

Entry in Category: Digital Communities 2008**Submitter**

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Title of submitted project: Arsmeteo

Year the work was created:

Type of project: Social Software

Description of project: Arsmeteo is a new art portal for sharing artworks and their emerging, ephemeral, connective meanings. It is aimed at setting a fertile background for collaborative artistic creation. Arsmeteo enables the collection of digital (or digitalised) artworks and performances, belonging to a variety of artistic form including poems, videos, pictures and musical compositions. Meanings are given by the tagging activity of all users of the community. Both authors of the contents and visitors may express their own perception and meanings about the works of art by annotating them with words, the tags: semantic references, mental associations, attributes, emotions, aesthetic experiences, conflicts, paradoxes, challenges, suggestions, intuitions. Even if the meanings given by the tagging activity are intrinsically anarchist, the social dynamics of the collection of tags spontaneously leads to the emerging of common patterns, and then to the arising of relations of similarity between artefacts. Thus, meanings enable to browse the works of art, to find new unexpected relations among artists and artefacts, and to connect them in a browsing experience in a very personal way, that can be different time by time. In fact, new artefacts, new meanings can be added anytime, the possible connections among artists and their works of arts can change, reflecting the evolution of the community and its latent perception of a sort of impermanent "zeitgeist". Everyone can access all contents as "digital commons".

Arsmeteo opens with a planetary vision of the Earth flown over by evolving clouds of words and images: the Time of Art. Artworks and Tags move about over the world, temporarily aggregating into cumuli. The disturbance is the community users' main activity which brings about aggregations, and is the cause of precipitations, hence of their possibility of being discovered and connected. Currently, the portal gathers a collection of about 2500 artefacts produced by over 100 living artists. The community expressed a folksonomy of over 15000 tags. This dynamic environment naturally engenders constructive contexts, where users have invented and experimented new forms of trans-individual artistic actions and reflections. New artefacts can be created by collecting and recycling art-material from different users and from different media. Actually, artistic group actions, where different users synchronized their creative potential, led to generate new artworks and languages, which build upon (or reinvent) Arsmeteo's material: new poems were created as rivers of words by the simultaneous and interactive tagging activity of many users; a new visual Arsmeteo alphabet -Alfameteo- emerged by reinterpreting some artworks as alphabetic letters. Moreover, Arsmeteo is self-reflective: the community gave spontaneously rise to a reflection on the evergreen question: what is art? The tag-answers to this artwork-question are changing and floating like the community minds.

Upload Description: Arsmeteo_detailed_descr.pdf

URL of the work: <http://www.arsmeteo.org>

Project Details

Objectives: Arsmeteo creates a common space to share culture and art and to connect artistic intelligence. Our primary objective is to offer to a wide community of people, on the one hand, unprecedented meeting occasions and mutual knowledge, on the other hand, the possibility of showing and sharing contents and styles, and of expressing creative cooperation.

While the World of Art is mainly parcelled out in exclusive communities, Arsmeteo aims at proposing a public space on the Web constitutively promoting the emerging and the growing of new inclusive and interacting communities. This is a difference with respect to other art portals, which simply attempt to certificate the existence of artists and artworks which are already present and well-known in the art-system. Arsmeteo instead aims at enforcing cooperation and dynamicity in the World of Art, with a special accent on Contemporaneity, by providing a seedbed for new artistic talents that grow not only individually but also by group actions.

On this respect, the goal is to create a space where artists can meet and cooperate without any third-party intermediation, and act in real-time on the same artworks. Different skills may converge: literary, art or movie criticisms can meet architectural, painting, sculpting or writing creativities. Cross-contamination of different ages, genders, cultures, languages,

ways of life can generate new artistic languages and a new level of composite culture.

Notice that we can keep memory of the dynamics of the integration and collective action, the original artworks will be not adulterated or lost.

Moreover, we aim at supporting a kind of connectivity that spontaneously emerges from the activity of the community which includes both artists and audience. A natural way to find connections without searching for them is to exploit the serendipity supported by the Web 2.0 social tagging technologies. The connectivity must be freely graduated: it is up to the user to explore the connectivity among the contents, the meanings, the artists and the community, by defining a total or partial space of artworks.

