HubIT

TECHNOLOGY WITH AND FOR SOCIETY

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 769497.

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUDING STAKEHOLDERS AND DEVELOPERS

HubIT

TECHNOLOGY WITH AND FOR SOCIETY

Deliverable type

Report

Work package

WP2

Dissemination level

Public

Month and date of Delivery

FEBRUARY 2021

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Programme

Horizon 2020

Contract Number

769497

Duration

36 Months

Start

1st September 2017

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2. GUIDELINES

2.1. Introduction to the guidelines

As human beings we are all expected to act in accordance with our own sense of responsibility. The question is whether the projects we work on can be considered responsible? To answer the question, it can be helpful not only to include people with similar professional backgrounds, but with diverse backgrounds as each profession tends to have different views on the needs of society and on the impacts of a project.

The short guidelines you can find here are meant to help you pose a few important questions to yourself and to your organisation, before you approach private and public stakeholders with your projects and ideas for interdisciplinary cooperation. Their main purpose is to get you to start thinking about the importance of a common cultural understanding and common language when approaching people who are not already familiar with the RRI approach.

After all, the best way to be responsible is to share your dilemmas and knowledge with others and get inspired by them in return.

Besides these guidelines you will also find examples of methodologies developed and used in the HubIT project presented here for your inspiration.

2.2. Guidelines

- When talking about common culture and digital technology it can be helpful to consider two differing views on the impact of digital technology and solutions on the development of society; broadly presented here as a mechanic view and a humanistic view. Is the flow of new technology a goal in and of itself as it drives societal development, providing society with solutions to problems only to be halted if specific laws are broken (the mechanic view)? Or is human cognition, arts, and language the main driver behind civilised development, with new technology being a possible, but not necessarily a desirable, means to an end (the humanistic view)?

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A culture with a mostly mechanic view might regard the humanistic view as far removed from the real world and a lot of 'empty talk', whereas a culture imprinted with the humanistic view might regard the mechanic view as a money talks/markets first approach.
To bridge the gap between the two views, a specific case to discuss could be a good starting point, while acknowledging the important parts of both cultural understandings.

- When defining a case and a common goal, language is important. This might seem self-evident, but it is none the less crucial when discussing your projects and ideas with people not from your inner circle or organisation. Language is everything from the use of abbreviations and technical terms to the wording of your spoken and written language.
  It is not necessarily clear to professionals working with IT and digital solutions what ICT means, as ICT is an abbreviation used in academic settings. Likewise with SSH or RRI. The use of an abbreviation creates noise in the communication, as you risk that the other part does not understand you or forces you to deviate from your point to explain.
  A technical term could be Responsibility. A precise definition of this could depend on the context and your personal and professional background. By framing something as responsible because it follows an RRI approach, you risk framing everything else as irresponsible to those not familiar with the approach.
  When planning interdisciplinary projects, keep your written and spoken language straightforward and everyday like. Instead of only relying on theoretical and academic terms, talk specific cases and specific dilemmas. In that way the people you are talking to will not resort to their own abbreviations and technical terms, and will help keep your communication on common ground.

- Remember that the HubIT platform and the RRI approach is a framework for discussing responsibility and societal impact, and not a checklist of certain truths. Make sure to keep your eye on the ball and not the player. Developers of digital solutions for example, will more often than not have found themselves in situations that forced them to consider many aspects of responsibility in their work. When asked about a specific dilemma it could very well be a practical problem they deal with regularly and have attached many strong opinions to, which has led to it defining the limits of the work they do.

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- In continuation of this, remember that an answer to a question like; “Have you considered whether the solution you are working on could be misused?”, could very well be; “Yes, I have considered that. Yes, it could be misused. No, that did not stop me from working on it”.
  An answer like that does not imply that the developer does not care. If you develop a hammer, it can be used to drive in nails or to hit people. So, should the inventors and developers of hammers stop producing them because someone could misuse them? Or do the societal benefits of having access to hammers outweigh the risks of people using them to hit each other?
  For many developers the solution to possible misuse of their work would be legislation. As it is with hammers.

- Lastly it is important to remember that when people talk to you, they invest time that could be used to do other things. In a fast-moving world we all get bombarded by information and offers all of the time.
  Professionals developing and working with IT and digital solutions can be especially picky with their time because they much more often than not are extremely busy. If you want them to cooperate you need to be specific and to the point. What is it exactly you have in mind, how do they fit in, what do you need them to do?
  Consider also including your thoughts on business models and financing. All in all this will help you facilitate cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural cooperation.

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