



Connect with the Energetic Society

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Europe is officially in an economic crisis. Some speak of a crisis of the system and the more optimistic thinkers speak of transition. That society is changing is clear to everyone. Many secure and established structures appear suddenly to be not that secure and established. Look at the banks, jobs and social services. Civil society is also changing. It is no longer the realm of institutionalized organisations but knows many more fluid organisational forms. What the crisis is going to deliver and how the transition will take place exactly will remain a question for everyone. The same applies to the way governments, institutions and civil society organizations relate to the "energetic society" (Hajer, 2011). This article contains some tentative suggestions for organizations that support and strengthen networks of people, groups and organizations.

The energetic society

In 2011 a report called "the energetic society" was published by the Dutch National Planning Board for the Environment. The energetic society is

".. a society of responsible citizens with an unprecedented speed of reaction, learning and creativity." (Hajer, 2011)

Society seems to change from a solid to a more fluid form. Where once the many foundations and associations formed the "cement of society", temporary connections, networks, communities and collectives take that role in an increasing way. The first are fairly definite and often long-established, hierarchically organized institutions, often with a professional agency and a support structure for members, supporters and / or affiliated organizations. The traditional organizations are responsible and based on legal rules and agreements, often created with the help of notary and auditor.

Networks and communities, however, are often spontaneous, voluntary and shared values-based initiatives with, in many cases, a shorter lifespan. The rapid rise of social media has reinforced this development and made it even more volatile. The literature already speaks of swarms. Growing groups of citizens move in the same direction as a flock of starlings with strong effects on society and public policy. These structures are more fluid and therefore more flexible, but also less tangible. They are difficult to control but if you manage to influence them also easier to get moving. They are unpredictable and can just move in unforeseen directions. Aslander (M.Aslander, 2010) describes in his book Easycratie the Dutch swarm around the vaccination against cervical cancer that first triggered a

strong lobby in favor of vaccination but made a u-turn and created an unprecedented backlash. A large number of the target group refused vaccination, which had never happened before.

Governments and civil society organizations traditionally play a supporting role in the support of civil initiatives. In the energetic society they cannot anymore rely on old methods and therefore have to redefine their role and position towards these initiatives. It is often very difficult to respond to such developments from existing structures. The tendency to fall back into old patterns is natural. Sometimes it helps to replace old paradigms by new ones. In the following paragraphs, suggestions are given, based on four paradigm shifts:

- From broadcast to follow (Folow)
- From support to form part of (Fuze)
- From coordination to connect (Forge)
- From convince to feed (Feed)

It is worth to try these four strategies in the quest for the connection to the energetic society. Main concern is that the responsible citizen aforementioned has a strong sense of self-determination and is only willing to be informed and supported at his own request, based on trust. A principle that, by the way, is not valid only for domestic use. The shift is also made in international cooperation, though gradually and under pressure from budget-cuts.

From sending to following (follow)

Since the emergence of the traditional media, press, radio and television, there are campaigns in which a message is packaged and sent to a broad target group. The aim is to move to more environmentally conscious behavior, for example, or against smoking, in favor of healthier food or making more use of public transport. These traditional campaigns are not in line anymore with the dynamics of energetic society. Instead of communication from one sender to many receivers nowadays, through the Internet, the communication is from many to many. The target changed from the group to the individual. An individual consumer, student, activist or supporter has become a broadcaster in itself and develops simultaneously its own 'campaigns' in the form of tweets, posts, movies, blogs and other social media. That counts for the Internet but has just as much impact on real life.