Another important issue we want to address is to bring a growing audience closer to contemporary art, by guiding people in interpreting the works of the artists. We want to use connectivity for favoring a collective interpretation of the artworks, which can guide the individual comprehension of art. Social tagging can be used for providing a possible answer to this issue. In Arsmeteo users are not alone when, in front of an artwork, they ask to themselves "What does it mean?", but they can at least rely on the meanings provided both by the author and by the other visitors.

Language and context: The birth of Arsmeteo is rooted in the national and present culture (Italian language, contemporary art and living authors), but no linguistic or geographical limit can significantly restrict its potential interaction area. In fact on the one hand the use of the web allows long distance cultural contacts, while, on the other hand, the use of folksonomies entails less linguistic obstacles than taxonomies.

At present folksonomies are mainly expressed in Italian, but some Latin, English, Spanish, French and even dialectal expressions are also included; multilinguality does not affect the functionality of the system and increases the attractiveness of the environment.

Since Arsmeteo community is open, the meeting of different cultures is wished and encouraged (Netville, Zeitgeist) and it will provide material for future linguistical and psychological analysis of the cultural differences in tagging and perceiving the same artworks.

Arsmeteo is based in Torino, where the art-system is typically dynamic: the town is traditionally a laboratory for new ideas and is known abroad for important startups (initiatives?) like e.g. Artissima and the former exhibitions of Arslab, which took place since the Nineties.

So, Arsmeteo is a sort of updating of the goal pursued by Ars Tecnica and ArsLab organizations which, starting from the early '90s, led to the development of ancestor projects and events: "Arslab II - The Senses of the Virtual" (Passing to Netville), Exhibition in Torino (I), 1995; "SEGNALI D'OPERA - Arte e digitale in Italia", Convention at Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Gallarate, Milano 1997; "Connected Intelligence" Workshop directed by Derrick de Kerckhove at MediARTech, Florence 1998; "Infowar-Information.Macht.Krieg [Band 01]", Convention at Ars Electronica 98, Linz (A) 1998.

Through this path it is possible to recognize the progress of the Netville Project, which leads from the first memory-collecting installations to the present web-collecting artworks of the Arsmeteo Project: in this way, starting from Torino, one can say that other "artistic planets" (Netville, Arsmeteo) can be reached.

Project History: The original start of Arsmeteo was a "no-logo" banner conceived by Giorgio Vaccarino for an online art magazine in 2005. The banner was planned to display collected multimedia objects which had to be a synthetic representation of the current state of art and culture.

Starting from Spring 2006, Arsmeteo became a standing-alone project, enlarged to the participation of some researchers of the Computer Science Department of University of Torino, a group of artists and the web agency Easybit srl. The core of this project became the research about a system enabling the collection of multimedia digital artistic contents to be shared by a community of authors and users, characterized by a social approach to content categorization and search.

In July 2007 the Associazione Culturale Arsmeteo started up, leading and supporting the development of the project as a web portal. At this stage, Arsmeteo becomes a meeting place where an everyday growing community of artists, poets, writers, multimedia authors coming from different cultural experiences and traditions are enabled to discuss, evaluate, suggest their ideas and their purposes.

Since its born, Arsmeteo provided a very rich and interesting application scenario, that inspired academic research about new methods and technologies for improving the access to knowledge in information systems of organizations (e.g. museums, libraries), whose aim is to disseminate culture by breaking the semantic gap between the professional language of experts and the perceptions of the general audience. This is witnessed by related research carried on in the context of various bachelor and master thesis at the Computer Science Department and at the School of Multimedia and Arts at University of Torino (see attached documentation). One of the most interesting direction of research concerns the possibility to link informal descriptions of artworks included in the Arsmeteo folksonomy to emotional ontological structures, in order to discover the latent emotional semantics of the tags and to enable interoperability, automatic reasoning, machine-readability and reuse. Given that visitors of artistic exhibitions normally have affective experiences and express relative judgements concerning works of arts, it is interesting to study how to make that affective component emerge from labelling the artworks works with keywords expressing their content. A scientific paper about this subject has been accepted for publication:

M. Baldoni, C. Baroglio, A. Horvath, V. Patti, F. Portis, M. Avilia, and P. Grillo. Folksonomies meet ontologies in ARSMETEO: from social descriptions of artifacts to emotional concepts. In Proc. of the Formal Ontologies Meet Industry: FOMI 2008, Torino, Italy, June 2008. IOS Press.

