Media Development in Practice
Innovation for Dialogue

New approaches and innovative solutions to improve public dialogue in the digital era

DW Akademie

Made for minds.

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Contents

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Imprint

Introduction

Digital transformation is fundamentally changing our lives. Just as the virtual world mirrors, recreates and redefines our physical reality, our public sphere has turned into a digital information sphere. Discussions around public issues now predominantly take place online.

This ongoing transformation is creating enormous opportunities. But it also brings huge challenges, problems, and side effects, and can impact public discussions in negative ways, as well. Without further innovation, the harmful effects will outweigh the opportunities in the long run.

It is true that people can participate in and shape social debates in many new ways. Technology offers endless possibilities to make information quickly available. Everyone can now immediately share and comment on that information. People can engage in dialogue on public affairs in new ways. Issues can be discussed on various social media sites, comment forums or messaging platforms.

However, the existing technological tools and current approaches often fail to ensure a free and level playing field everyone. They also fail to guarantee everybody's right to freedom of expression and include all relevant groups, such as disadvantaged and underrepresented communities, into conversations around public issues.

New barriers have emerged. Access to technical equipment, computers, smartphones, Internet access, and affordable data, as well as the knowledge, skills and competencies to handle technology, are preconditions for participating in public discussions. Language becomes another barrier when people cannot find enough content in their native tongue.

New technology provides new ways for information to become visible, amplified, and prioritized. It defines what information will have a better chance to be part of and dominate public discussions. Journalists and media companies are no longer the gatekeepers of information and drivers of debates. They have been replaced by social media platforms, which have been created and maintained by private companies that provide crucial infrastructure for the public sphere.

Their algorithms, which fundamentally define the character of public debate, are mainly optimized to increase advertising revenues rather than ensuring that public discussions live up to their full potential. States are increasingly trying to regulate these platforms and enforce that public interest equally be taken into account, but the platforms' fundamental business model — providing infrastructure for the discussions in exchange for data — remains unchanged.

This digital information ecosystem is therefore full of friction and turbulence. Our public sphere is shrinking.

– Special interest groups with influence and money, often with minority views, stand a good chance of driving public discussions in favor of their interests. Bad actors such as tech-savvy extremists, terror groups or authoritarian states can easily hijack debates to serve their purposes.
– Because untrustworthy information spreads just as quickly as verified facts on social media, bad actors frequently use these platforms to share disinformation and propaganda. They deploy social bots as "weapons" to amplify their views, deviate political debates and disrupt elections.
– Information on the one hand seems abundant, but people often feel overwhelmed, disoriented and doubtful. They lack filters for the available truthful and trustworthy information, without which public dialogue can easily collapse into chaos.
– Discussions are often dominated by emotions rather than facts, as social media algorithms favor emotions that drive higher engagement with their users and result in greater advertising revenues.
– Debates become quickly polarized and are frequently characterized by various forms of online harassment. Trolling and bullying can prevent people from freely participating in public debates and public affairs generally. They are often used to silence critical opinion, as well.
– People increasingly interact in closed channels on messaging services on dark social media, which carries the risk of segregating them from other groups and the general public. Discussions are becoming fragmented, effectively preventing societies from creating common ground and narratives.

The dangers of failing to find adequate answers to these challenges are huge.

– Over the next decade, hundreds of millions of people will connect to the Internet for the first time, most of them in the Global South. The masses of new users, many of them digitally inexperienced and often coming from low-income and conservative societies, will bring new user patterns and behaviors, exacerbating the current challenges and bringing new ones.
– Free and independent media outlets are now struggling to survive, therefore journalists — unless they find more appropriate content, formats and channels to help them be a part of online public dialogue — will continue to shrink in importance.
– Governments will use these negative tendencies to introduce tougher regulations. Authoritarian regimes will find more arguments to approve stricter rules and use them to stifle critical views.
– Technological innovation will continue to be shaped by for-profit companies such as social media platforms, of which the business logic will not fundamentally change.
– Commercial interests will be the main drivers for further rapid technological progress. The expansion of Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things, and virtual and augmented reality will quickly alter the information landscape, and create new avenues for negative online behavior and more sophisticated methods of manipulation.

Innovation in this field means that societies must be able to take full control of their public discussions using an infrastructure that serves the public instead of private interests. They should be able to define for themselves the issues they deem relevant, instead of algorithms which are optimized to increase advertising revenues. They have to create digital public spaces without barriers and protect them from restrictions and manipulations.

If societies fail to develop new approaches and find new solutions to offset the harmful effects of digital transformation on our public sphere, these negative tendencies will have a greater impact and social cohesion will be at stake.

For these reasons, fostering innovation to improve public dialogue in the digital sphere is an important mission for media development.

Responding to these challenges, DW Akademie has identified "Innovation for Dialogue" as a key field of action in its digital strategy.

In this publication, we selected four examples out of many, from four corners of the world where, together with our partners, we developed projects which aim to improve dialogue on issues of public interest online.

In Moldova, we organized a series of hackathons to develop tech-based solutions for misinformation, which deviates public dialogue using false and misleading information. In Ecuador using Wikipedia, we empowered indigenous communities to better shape their own narratives in mainstream public dialogue. In Uganda, we established a network of community radio reporters to bring underreported local issues vital for underrepresented communities into mainstream conversations. And in the Middle East, we developed innovative approaches in journalism education to better prepare future journalists for digital challenges.

These short case summaries highlight our efforts in bringing novel approaches to this field and will hopefully give inspiration for further innovation in media development.