If you want to be influential more than ever one needs to listen to what is happening in society. Where are the new initiatives, who is involved, what are their questions, goals and values? Rogers (Rogers, 2010) recommends five connected strategies for the network society under the heading: "The Network is our customer." The five strategies are:

- Be accessible (Access): be fast, easy to find, everywhere and always on
- Involve the receiver (Engage): be a source of valuable content
- Provide adaptability (Customize): give the receiver space to customize your message at his discretion
- Connect (Connect) be part of the information exchange in networks of the recipient
- Work with the receiver (Collaborate): involve the receiver at every stage of your activity

In these strategies, the receiver is someone who decides when he takes the information to himself, what he does with it and with whom it is shared. That means that since the advent of social media other laws apply. To achieve something through communication you have to follow what is happening, to whom people listen and, very importantly, what movements take place. Van Schendelen speaking in another context, the lobby circuit in Brussels, describes the lobby arena as a labyrinth on a trampoline. (Schendelen, R. Van., 2010) The world wide web is an ocean size trampoline and the labyrinth is a network of billions of points and trillions of connections processing a multitude of information units. Yet some people still manage to get their message seen, read and heard in sometimes, unimaginably large numbers. From the Web to the energetic society is comparable to zooming in from the earth, to our city, town, village or neighborhood. Since the energetic society actually takes place in the form of energy and food collectives, neighborhood associations, sustainable villages, open studios, art viewing routes along ateliers, hopping dinners and many other civic initiatives. All to be found on the web as the materialized glocalization.

From support to 'being part of' (Fuze)

There are basically two starting points from which networks (are) formed. Traditionally you have the organizations and individuals in their neighborhood and village who are active and, in addition to real life, find each other over the internet. (Amnesty groups, churches, environmental or rural development networks) Emerging are the networks that start on the internet and connect in real life at a later stage. (Linkedin discussion groups, facebook groups, good food, platforms). In most cases, if not prematurely extinguished at least, the two, eventually form a mix of virtual and analogue network. Joseph Pine and Kim Korn call this 'The third space' (Pine, 2011). A third space is created when the real and virtual merge in such a way that a totally new experience is created. Seats2meet, a Dutch initiative, is an example of such a place. Visitors book a workspace and put their qualities, their social capital, on the site. When you work and have a free lunch there, you are expected to be open for encounters with other visitors. Sometimes people come specially to S2M because they see on the site that there is someone with social capital that is of interest to them.

In already existing network organizations, you often have a 'group employee', 'network official', 'trainer', 'coach' or a 'development worker'. Their task is to support the network by attending meetings, organize the connection with experts and knowledge. As in many professions, the network officials, can be found to write grant applications to create reports and answer emails. The employee is found more and more behind the computer, in many cases, to their own regret, losing the direct contact with their target audiences. The possibility to be everywhere and always connected with smartphone and tablet gives them the possibility to move and be active again in the real society. By being visible, both in the real and virtual world, they build confidence with independent initiatives. As indicated earlier, for those who, for whatever reason, want to achieve something in the energetic society, the rules of the game have changed. Citizens take initiatives, pick up their knowledge through internet and undertake virtual or analog activities with peers and have less need for professional supporters or experts. If for whatever reason you want to influence the energetic society you must be part of it, active,

accessible and reliable.

From coordination to building connections (Forge)

In Dutch society, coordination for years has been a euphemistic term for hierarchic leadership. In fact, many coordinators were boss or director, because still goals had to be achieved and people needed someone to tell them what to do. In the nineties we saw the coordinator disappear again and directors and team managers re-appeared. There still is a strong tendency to coordinate the many initiatives that arise in society. The need, however, comes primarily from those who want to coordinate. Someone who starts a nearby vegetable garden may be a doer who likes to do something for the neighborhood but does not want to be part of a bigger scheme of sustainable transition. Social innovators are often strong individualists who like to set their own course. Collectives and communities often have a healthy aversion against a top down approach and institutions. In addition, coordination often leads to dependency and the transfer of responsibilities. The coordinator is a professional who knows the subject and has entries in the official and administrative circuit. So leave it to him or her, then you'll be fine. The result is that the independence of civil initiatives loses momentum by committing to a larger whole that, unnoticed and with good intentions, will determine their course. Responsible citizens will not let that happen. Many of them have become somewhat allergic to coordinators and supporting agencies.

