have to be while the goal is reached? This last question also leads us to consider a possible continuation of the "e-town" operation. Those few issues are attempted to be solved through the second phase.

Phase 2 is composed, as phase 1 was, of two types of analysis: a qualitative one and a quantitative one.

Qualitative analysis (CRAPE/ONTICM)

The study tackles the issue of the reduction of the "numerical gap". It therefore attempts to determine the actual ways the Internet is used on a region scale. As priority had been given to private initiatives in the studies made upon these issues, having a look on what has been done on the fringes of the institutions seemed to make a sense. The expansion of networking technologies has the advantage to be supported by the Region and its promising initiatives. The present study highlights some development leads and the possible dead ends of some projects. Our aim is neither to produce some exhaustive description of the Breton public spaces, nor to decide on what the priority should be put. The aim is to make the most realistic painting of the situation in 2003.

Methodology

To take into account the dimension of an area corresponding precisely to the social territory in the rural (and also the urban) area, it has been decided to base the study on a country scale and to respect its outlines. Five Breton countries have therefore been chosen. All of them represent the four Breton departments as well as a variety of socio-economic situations and typologies alternating between a strong rurality and more urban places. These five countries might not show all the actions possible, they are however rather reliably representative of the variety of the situations met between industrialized areas (country of Vitré) and deeply rural areas (country of the center of the West Brittany), areas settled in the technological culture (Country of Tregor-Goelo) and entering countries (country of

Vannes), without forgetting a more built and related to urbanised spaces experimentation (country of Brest).

To tackle these issues highly linked to local specialties, mostly due to memorable individual actors, it is necessary to resort to a sociological methodology highly based on semi-structured interviews of significant actors of the Country that could or couldn't fit in different social places. For this reason, institutional and commercial actors put apart, the survey has been focused on the most active people who enable some websites to exist. We, therefore, find very localized websites (collective local interest's defence), actors of the local social, cultural and political lives who use the Internet tool to valorize their productions, practises and militating actions and, in the same time, another category of federated actors on a national or european level who locally decline initiatives taken on a wider scale.

Results

The analysis of current practises in Brittany shows that a certain amount of websites created by Breton people are given up because of a lack of interest for the content and also because of the technical laboriousness needed to maintain them up to date.

However, in return of such a disinterest, we can notice the emergence of a new phenomenon of auto-edition made possible thanks to new softwares of creation and updating of personal websites. This custom is mainly organized around the new phenomenon of "weblogs". The study underlines the difficulty, for the Internet's actors, to create a real animation around the technical tool. The successes observed are due to personalities who are, locally, capable for making this practice fit, in a reflection on ICTs and in an engagement in the social life and the local policy.

Participants

Categories of non institutional participants who create informational contents have been identified in priority:

- local specialized institutions, education, libraries;
- marginal media;
- collective of facts;
- associations of users;
- altruistic associations
- individuals valorizing actions or practices.

Contents

The contents belong to the following genres:

- militancy;
- journalistic information;

- training, professional orientation;
- cultural promotion;
- commercial promotion;
- diffusion of productions and personal notes;
- participating websites/forums;
- convenient information;
- portals, phone books.

Hybridization of space and time

Mixing all these categories, a rather complete picture of the uses of the Internet in domains different from the economy and institutional domains becomes visible. Paying attention when looking at this picture, a brand new hybridization between technics and social actors comes to light and underlines that the situation of the territory in these usages develops. Variety shows indeed a common line between those usages: the relations between local practises and global analyses relentlessly change configuration. This permanent exchange of the dimensions, associated to a strong interactivity with the producers/receptors of the information, is enabled by any classical media. The exchange of information among various public social call to mind the foundation lines of the duties of the first "gazettes" which gave birth to the written press.