1

Ecuador:
Indigenous communities write their own narratives on Wikipedia

The challenge: How can indigenous communities be empowered to better shape their own narratives in mainstream public dialogue?

Ecuador's indigenous population of around 1.1 million (out of the country's 16.4 million inhabitants) is seriously under- and misrepresented on the Internet both in terms of quantity and quality, often leaving public dialogue about their history, current social, political and cultural challenges one-sided.

Like similarly marginalized groups all over the world, the vast majority — more than 80 percent — live in rural areas with low levels of education and often with low access to the Internet. Almost 70 percent do not own a mobile phone or smartphone and only slightly more than 30 percent access the Internet in an average year. When they go online, they do not find much content in their own languages and although around 70 percent are bilingual, the content they find about themselves in Spanish is usually not written and published by members of their own community. Most of these communities do not write down their history, their rich traditions, customs and festivities — they preserve traditions orally, from generation to generation. Although this way of preserving knowledge is just as valid as the written form, it's a clear disadvantage in a world where almost all online research starts with "googling" and looking up entries on Wikipedia.

For these digitally excluded indigenous communities and their culture in Ecuador, an important challenge is how to increase their online presence and visibility, and empower their members to better contribute, shape and if necessary rewrite their cultural narratives in online media.

The solution: Indigenous activists rewrite Wikipedia entries

In an experimental seven-month pilot project (September 2018-March 2019), a group of indigenous journalists, community reporters, language activists and leaders participated in a process to create new entries or revise and rewrite existing entries on Spanish-language Wikipedia about their own history, culture and traditions — correcting false or misleading representations of indigenous peoples. The project was financed by the German development ministry (BMZ - Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) and implemented by DW Akademie and its partner, CORAPE, the biggest network of Community Media in Ecuador, comprising over 36 community radio stations.

Wikipedia was chosen for many reasons. This non-profit, online encyclopedia is not only one of the top 15 websites in the world, but the main source of information for hundreds of millions of online users globally. The Spanish language version with more than 1.6 million entries is the ninth largest Wikipedia as measured by the number of articles. As a tool, it clearly has the potential to effectively impact public dialogue about indigenous communities. Moreover, it is created and maintained as an open collaboration project by a global community of volunteer editors. As a result, its free and collaborative nature provided opportunity for indigenous activists in Ecuador to write new content and edit existing articles, creating a bridge between the people holding traditional knowledge and this global platform, and making their knowledge visible and available online.

Empowering indigenous activists to work with Wikipedia required a whole process to be put in place. During a series of workshops, participants selected from member radio stations of the CORAPE network, principally those that work with indigenous languages, first learnt how to research and write for Wikipedia and manage the collaborators' platform. Then they chose their own topics that either did not exist or were not correctly represented on Wikipedia yet, researched those topics, collected existing materials and produced new original content (audio, video, photo) with people in their communities.

A key aspect of Wikipedia is that the sources cited as references in its entries should be secondary sources (e.g.: books, articles, audio or video documentaries) — that is, content that has already been published somewhere else and can be used as a reference in hyperlinks. The project, therefore, needed an online repository to store materials collected by the participants. This element was vital, because it created a way for written Wikipedia articles to reference orally transmitted knowledge.

The process culminated in a final meeting. During a three-day "edit-a-thon" — an event where people edit Wikipedia content together — the objective was for the participants to produce as much content as possible, upload it to the digital online repository of CORAPE and finish and publish their articles on the Wikipedia website.

The impact: Hundreds of new and corrected entries on Wikipedia, increased knowledge for public dialogue

Why do the indigenous people of the Saraguros wear black? How do the Sáparas themselves spell the name of their nation and why was it not spelled correctly on Wikipedia? How should one prepare the traditional dish Salsa de ají de pepa de zambo? Activists corrected spelling errors which might seem miniscule to outsiders but were extremely important to participants and the communities. They also added information about their cosmology, theories of creation and ways of viewing the material and spiritual world. They rewrote existing articles which only contained folkloric information and descriptions of typical crafts and handiwork described from the "tourist-gaze" per-

Lessons learnt, recommendations

Co-creation is the key to success

The project itself was designed and constructed through participatory human-centered design processes. Participants were invited to an initial "ideathon" or ideation session. Over the course of three days, participants defined the needs to be addressed, elaborated on the context and constructed the project structure and its activities. This process was key in ensuring the "buy-in" of the participants, and for constructing a project that was manageable for the participants in such a short period.

Multi-disciplinary facilitator team

It proved to be important for the success of the project that it had a facilitator pool with diverse skills and experience. They included Wikipedia experts, anthropologists and media producers, and several of the team were members of indigenous groups themselves.

Improve participants' mix of expertise

The selection of participating organizations and participants was good for providing initial access to indigenous populations and a direct link to traditional knowledge, as well as for constructing the project design. However, the fact that many of the participants were radio producers, communicators or community leaders was an obstacle to ensuring ongoing contributions to Wikipedia. For future projects, a better combination could be linking up academics or students with these radio producers, communicators, leaders and activists. This way, the access to traditional knowledge would be supported by participants who are more experienced in writing and producing content for platforms like Wikipedia.

Better integration of the existing Wikipedia community

Another improvement could be to have an even deeper integration of the Wikipedia community and active local contributors in the project to ensure longer-term support for the published articles. Articles published to Wikipedia are not static or closed. The content produced needs to be "defended", updated and maintained on a regular basis. Otherwise it will eventually be replaced or deleted by other contributors. The afterlife of the articles created during the project timeline proved the importance of this aspect: some of the entries were further improved and expanded later by members of the Wikipedia community that were not part of the project.

spective and included the information important to them. Two participants from the Awá nation, for example, were adamant about including a description of the different worlds that exist in their cosmology.