One who is taking actively part in the energetic society can connect by moving between different groups with a similar activity or ambition as a so called 'linking pin' (Rogers, 1981) This creates opportunities to exert influence and create added value. Citizens initiatives and communities often experience at some point the need for expertise from outside because they get stuck somewhere, do not want to re-invent the wheel, want to be part of a greater whole or share their success with others. In these cases a linking pin can serve them. The difference between the linking pin and the traditional coordinator is that the need arises from the initiatives and not from the coordinator.

From persuasion to feeding (Feed)

The concept of the 'Wisdom of the Crowd', has affected the position and status of experts. Instructions for almost everything, from peeling a banana to building a tractor, can be found on video sites. Just type a question into a search engine and receive within seconds 20,000 answers. If you do not find the answer right away, there are many forums where it can be posted. If you want to be part of the energetic society you must bring more than expertise. And certainly cannot count on a substantial hourly rate for the knowledge provided. Knowledge is offered free everywhere throughout the web. There is however a pitfall in the word everywhere. The energetic society has to deal with an overload of information. Within a few years everyone will have more information in their smart phone than they can process during their entire lifetime, let alone the amount of footage that appears one day on Youtube and other forums. To find the right information, search engines are indispensable. But if you want to buy solar panels, even search engines may be inadequate because you cannot assess the quality of the product and its suppliers. You will then experience what Barry Schwartz (Schwartz 2003) describes as the paradox of choice. With an infinite amount of choices your system blocks and you do not know what

to choose. This could happen to you if you just want to play a song on Spotify, a music site with over 8 million tracks available for free. You can find yourself for seconds behind the screen without something coming to your mind. In good English: you experiencing the stress of choice. When purchasing solar panels it can be helpful if there is someone you trust who can help you and advise you on the pros and cons of different offers and works according to the five principles of Rogers (Rogers 2010), earlier in this article.

It is important to mention that the Internet alone is not sufficient in this context. The strength lies in the combination of digital and analog world. Who only communicates through social networks remains viral, who only works in the analog world, has a very limited range. A combination has the potential to develop a global network, while maintaining personal contacts. And we must not forget that there are still large groups who continue to operate the 'old media'. You lose them if you only communicate viral. Experts can feed the energetic society with knowledge and experience at the request of the responsible citizen and may request him pointing a way in the labyrinth on the trampoline.

The new 'community supporter'

As organizations and employees cannot go further on the old road they will have to change course. The question: "How do we earn a living in the energetic society" is highly relevant. In the freeconomics many services, we used to pay for, are free of charge. Examples are expertise, knowledge or instructions. Some of these services are unnecessary or undesirable, such as coordination imposed from above. There is, however, demand for connectors and guidance through the endless jungle of information. Governments and companies are willing to pay for those who know the energetic society and have the confidence of large communities. This is only if you participate. The new community supporters shows up, as they did in the old days, at meetings, in the media and in personal contact. The difference is that he develops through smart phone, tablet and laptop a similar position in the virtual world by actively moving on facebook, twitter and many networking sites, forums, tumbler, instagram, whats app and the possibilities that will develop in the future. These employees don't have a nine to five mentality, their work will take place mainly in the evenings and weekends. Their office they carry in their tablet and the archive is in the cloud. They also do not make a break even on investment right away. Building trust takes months, if not years. But ultimately this investment will recoup every penny according to the principle: money follows the crowd. Who manages really to connect to the energetic society groups and citizens can achieve the purpose of such networks and get paid by parties who do not have inputs and not (yet) know how to establish the connection to the energetic society.

The innovator

Another function is that of inspiring innovator. If you ever viewed TED presentations (www.TED.com) you will know there are innovators in all shapes and sizes. Many of the presentations do not convince by argument but by inspiration. Who in the energetic society wants to spread innovative ideas with a number of principles must take into account:

All communication has become personal

Not organizations, but people are inspiring. Angelina Jolie had a big impact with her publicly announced

breast amputation, and created lots of media attention for breast cancer. In politics, the importance of the person to disseminate political ideas is recognized much longer. Many social organizations adhere so strongly to the content or the purpose for which they stand that they have great reluctance towards personal attention. People in the energetic society are accustomed to be with friends and connections. The level of communication in the energetic society is the personal level.