The interviews that followed these observations confirmed that a large number of actors of these new media claim an independence towards public powers. However, forms of support to the production (sometimes found in PAPIs) and to the accompaniment of initiatives gathering the producers of information (under specialized information or territorial portals) are wished by these same hosts. These remarks will have to be linked to the results provided by similar studies, supervised, in particular, by the Ministry of Research within the context of European research projects for which breton experimentations represent a particularly interesting case.

Quantitative analysis (Get-ENST Bretagne and UBO)

The survey wants to evaluate the pertinence of the encouragement's policy that aims to develop public access points of the Internet with an economic point of view. The improvement of the knowledge of public access points to the Internet, their adoption by citizens and their possible evolutions have to be brought by this evaluation. This can't be done without an analysis of the facts and the meeting of the participants, to which the team has been buckling down during the whole period of study.

In the same way, we tried to determine the efficiency of this policy and, in particular, whether the goal target has been reached. This one aimed to satisfy:

- the equity, through the availability of an access to the Internet and multimedia tools for everyone, wherever they lived;
- the efficiency, through measures of the impact resulting from the resources mobilized, in a users' point of view, but also in the Region and implicated districts's point of view.

Methodology

An costs-advantages analysis has been led. Several questionnaires have therefore been realized. Three actors of public access points to the Internet have been questioned. The first interrogated were the hosts who had an informal meeting with the inquirers. The goal was to get the impressions of the hosts on their occupations, their relations with the users and the elected and to know how PAPIs work. The second actors questioned were the users of PAPIs. The questionnaires made towards users have been addressed to everyone present in the PAPI visited in the period of inquiry (one week in July). The choice has been put on the establishment, on a given period, of the real pace of frequentation and the users' profiles. The third actors met are the elected of the town who have ordered the creation of a PAPI.

Four elected of a town with less than 2500, between 2500 and 10000 and more than 10000 inhabitants have been questioned in the North-Finistere. The fourth town is one of the last town where a PAPI has been created (within one year). This led us to write monographies upon each of the towns, the primary information that resulted was the one concerning the costs supported by the collectivity.

The measure of the advantages has been made thanks to a contingent valuation method (CVM). The CVM mechanism consists in questioning the agents on their consent to pay or their consent to receive so that the project can be realized. As there is actually no effective market, agents have to display hypothetical behaviors, supposed to correspond the best to their preferences.

Results

Two samples are eventually available: 88 adults and 97 younger people.

As far as the majority of the users state that they live at less than 1 km from their PAPI (67% of the young people and 48% of the adults), PAPIs give a service of proximity. Besides, 41% of all the users state to come on foot.

Most of the researched tools are office automation (75% of the adults and 32% of the young people), followed by the use of the printer, the scanner and the CD burner. Their usages can therefore be qualified of primary usages.

Young people go the PAPIs to play games in networks or online, whereas adults mostly look for information. When young people are asked to "classify" their usages of the Internet, they rather put the games AS FIRST, then the research of information and then chats. As for the adults, they mostly use PAPIs to research information on culture and leisure, then to check or send e-mails and eventually, to look for online job offers.

The main advantage of PAPIs is to offer a free - or at least cheaper - access to the Internet. Adults underline the fact that they don't have to buy materials and the importance of the host and the training. For the young people, the host is a "friend" and a PAPI is a past time place and often the only place the town where they can meet their friends.

The survey shows that PAPIs have a non negligible price. The cost can be estimated to 2865Euros/year/PAPI for a region, 7945Euros for the town (creation's cost excluded and public help included), 2.13Euros one hour of Internet - in average - for the users.

It is also shown, in parallel, that the value of the use depends on a certain amount of determining factors which are either related to the usages of the Internet, or related to the services offered by the PAPI, or even to the quality of the equipment offered. In average, users are willing a 7.5Euros [1] each month for an unlimited access to their PAPI.

Eventually, the result of the costs-advantages analysis is mitigated. The result has a lot to do with the way the PAPI functions (is a local supposed to be rented?) and on the number of users frequenting the place. In any case, the financing of the host is the crucial point on the survival of the PAPI. If the cost is fully taken in charge by the region and the job as a host gets the status of community's employee (without the cancellation of the taxes as it is done for an "emploi-jeune"), it becomes obvious that the cost-advantage balance is negative.