These are just a couple of examples of the type of work indigenous activists achieved during the short lifespan of the project, examples which have the potential to enrich, improve and in some cases reshape the public dialogue surrounding them. These Wikipedia articles often took on a life of their own: the community continued to improve or complement the initial idea of the articles posted by the indigenous participants. In this way, the initiative created ripples within this collaborative system of knowledge that can still be observed today. Their efforts increased knowledge and improved the public's understanding of the lives, everyday reality and challenges indigenous communities are facing.

Altogether, they published 44 new articles and edited 85 existing ones, resulting in 379 corrections. The project registered 47 new Wikipedia authors, all members of different indigenous populations, in a relatively short time span of seven months. Additionally, the project was able to create structural innovations for the partner organization CORAPE. The online digi-

tal media repository is still online, and CORAPE is looking for new alliances to use and populate the website with content and make it a living tool. In the second half of 2019, UNESCO, together with DW Akademie, supported CORAPE in the development of a mobile application "Conecta Culturas" that allows content producers to upload multimedia content to the online repository from their mobile phones.

Innovation for Dialogue takeaways

– Defined an existing but neglected social need and developed a new approach for a solution in a participatory, co-creation process with the people affected;
– Harnessed the strength of an existing, widely used social platform in a new way to enrich public debates with the perspectives and narratives of marginalized communities;
– Created a model process mixing offline and online elements that could be scaled and replicated for similar underprivileged communities struggling with the same challenge in other parts of the world.

2

Moldova:
Tech-based solutions for fighting disinformation
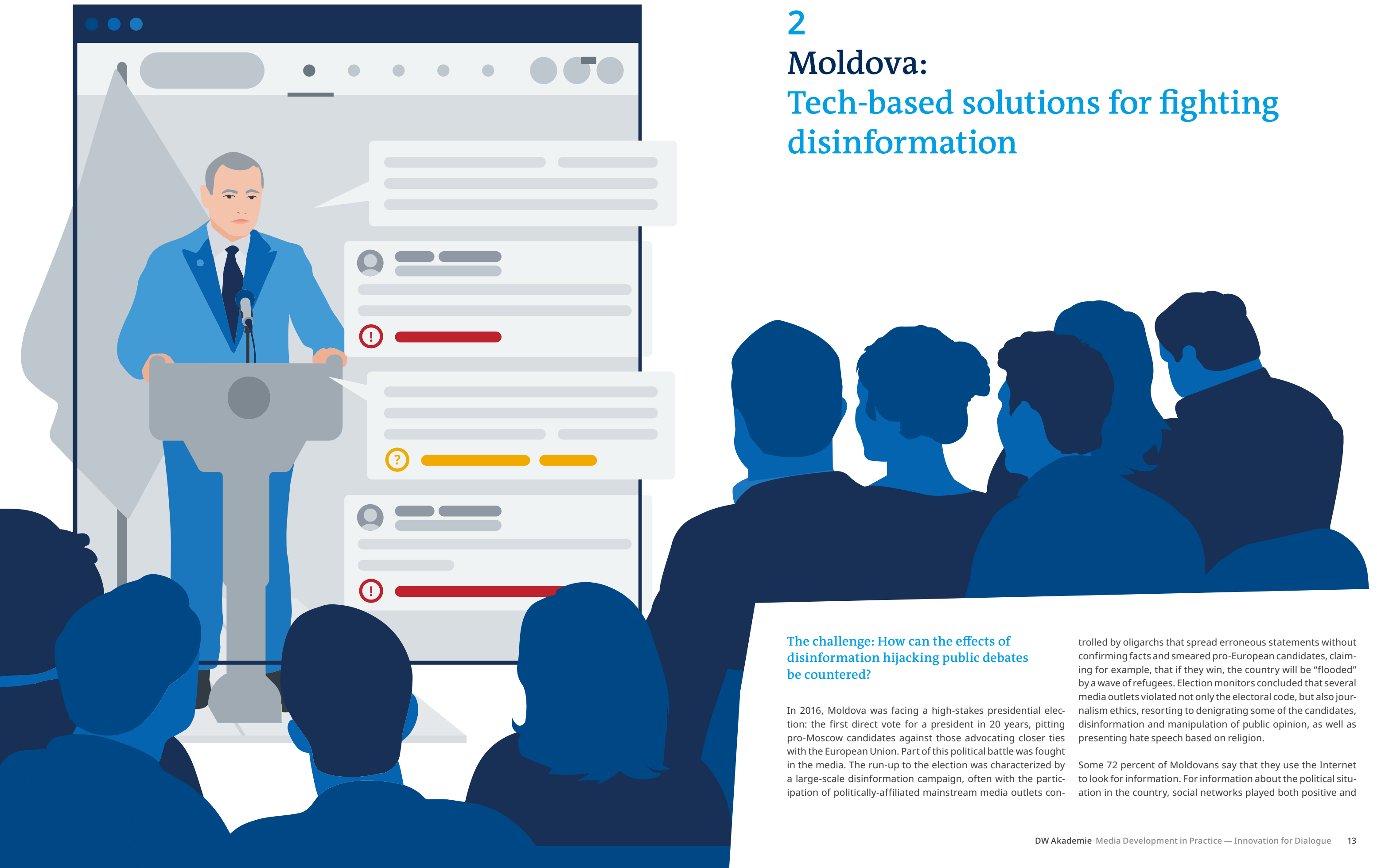
The challenge: How can the effects of disinformation hijacking public debates be countered?