People: Associazione Culturale Arsmeteo founders are: Edoardo Acotto, Matteo Baldoni, Cristina Baroglio, Nicola Canonico, Gianni Colombo, Ambra Lazzari, Alessandro Misiti, Giovanni Pagano, Viviana Patti (vice-president), Flavio Portis (project manager), Donato Prosdocimo, Franco Torriani, Giorgio Vaccarino (president), Matteo Vaccarino, Flavio Ventre. The project is supported by the Department of Computer Science - University of Torino - Italy (www.di.unito.it) and by Easybit SRL (www.easybit.it). A proactive contribution to the project came from Maria Coscarella, Claudio Gulli, Umberto Gulli, Roberta Mazza, Filippo Valente, Luisa Valente.

There are different levels of participation in the project. The entry level is completely free and consists in navigating, searching and tagging all the artefacts stored in the Arsmeteo database, using the most popular web browsers. A second level is allowed to the registered members of Arsmeteo Community: as soon as logged-in, they can see who is on-line and access the chat-line which is also a useful registry of previous discussions; they can also enter the uploading area, in which they are allowed to transfer to the database a variety of genres of artworks accompanied with a first range of tags.

Lessons learned: Our bet with regard to the selection, which is already finding some kind of confirmation, is that it takes places through the tags in a new way that involves visitors as they surf through the works of arts and the tags inserted by previous users. We can say that Arsmeteo fishes in a practically endless inventory of works of art (and authors) with selection criteria that are set forth partly by visitors and partly by the clouds of tags which accompany the artworks. The less interesting

works are bound to remain at the bottom... This effect is already tangible whenever visiting Arsmeteo with some degree of accuracy along with a serendipitous behaviour. If Pablo Picasso said "I don't search it: I find it", then we could say nowadays "We searched for the way for finding without searching: we have found it!". We would like to be able to apply this issue not only to find "fine" artefacts but also to find "great" contributors. This is the most interesting and very difficult thing! Concerning the participation of the community in the development of the entire project, common tools like forum and chat provided very well-accepted and important tools. The community is actively engaged in the development of the project: a forum allows to record daily proposals about the strategies to be adopted and the steps to implement them. Moreover, all the logged-in users may intervene within a chat, which turned out to be a useful tool for a quick exchange of views about the insertion of an artwork or its tagging.

Technical Information

Technological Basis: ArsMeteo is a Web-Application, accessed via Internet. It dynamically generates a set of Web documents in a standard format supported by common browsers such as HTML/XHTML. The communications protocol is HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol).

Server-Side Software Technologies:

-LAMP: open-source Web development platform, using Linux operating system, Apache Web server, MySQL RDBMS and PHP object-oriented scripting language.

-Debian GNU/Linux 4.0: freely-distributable open source operating system that runs on a number of hardware platforms. The Linux kernel was developed mainly by Linus Torvalds and it is based on Unix. Since it's free and it runs on many platforms, Linux has become an extremely popular alternative to proprietary operating systems.

-Apache Web server 2.2: public-domain open source Web server developed by a loosely-knit group of programmers.

-MySQL 5: open source RDBMS that relies on SQL for processing the data in the database, developed, supported and marketed by MySQL AB. The database is available for free, under the terms of the GNU General Public License (GPL).

-PHP 5: (self-referentially short for PHP Hypertext Preprocessor) is an open source, server-side, HTML embedded scripting language used to create dynamic Web pages. PHP is executed on the server (the client cannot view the PHP code). Its strength lies in its compatibility with many types of databases.

Client-Side Software Technologies:

-JavaScript: scripting language used for client-side web development. It is a dynamic, weakly typed, prototype-based language with first-class functions. JavaScript was influenced by many languages and was designed to have a similar look to Java. "JavaScript" is a trademark of Sun Microsystems. It was used under license for technology invented and implemented by Netscape Communications and current entities such as the Mozilla Foundation.

-Flash: a set of multimedia technologies developed and distributed by Adobe Systems. Flash is commonly used to create animation, advertisements, various web page components, to integrate video into web pages, and to develop rich Internet applications. It contains a scripting language called ActionScript. It is available in most common web browsers. Several software products, systems, and devices are able to create or display Flash, including the Adobe Flash Player. Files in the SWF format usually have a .swf file extension and may be an object of a web page. Flash Video (FLV) files have a .flv file extension and are utilized from within .swf files.

