STOA-NEWS

New STOA Project on Cloud Computing and Social Networks

As of 15th of April a new STOA project on the "Potential and Impacts of Cloud Computing Services and Social Network Sites" has been launched by ETAG. The project is scheduled to run until December 2013. The project will incorporate and assess the key findings and conclusions of the relevant research conducted in the field of Cloud Computing services and Social Network Websites. Based on the results of this research, options will be developed that are relevant for actions of European decision-makers. The project team is made up of colleagues from the Danish Board of Technology, the Austrian Institute of Technology Assessment, ITAS and Fraunhofer ISI, the latter as the leading partner.

Cloud Computing

The project will analyze the technological, economic and legal foundations of cloud computing. In order to shape the understanding of cloud computing it will also be necessary to research and analyze the evolution of cloud computing technologies and concepts, since the idea behind it has a rather long tradition that can be traced back to the 1960s. Based on the analysis of technical features and requirements, the project aims at identifying driving factors for the diffusion of Cloud Computing services. Different layers of services will be distinguished, making the difference between basic infrastructure layers (such as Google Docs for instance) and value added services that can be added on top of it (such as document management for business).

The main task of the project will be to analyze possible economic and social impacts of cloud computing. Impacts considered are e.g. the direct impacts of cloud computing on the IT services, and on the software and Internet markets and industry in Europe as well as the impacts on existing structures of the industry, especially with regard to the business models of FLOSS (Free/Libre Open Source Software) or proprietary producers.

Direct impacts on private businesses, public authorities, the science and innovation system, and private households will be considered as well. The project will finally deal with questions related to privacy and security threats including their legal aspects. In three strands the project will address the problems of customer rights related to the use of cloud services, the challenges to governance arising from it as well as technical aspects of security, privacy, and intellectual property/copyright protection in cloud computing services.

Social Network Websites

Given the specific context and issues of Social Network Websites, this topic will be treated in an extra module. As a first step the module will review the different types of Social Network Websites, focusing on traditional global open social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, XING, on the one hand, and on the VZ group, on the other. The focus will be on identifying the demands, motivations and risks for or of the intensive use of Social Network Websites especially by younger people. Building upon this review of cultural and social factors, the module will analyze legal implications arising from that situation. In further steps, technological and economic factors like different types of business models (membership, data exploitation, in-shop concepts, etc.) or alternative technological approaches like Diaspora will be researched, as well as questions related to security, privacy, and the protection of intellectual property/copyright in SNS. As an emerging segment of social network websites, the project will also address restricted business-oriented social networks like Yammer, Communote and other services categorized as enterprise software. The underlying functions like microblogging, networking and collaboration are essential parts of the Enterprise 2.0 (E2) concept, which evolved in the mid of the 2000s. The basic idea of E2 was to exploit the benefits of social software for improving communication and collaboration within enterprises. In the following several enterprises like, for example, BT (British Telecom) as an early adaptor implemented own solutions. Also many enterprise software developers like IBM, SAP or Oracle subsequently started to implement features in their own systems. In the recent years,

enterprises like Yammer or Communote appeared offering solutions as web-based services that address two major challenges: firstly, the need of especially small and medium sized companies which are not able or willing to implement enterprise systems offered by IBM, SAP or others and, secondly, they also addressed the limitations of such systems which hamper the integration of suppliers or customers using different systems.

Contact

Michael Friedewald
E-mail: michael.friedewald@isi.fraunhofer.de
Timo Leimbach
E-mail: timo.leimbach@isi.fraunhofer.de

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European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA)

The EPTA Partners advise parliaments on the possible social, economic and environmental impact of new sciences and technologies. The common aim is to provide impartial and high quality accounts and reports of developments in issues such as for example bioethics and biotechnology, public health, environment and energy, ICTs, and R&D policy. EPTA aims to advance the establishment of technology assessment as an integral part of policy consulting in parliamentary decision-making processes in Europe, and to strengthen the links between TA units in Europe.

The EPTA network was formally established in 1990 and has a light structure, guided by the EPTA Council and by meetings of the Directors of the EPTA partner organisations. The members of the EPTA network are European organisations, which carry out TA studies on behalf of parliaments. EPTA can decide to make "common EPTA projects", in which EPTA members and associates can join forces and make trans-European TA activities. The project is decided on a Directors' meeting or Council Meeting after being contested by the boards of the members. The outcome of an EPTA project is the sole responsibility of the participating members.

For more information and a list of all members see http://eptanetwork.org/about.php.

Information about ITAS

The Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) is a research facility of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). It is assessing technological impacts and comprehensive systemic interrelations of societal transformation processes and developments in science, technology, and the environment. The orientation of research and technology policy, the influence on the design of socio-technological systems and the realization of discursive processes on open and controversial questions on technology policy are some of the most important objectives. Parliaments and governments are the main addressees of this policy advice. The results of research and policy advice are publicly available. Regarding the object of research, work in ITAS is problem-oriented, it is organized in the form of projects and the individual research disciplines are interdisciplinary. ITAS covers the whole spectrum of systems analysis and technology assessment for policy advice and technology design with its scientific, methodological, and procedural competences. Comprehensive analyses of societal problems and technological systems generally require a combination of various analytical processes which have to be coordinated for each individual project. More information about ITAS see http://www.itas.kit.edu/english/index.php.