In 2016, Moldova was facing a high-stakes presidential election: the first direct vote for a president in 20 years, pitting pro-Moscow candidates against those advocating closer ties with the European Union. Part of this political battle was fought in the media. The run-up to the election was characterized by a large-scale disinformation campaign, often with the participation of politically-affiliated mainstream media outlets con-trolled by oligarchs that spread erroneous statements without confirming facts and smeared pro-European candidates, claiming for example, that if they win, the country will be "flooded" by a wave of refugees. Election monitors concluded that several media outlets violated not only the electoral code, but also journalism ethics, resorting to denigrating some of the candidates, disinformation and manipulation of public opinion, as well as presenting hate speech based on religion.

Some 72 percent of Moldovans say that they use the Internet to look for information. For information about the political situation in the country, social networks played both positive and

> **"** Want to see how technology combines with education for the purpose of creating impact projects? Then plan and hold a hackathon!
>
> Ina Grejdeanu, Independent Journalism Center

negative roles. On the one hand they helped establish direct contact between politicians and their voters, enhance interest in political issues and boost participation. But they also played a crucial role in negative campaigning and created an often-toxic climate in public discussions.

Social media was instrumental in reaching young voters. These platforms were used to spread many falsehoods about political opponents, labeling them as "traitors" or denigrating them with false accusations not only in Romanian but also in Russian in order to reach ethnic minorities (Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagausians, Russians). An army of false Internet profiles and trolls were spreading lies, fake news, conspiracy theories, and rumors to influence voters. Out of all the social networks, Facebook has established itself as a central platform for political communication; not only for politicians and parties but also for militants from different political sides.

This climate threatened to create confusion among a considerable part of the electorate during the election campaign. The pro-Russian candidate won after a second round of voting in November.

The solution: High-intensity media hackathons to develop tech-based approaches to fight disinformation

DW Akademie, together with its partner, the Independent Journalism Center, in the framework of a project financed by the German development ministry (BMZ — Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) brought together software developers, programmers, journalists, designers, bloggers, civic activists and media consumers for a three-day hackathon in July 2016 in Chisinau to foster new ideas and novel approaches, and to create solutions. The hackathon, titled "Fifth Power", said that its goal was "to improve the ability of media consumers to critically perceive the media's messages, to filter information using web or mobile applications and other innovative IT tools." While the election campaign was ongoing, this was one of the most pressing challenges facing Moldovan society.

A hackathon — a word coined from hacking and marathon — is a high-intensity collaborative event for innovation. It's an efficient method often used when it is clear that tech-based solu-

tions are needed but these solutions can only be developed through the collaboration of creative minds and experts with diverse backgrounds. Solutions often require coding, programming and software development skills. The key to their success is the effective collaboration of a large, diverse group of participants. Participants work in teams to find solutions for specific challenges in a relaxed, informal and playful atmosphere with a competitive spirit. Winners are rewarded with prizes to help them further develop and implement their ideas.

More than 60 participants from Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia came together for the three days. They presented their ideas on the first day and worked on developing IT solutions with the support of mentors and experts. The 2016 hackathon brought a pioneering spirit to media development in Moldova, and several other such events — organized by DW Akademie or other organizations — have followed its example in the years since.

The impact: Less trolling activity and increased public awareness about disinformation

At the end of a hackathon, the participants are happy, the winners are enthusiastic, and generally everybody is glad to have some sleep after days of intense work. The actual impact of this type of event can only be seen from what happens after. From this point of view, the 2016 event was a real success: all three winning teams developed their ideas further and brought to life applications which contributed to a quality public dialogue in the virtual space with lasting effects. The events themselves attracted media attention, and the solutions that came out of the collaboration also raised awareness about the harmful effects of disinformation, manipulation and trolling.

The winning team of young Moldovan programmers worked on an idea to fight manipulation and disinformation on social networks and came up with a well-focused project involving an Internet browser extension. The plug-in aimed to identify and isolate suspicious and fake profiles and trolls on Facebook. In October 2016, they officially launched the application called Trolless which is still up and running on Google Chrome. Users of the extension can flag and track suspicious profiles, report them to Facebook, and introduce them to a database that analyzes them according to an algorithm in order to establish whether they belong to trolls. The Trolless community now has more than 800 users on the Chrome platform.

The app has been used in subsequent election campaigns and in 2019, after three years of continuous reporting to Facebook, the company finally took action in Moldova. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2019, it closed 168 Facebook accounts, 28 pages and eight Instagram accounts, some belonging to government officials, because it suspected they were spreading fake news, political propaganda and misinformation ahead of

Lessons learnt, recommendations

After organizing several successful hackathons, DW Akademie's team in Moldova came up with a few tips for good hackathons.

Reality check and comprehensive promotional plan are essential

Hackathons are most efficient when they focus on a well-defined issue that is relevant for the target group (community issue, public good, etc.). The more specific the issue and the target group, the higher the relevance, and more participants and engagement can be expected, making the potential for success greater. Timing is crucial, so it is better to make sure that no similar event is taking place the days and weeks before/after the event, so as not to lose potential participants. It is also important to make a promotional plan to attract competitive participants and achieve visibility. Creating an event website (with essential sections like About Hackathon, Experts and Mentors, Hackathon Program, Participants) using social media platforms and finding media partners who will provide coverage of the event are must-do parts of such plans.