Browser Compatibility:

-Internet explorer 6 or more, Mozilla Firefox 1 or more, Opera 8 or more, Safari 2 or more, Plugin Adobe Flashplayer 8 or more

Server (Hardware):

-Server HP ML115G1 hosted in Easybit server farm
-Processor AMD Opteron 1210 (1,8GHz)
-2GB Memory DDR2 ECC da 667MHZ (exp. until 8GB)
-2 hard disk 250GB Serial ATA
-Controller hardware HP RAID 6 ports
-Controller SATA RAID 0,1,5 with 4 ports (until 4 HD)
-LAN Ethernet Gigabit

Solutions: :

Implementations:

Users:

License:

Statement of Reasons: Social tagging and user-generated media can lead to the development of very interesting software for digital communities, especially in application domains that share a strong social characterization, i.e. people rely on others's experience and perception. The World of Art is a domain with such characteristics. Relying on a folksonomic approach, Arsmeteo makes both the author's and the audience's experience more enjoyable and, at the same time, more effective, reducing the overhead of retrieving relevant information, removing barriers to entry in an inclusive, not exclusive, community, and adding value to the content, that can be collectively and dynamically created, modified and connected. Arsmeteo is a public, free and anarchical space for sharing artworks and references to which anybody can contribute. It is open to a large number of authors from diverse backgrounds. Its content may be added by users from everywhere. A large number of authors contributing at any moment also means that Arsmeteo can collect resources covering a wide range of art genres. This allows us to significantly reduce cultural bias, and makes it very difficult to censor and impose any sort of bias.

The Arsmeteo proposal is unique w.r.t. other art portals as it provides not simply a platform for storage and sharing of contents, but also a space for collective cultivations of new artworks and ideas, which find in Arsmeteo a fertile ground. In many instances, authors who did not know each other entered in contact, exchanging not only opinions but even pieces of artworks, thus giving birth to new artworks. The system provides the possibility to see who is on-line, thus turning out to be very stimulating for the creation of new works that, outside of Arsmeteo, would have not found any hint to see the light. Our likelihood of success seems encouragingly high. Arsmeteo has a growing source of traffic and an increasing rate of authors and tagging visitors. In about six months, we gathered a collection of 2460 artworks and a set of over 16000 tags, with over 150.000 accesses.

Finally, in Arsmeteo the artistic community has the opportunity to experiment a focussed use of the new social media. In fact Arsmeteo encourages an easy and intuitive use of the social technologies, providing a guided access to them. This is witnessed by the fact that our community is populated also by artists that categorize themselves as new-media-absolute-beginners. Last but not least, Arsmeteo is going to evolve in innovative directions, aimed at enforcing both the semantic and the affective aspects. As documented in the uploaded documents, Arsmeteo is a case-study for academic research about the possibility to integrate semantic web methodologies and social technologies, in order to extract a latent emotional semantics from the tagging activity, and thus to provide time-wired emotional navigation paths along the contents. What's more, Arsmeteo has no ads!

Planned use of prize money: From the beginning, the project has been funded by the direct contribution of members of the Arsmeteo non-profit association. Technical support derived from the cultural sensibility of Easybit srl which patronized the start-up phase. The maintenance of the system is guaranteed by volunteers. Fortunately, we are observing a growth of the community, which leads to a significant increase of artworks, tags and interactions. However, the possibility to provide a high quality service with a broader community is strongly conditioned by the availability of resources for communication activities and events and for software and hardware improvements.

Moreover, the future planned extensions of the system with new functionalities, concerning for example the adding of an emotional dimension, will call for the necessity to design new forms of navigation and new spaces where users can access the contents.

There are costs that cannot be avoided: infrastructure, hardware, software, user interface, etc. In the next year we expect to spend a budget of not less than 25.000. On this respect, the fund raising is a crucial point for Arsmeteo. Such a funding, like the one provided by Prix Ars Electronica, could be a delighting and fundamental incoming for us!

Further material entered:

Upload Material: arsmeteo_06_chairman.jpg

giorgiovaccarino.shortbio.txt

arsmeteo_01_home-tag.jpg

arsmeteo_02_alfameteo2.jpg

arsmeteo_fomi08.pdf

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Interview with Giorgio Vaccarino.photo.pdf

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arsmeteo_08_taggingriver.jpg

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arsmeteo_10_video.jpg

arsmeteo_11_whatistart.jpg

pictzeitgeist.jpg

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