Conclusion

In the end, it can be kept in mind that the users are attached to their PAPI and host. PAPIs are places of leisure and meeting for adults as well as young people. Closing these spaces seems unacceptable nowadays, even if their uses have hardly evolved since their creation. The PAPI's worth therefore deeply depends on the socio-economic characteristics of the citizens who frequent them and on the usages developed. The Internet is thus spreading through Brittany, partly thanks to PAPIs, giving them a social value largely beyond its cost. In term, the aim would be to develop the uses of the Internet in PAPIs. This can't be done without the renewal of the facilities available and the maintaining of the host's job... and perhaps the financial participation of the citizens...

Recommendations

The PAPI's development program is currently coming to a critical phase where the hiring contract of the hosts - considered essential by the users - comes to its term.

The majority of the hosts don't have anyway out at the end their "emploi-jeune" contract . Some of them are planning to become titular as administrative assistant under the condition of obtaining the administrative competitive examination.

However, without hosts, the future of the PAPIs is seriously compromised and it seems difficult for a town to completely take in charge the cost of a new community's employee, unless a cultural center has already begun to be developed or a job of communication manager can be created.

As a following of the evaluation led, some leads to extend the program and support the development of PAPIs are suggested. The main recommendations that are being done concern the uses within PAPIs.

- So that PAPIs can go on existing, it is necessary for them to be places of services and advanced - and in continuous evolution - technologies. Otherwise, the citizen won't find any interest to move, as far as almost 50% of the households currently have a computer at home. The town therefore has to be able to offer sophisticated facilities, with sufficient rates (a permanent access in minimum) and recent softwares.
- This implies an evolution of the hosts' roles: hosts have to become the actors of the usages: they have to be given the means (time, equipment), the motivation and an adapted training. Hosts could also suggest other kind of uses.
- The public could also be widen and these spaces could be more and more opened to associations, schools and youth clubs...
- Some time slots should be reserved to particular publics: for young people, for instance - even though, this goes against the meeting of various generations, but playing games is often incompatible with the research of information or with trainings).
- One should be able to identify the non-users of PAPIs, the reasons of this non-use and to analyze in which

conditions a PAPI could fit their expectations and needs.

The financial issue remains a delicate point to solve. The Region hopes to develop collaborations with other organisations (European Commission, Deposits and Consignments office...)

- To face the aging of the informatic park, computer sales (used computers) could be opened and therefore renew the equipment.
- A better definition of the content and the outlines of the job of the host. The difficulty comes from the fact that they are not regional employees. The decision is therefore in the town's hands. The Region could provide recommendations to homogenize the jobs.
- It could also be necessary to have one host per Country who would be responsible for keeping the hosts in touch, the forums alive and creating other means of diffusion of the information. This host could also be in charge of organizing exchanges of competencies, so that the speciality of each host can be profitably used in all of the spaces. Local hosts also look for support and advice that they benefit from the cooperation of more or less close neighbors. Tutorials made by visioconferences could be punctually made (it is sometimes difficult for the hosts to travel).
- Eventually, the groupment of some PAPIs in a central spot is recommended. Even if, PAPIs remain a service of proximity, inhabitants of rural towns have a standard of living that make them regularly take means of transportation. They would therefore not be afraid to have a 15 km-ride to benefitiate of such a service. This would avoid having almost empty spaces, with a slightly busy host and a municipality that has to face high costs. It is undeniable that the PAPI's program is, for some towns, the opportunity to have materials and a low-cost job, however no long term reflection occurred. This shouldn't happen again and for every future program, the Region should ask for management's expectation on at least 5 years.

In any case, PAPIs will have to develop their services if they want to bring additional values to the current practices of the citizens. They have both to manage attracting the primary-users and to satisfy the regular visitors so that PAPIs don't become just a space where young people can play.