Careful selection of mentors and jury, motivating prizes

Invited experts must be authorities in their field as they should be able to offer valuable feedback and ideally they should remain in contact with the winning teams to offer consultations if needed. Some of the mentors could also be part of the jury, which needs to prepare a clear set of criteria for evaluating the projects. Awards and prizes must be clearly defined from the beginning and it is also necessary to explain that should teams require additional resources for the realization of their final product, it is their responsibility to look for funding.

Combining competition with cooperation

During hackathons, encouraging cooperation while maintaining the competitive spirit is essential. In order to create a level playing field for everyone, participating individuals should be supported by others, and teams should not compete against individuals. For individual members, a hackathon is an opportunity for establishing networks and advancing their careers.

Post-event engagement for all participants

Hackathons are competitions but celebrating all participants, including those who did not win, is important, since they are also individuals who want to and will drive positive change even if they have to rethink and revise their concepts. Collecting ideas that did not win could lead to similar events in the future. Organizers should show their appreciation for the participants' involvement by maintaining contact with them, sending them a survey to give feedback on the hackathon and by inviting them to future networking events. This spreads the word about the success of the hackathon and attracts the attention of potential partners and other interested people.

elections. "Although the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their identities, our manual review found that some of this activity was linked to employees of the Moldovan government," Facebook said in a press release. As a result of a 2016 hackathon, the phenomenon of trolling did not go unnoticed by the general public, which became aware of the significance and harmful effects of this activity.

Another winning team tackled the problem of users publishing news-worthy videos on social networks without providing necessary background information and context. The smartphone application (available for Android and iPhone) called DIY News (Do-It-Yourself News) makes users answer six basic journalistic questions (who, what, where, when, why, how) before they share the videos on social media, making these users assume responsibility for what they publish online. The app was also used by civic activists in Romania during several waves of anti-corruption protests.

Innovation for Dialogue takeaways

– Used the hackathon concept in a novel way in Moldova, applying it to the solution of a social issue, fostering social innovation;

– Enabled new types of collaboration between journalists, social activists and digital innovators, established new networks for future initiatives;

– With the resulting projects and the new collaboration networks, it catalyzed further innovations with the potential for improving the quality of online public dialogue in the country;

– The event aimed to raise awareness of both local and regional/international issues and the developed products could be used across borders (in several countries), and for several target groups (social media users, educators, citizen journalists).

3

Uganda:
A network of community reporters sheds light on underreported local issues

The challenge: How can relevant issues for local communities be brought into focus?

About 95 percent of people living in remote areas in Uganda have access to radio and it is the only source of information for many. However, most media content is directed at urban target groups and has only limited relevance for rural audiences. Furthermore, many of the large FM stations broadcast their content in English, making it impossible for large parts of the population to access.

This leaves the majority of grassroots communities in an information blackout, disempowered and without a voice. The provision of relevant information on nutrition, education or health, for example, is extremely limited and people have little opportunity to make themselves heard to the local authorities.

The reason for this information blackout is two-fold. On the one hand, rural journalists lack the knowledge and skills to investigate abuses and fulfill their role as a watchdog in monitoring the conduct of government officials and holding them accountable. Outlets reaching wider audiences, on the other hand, often do not send their staff to cover rural stories due to financial and time constraints. Mainstream media tend to give voice to those who already have it: politicians, business leaders and non-government organizations (NGOs).

The key challenge, therefore, was to find a way to give people in rural Uganda a voice and to strengthen grassroots participation through local media so that people could influence the public debate about their future, help shape decision-making processes, and contribute to the development of their communities and their country. It was especially important to better include young people in public issues. Uganda — after Niger — has the second youngest population in the world, with almost 80 percent of people below the age of 30.

The solution: A collaboration between radio stations and community reporters

From 2014-2020, DW Akademie paired up with the Ugandan NGO CEMCOD (Centre for Media Literacy and Community Development) within the Community Media project financed by the German development ministry (BMZ-Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Together, they designed a solution that helps rural radio stations to cover hyperlocal news stories at no cost by building up a network of 120 community reporters in remote parts of Uganda. These reporters use their mobile phones to report on issues that affect their communities but were previously ignored by mainstream media companies. These stories specifically focus on public service delivery and include, for example, poorly made roads hindering transport of farmers' produce, land-grabbing incidents, domestic violence and child marriage. The commu-

> " The Community Media project gives leaders an opportunity to listen to their citizens and to make better decisions. A community without a voice breeds disorder and lack of public trust.

Jonathan Tusubira, co-founder CEMCOD

nity reporters submit information they gathered locally to five partner radio stations in the urban centers, where journalists embed them in news bulletins, talk shows and other programs. The community reporters also organize quarterly Community Interface Meetings, where local leaders come face to face with the communities they serve to discuss and jointly develop solutions to these local problems. The meetings are reported live on radio and give the leaders a platform to take accountability and respond to issues raised by community reporters.

The project had to find a way to ensure that content comes without considerable extra costs. The solution was to eliminate travel costs and also reduce the time the radio journalists would need to cover local issues by engaging young people living in remote areas who would become their community's voice — the ones who provide information about life in those communities to the partner radio stations. The youth selected received training on basic reporting skills, mobile reporting, news gathering and interviewing techniques and the roles and responsibilities of community reporters. In parallel, journalists from the partner radio stations got trained to become skillful mentors.

As the Community Media project evolved during the years, the need arose to support the communication flow between community reporters and their mentors, and to create a smooth and secure workflow for the submission of community stories. Financed by the Civil Society Foundation and developed by Kapeyi Samson, a Ugandan developer, an Android-based app and a cloud-based internal database were launched in August 2020.

The app takes the community reporters step by step through the process of telling a community story, making them answer basic questions and enabling them to send audio, pictures, and texts to report their stories. It also works offline, which saves data and lets reporters work in areas without mobile data reach. Once submitted, the mentors can access the story via the digital platform, from which they can follow up, verify and edit the information, and produce a story out of it.

With hundreds of stories per year, the platform will soon host an enormous database of information on public service delivery in remote parts of Uganda. Although these hyperlocal stories present reality on a micro level, they usually touch on the same issues: infrastructure, education, health and other public

service deliveries. The cloud-based database taps into this knowledge by archiving all the reporting, extracting the data behind it and mapping it with geolocation data in order to visualize broader patterns and trends.

The impact: Community reporters bring about positive changes locally and amplify local voices

Five radio stations, more than 120 community reporters and hundreds of radio reports on local issues — the numbers achieved by the Community Media project since its start in 2014 are impressive in themselves. But the real impact on local life and national debate is not only measurable in numbers.

Community reporters — who are not remunerated — have grown into local changemakers who are highly engaged, have impact on everyday life and bring about positive change in their communities. They not only find topics, gather information and report, but loop back their reports to the communities and their leaders. They organize community interface meetings between local leaders and the community to jointly develop solutions to local problems. The meetings are reported live on radio to give the leaders a platform to respond to issues raised by community reporters. As a result of the perseverance of community reporters, wells have been built, absentee doctors in health centers have been replaced and several former community reporters ran for locally elected positions, winning a mandate and becoming local changemakers. The participating radio stations, in some of which the community stories make up to 60 percent of local news, reported that they get requests from neighboring district chiefs who also want to participate in the project. They also noted an increase in audiences from rural areas as the local stories are more relevant to them.

With the development of the app and the cloud-based platform, the Community Media project has the potential to effectively impact national debate about life in remote parts of the country by leveraging the vast knowledge, data and stories gathered by the reporters. How many schools report challenges with their teachers? Which health centers are not well equipped with medicine and doctors? As these questions are now finding their way into radio stations that reach wider audiences, they have the potential to provoke interest on a national level among government officials, policymakers, researchers, NGOs and mainstream media. Lifting local community voices to the national level offers a huge opportunity as the stories can influence the national dialogue on public service delivery. It could also potentially generate new revenue streams for CEMCOD, the NGO partner organization behind the project, and for the radio stations. The project explores ways to monetize data and support the costs of the initiative, which would allow it to diversify its income, making it less vulnerable to donors and helping to sustain it in the long term.

Lessons learnt, recommendations

Improve selection of community reporters

Candidates for community reporter positions were selected from the various listeners` clubs and approved by local leaders. In the future, a more competitive selection process would be recommended, where knowledge and motivation could be better assessed to ensure long-term participation. In some cases, community reporters have become inactive due to other engagements or natural changes in their life.

Listening to local communities

The key to the success of the Uganda project and the main recommendation for such projects is that local communities are consulted from the beginning, and the solution is designed together with them. In the future, even deeper involvement of these communities in the design process is recommended. Informing local leaders and the families of community reporters about every step, including the objectives and possible risks (for example, risks that might come from their child asking questions around the village) is key.

Innovation for Dialogue takeaways

– Designed a model, unique in East Africa, to address an existing but unserved information need with the potential to improve the quality of mainstream public discussions;
– Created a replicable and scalable model to address similar information challenges facing rural communities in other parts of the world. The project is currently exploring opportunities in Latin America;
– With the community reporters as local changemakers, the project is actively engaging citizens in local public dialogues. It uses media as a tool to bring about change and contribute to rural community development through media.

4

Middle East:

Fostering innovation in journalism education to better prepare future journalists for digital challenges

The challenge: How can journalists in the region be enabled to catalyze better public discussions online?

Following the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, demand for quality information has continued to grow in the Middle East. Audiences are seeking to move beyond the misinformation and propaganda that dominated state-controlled and state-influenced media, and they look for ways to actively debate public affairs online. They want to freely express their opinion, criticize their governments and local leaders. The use of social media has not

only resulted in an increased interest in public life and a need for more transparency in public decisions, but also an opportunity for many to connect and interact virtually with like-minded peers. However, journalists and media are often left out of these discussions.

As a result, there's a need for knowledgeable, tech-savvy and open-minded journalists who are able to develop content that better answers to the audience's needs, can deliver it in appropriate digital formats, and are more efficient in feeding their content into online discussions and becoming part of these conversations.

> " We need to cope with new market trends. Curricula and media faculties should also change in order to train future journalists who are able to produce quality journalism that fits the audience needs and the market trends.

Layal Bahnam, Maharat Foundation

Future journalists, however, are generally ill-equipped to tackle these challenges as journalism education in the whole region has maintained a very traditional approach. Media entrepreneurs complain that students leaving universities often lack the competencies to produce the engaging content they need, as well as the skills and mindset to interact with their audiences. And given the scarcity of job opportunities in legacy media, universities are failing to equip students with the necessary business and innovation skills needed to be attractive to media start-ups or eventually start their own business.

The key challenge was therefore how to foster innovative approaches in journalism education in the region so that future journalists will leave universities with the necessary skills, competencies and mindset for the digital era.

The solution: Building innovation capacities with educators to develop and test new approaches for journalism education

In a one-year project (January-December 2019) financed by the German development ministry (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ), DW Akademie, together with one of its Beirut-based partners, the Maharat Foundation, invited a diverse group from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco to engage them in a creative process with two main goals. On the one hand, the process aimed to build long-term innovation capacities with the participants, especially the university educators, by introducing them to the concept, methods and mindsets of human-centered design. The goal of the project was, however, more ambitious: reimagining journalism studies in the Middle East. Participants were expected to use the skills acquired and develop working prototypes for new learning experiences for their students, which would better respond to the digital and economic challenges and do it in a much more engaging and inspiring way than they had done before.

Human-centered design is a creative problem solving approach that believes in the power of engaging with the people we design solutions for from the very beginning and involving them in the process every step of the way. The first step is getting the ini-

tial inspiration and gaining understanding by interacting with the people and becoming immersed in their universe in order to define the problem from their perspective. Later, after generating lots of ideas and developing several of them into prototypes, new insights arise through feedback from users and by testing the prototypes with them. The end result is achieved by never sticking to the first solution and repeating this process until the solutions are tailor-made to suit the people's needs. To inspire creative thinking, the process works best when it brings together people from different disciplines, perspectives and backgrounds.

The project therefore gathered a group of 30 people: university educators who were keen to explore opportunities for innovation in their universities, young journalists with fresh memories of their studies and daily challenges, media entrepreneurs who brought a business perspective to the discussions, and practitioners working in the intersection of digital media, journalism and tech.

During two intense workshops in Beirut in January and February 2019, participants were introduced to human-centered design, discussed challenges facing journalism and the information ecosystem in the Middle East, and defined areas they wanted to explore with their students between and after the two workshops. In both workshops, international experts from the fields of journalism and journalism education talked about their experiences with innovation in media and media studies. The topics participants defined after these discussions ranged from digital security (an increasingly important aspect for journalists and their audiences in the region), to new ethical challenges brought about by the digital era (and how to address them in order to build greater trust), to the journalists' lack of entrepreneurial and business skills, which would be necessary for new initiatives, start-ups in the field and bringing greater diversity to these markets.

Participants from different countries teamed up in groups to work on these main themes. Between the two initial workshops, renowned international experts helped them dive deeper into their topics through online consultation sessions, and two human-centered design experts coached the thematic groups through the various phases of the process — from interviewing users to brainstorming, prototyping and testing. In a closing workshop in October 2019, participants shared their experiences of the process and discussed ways to move forward with their prototypes.

The impact: Ongoing innovation initiatives and innovation ambassadors in several universities

The tangible outcome of the creative process is the development of three prototypes for innovative approaches in journal-

Lessons learnt, recommendations

More relaxed human-centered design process and online assistance

A mere four weeks between the two workshops proved to be too short for participants otherwise doing their normal jobs to conduct enough interviews with sufficient depth to be able to gain insights for brainstorming during the second workshop. Therefore, a more relaxed and elongated human-centered design process would be recommended to let participants explore their users' universe with more opportunities for online coaching with relevant experts.

Explore opportunities for innovation in university settings

Participants coming from various universities in the region saw the same challenge from the very beginning of the

process: how can the innovative ideas and approaches be integrated into the rigid environment of higher education? Future similar projects which aim to build innovation capacities with participants coming from academic settings should focus more on this aspect with expertise, good practices and case studies of innovation in educational institutions. Equally, a more deeper involvement of the universities' top management would be recommended to guarantee a better buy-in from their part.

Involve a wider network of partners

The regional aspect of the project was one of the key success elements. Besides regional coordination, local country-specific coordinating partners would largely facilitate smooth operation and successful completion.

ism education, but the main impact of the project is that participants independently pursued their initiatives even after the project officially ended, maintained an innovative spirit and acted as innovation ambassadors in their environment.

One group's prototype at the Lebanese University explores using virtual reality (VR) to spice up the otherwise dry and theoretical ethics classes with real-life problems faced by journalists covering war or terror attacks. DW Akademie continues to work with the group on a project which aims to integrate the module — a weekend VR ethics crash course — into the curriculum.

Another group at the Lebanese International University is working on a prototype series of extra-curricular workshops to equip students with the necessary entrepreneurial and business skills to successfully freelance or launch their own media outlet. The original idea was a competition, a kind of Mediapoly with prizes for the most successful journalist-entrepreneurs, and the current prototype also uses the game aspect as an incentive for students.

The third prototype on integrating digital security in journalism studies is under development. The group members from Lebanon and Egypt continue to actively work on a pitch, which they plan to present at the Arab University in Beirut. This initiative plans to develop a smartphone application and uses the concept of gamification, where students are rewarded once they solve problems around digital security. The prototype will be run on "ActionBound" — an existing app used for playing digitally interactive scavenger hunts — to further test and gain feedback from students.

These prototyping processes helped educators and media professionals gain capacities to foster further innovation and spread the word about the need for new approaches in their respective institutions. The network is still alive: participants continue to study and work with human-centered design.

Innovation for Dialogue takeaways

– Defined a shared need across the Arab-speaking world for better journalistic approaches in tackling challenges around online public debates in the region and addressed it by introducing novel approaches in journalism education and focusing on better qualifications for a future generation of journalists;

– Designed a model process using human-centered design to foster innovation in journalism education. The process could be replicated in similar circumstances all over the world and has the potential to develop experimental approaches in academic settings. The prototypes could later be included in the curricula;

– Established a regional network for collaboration among professionals coming from non-profit and for-profit environments working in the intersection of journalism, media, tech and academia, which could bring about further innovation in the sector.

The way forward

This publication aimed to present DW Akademie's diverse activities and efforts in fostering innovation to improve dialogue about issues of public interest. Besides these four examples, we work on innovative projects in various parts of the world:

– Citizen journalism initiatives aim to enrich public dialogue by bringing underreported topics to the forefront. In the Shatila camp in Lebanon, young refugees report on the daily lives of the people and discuss important matters in the camp on a social media platform.
– Historic dialogue projects help communities discuss traumatic events from the recent past. In Guatemala, a digital initiative is building an interactive map which links places that have civil war memorials. The map is used to spark dialogue about the recent past. A website in Cambodia uses digital archive material on the very dark period of the Khmer Rouge era.
– Competitions and hackathons gather innovative players to develop new tech solutions. A competition in Tunisia for example brought together media outlets with the country's start-up scene to develop novel solutions for high-quality journalism to find its way to audiences.

"Innovation for Dialogue" will remain a key field of action in our strategy. Our focus in this field is to

– Identify new actors— from open data initiatives and media start-ups to hacker communities and innovation hubs — that work on new approaches and develop new solutions to improve online public dialogue, seek new ways of fostering collaboration among these actors, build networks and establish partnerships with them;
– Experiment with new technologies (like AI, AR, VR, Internet of Things) and discover how they can be used to have a meaningful, positive impact on public debates;
– Build innovation capacities of our partners using a range of methods, from a human-centered design approach to agile ways of collaboration, so that they can better develop and manage initiatives answering to the challenges of the digital era; help them adapt to changes and develop new strategies.

With all these efforts, we hope to make a meaningful contribution to create enabling environments and foster a sustained culture of innovation in the countries and communities we are active in.
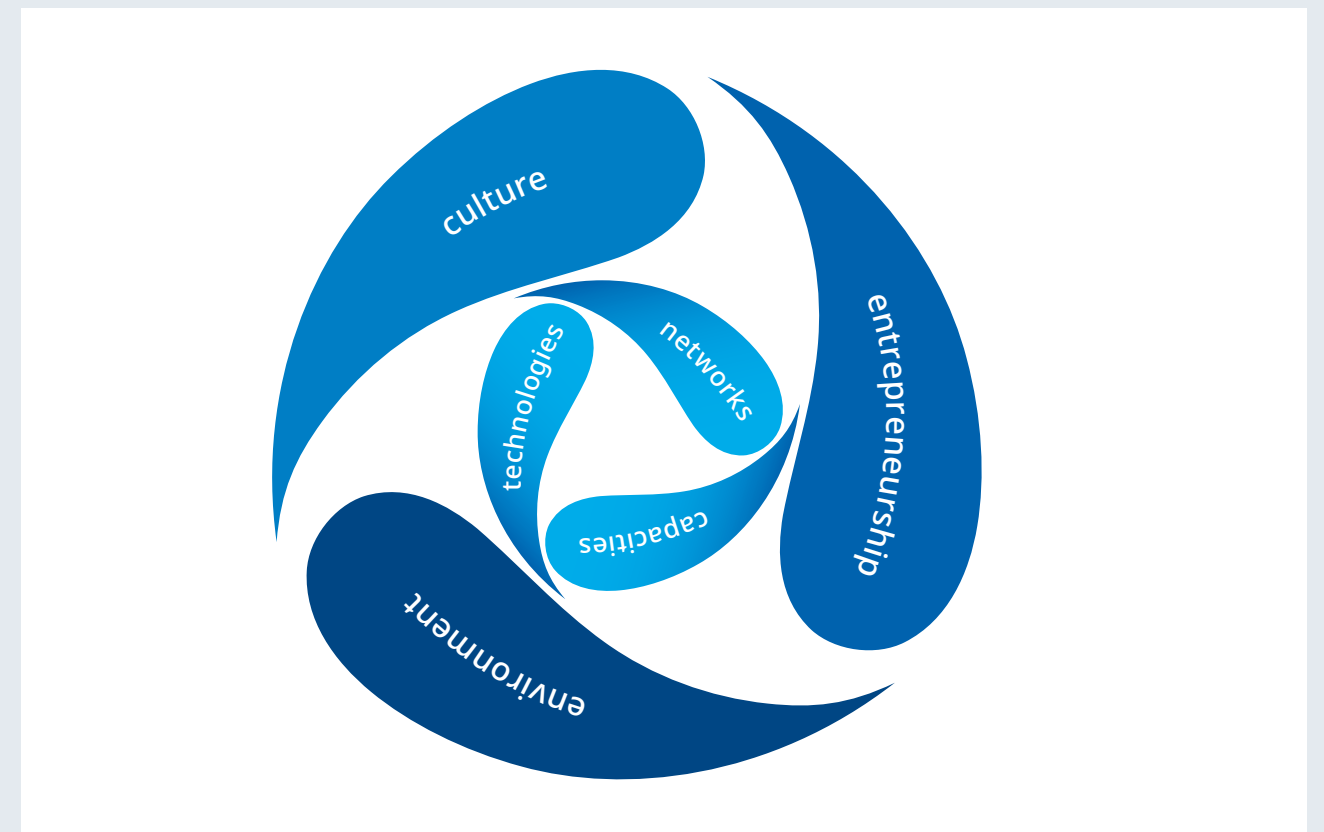
Visual guide to our Innovation for Dialogue approach *Source: DWA*

DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer.
Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 50 developing countries and emerging economies.

DW Akademie

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