“It is the idea!, Stupid!”

It sometimes seems as if society is exploding with ideas. On the other hand, all of us probably had the disappointing experience that you came up with a new idea, and after roaming the web find out that it was conceived elsewhere around 10.000 times and often much better developed than you could ever have done. There is a number of reasons not to get discouraged after such an experience. Firstly, there are still a lot of people who have not heard about your idea. Secondly, ideas are increasingly adapted to local circumstances or personal preferences. And thirdly, remember this was always the case. Book printing and gunpowder were invented at different places. And you can give existing ideas a make over, to make them appear new. Mix an existing idea with new insights. Many innovative thinkers use that strategy. The, currently very popular, circular economy looks suspiciously much like the one we had in the 70s, designing with nature is an engineers and business model that shares basic similarities with the slogan "back to nature" promoted by alternative 'hippies' forty years ago.

Prototype sells

A good example creates followers our grandparents used to say. If you can show that something works then you are more convincing. In one of the TED presentations a farmer shows how he built a tractor all by himself through instructions via the internet. As a spectator you become confident when you see him driving in his self-built tractor on his land. Practice what you preach creates reliability and credibility. Two indispensable elements in the market for inspiration!

The packaging creates added value

With a personality and a good idea, you are not there yet. The idea is to be expressed, clearly, preferably in a lecture of 15 minutes and some interesting examples. If you add attractive artist impressions and offer concrete examples or prototypes you will gain attention of consumers hungry for inspiration.

Combine old and new, communication channels

The trick is to bring the idea by using all possible media. A book with a catchy title ("Easycratie", "The city of the future") is still doing well. Then follows the lecture circuit, radio, television, and of course, a website, a Facebook page and videos on the internet where you present your idea in an attractive manner.

With these ingredients ideas can be easily disseminated, freely without much cost. And it can go fast. If you send your idea to all your 500 friends on facebook, 500 + connections on linked in and your 800 followers on twitter and 5% of them does the same after that a further 5%, more than 200,000 people

have received the message.

The countervailing power

In the energetic society still things happen that threaten values. Micro Plastics pose a threat to the ocean, nature reserves are sold to individuals because there is no more money for management, there are constantly new pesticides on the market, drugs contaminate surface water and many are barely aware of what they eat. How do you develop the energetic society a force against such developments? The answer is twofold. On the one hand it is possible to quickly build a power base through social media, on the other hand it is difficult to control the swarm and prevent it from turning against you.

The case of the plastic soup in the ocean is an example of a very fast and global agenda setting. The plastic soup was predicted in 1988 by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Captain Charles Moore discovered the plastic actually archipelago in the nineties and is actually scientific studies since 2000. In the Netherlands, in 2011 the plastic soup foundation (www.plasticsoupfoundation.nl) founded by Maria Westerbos, expert in mass communication. She has succeeded in bringing the wide subject in two years to the attention to bring the much needed solution to this global problem. A recent success is the voluntary ban on micro plastics in cosmetics by including the Dutch chain Kruidvat. Kees Neighbour, Kruidvat and Trekpleister: "Following the campaign Beat the Micro Bead of Plastic Soup community we have decided to remove micro plastics from our own brand. We will do this before January 1, 2014. We are also in talks with our A-brand suppliers about their policies regarding sustainability. These discussions we will continue to actively implement the coming years. The removal of micro plastics will be part of it. "

Most recent and successful intervention was stopping the launching of 150,000 balloons during the coronation of the Dutch king William Alexander on April 30, 2013 by a rapid media action of nature and environmental organizations along with many concerned citizens. These cases show that much is possible, and in a short time. It is interesting to investigate when such quick actions work and when they don't. Will similar strategies also work if the habitat of a threatened amphibian is under threat, or less strict rules for ammonia emissions are announced? You will only get the answer by trying.

Conclusion

Crisis or transition, society, and thus civil society is changing rapidly. If you want to be active in civil society you will have to relate to that and adapt your strategies. Also governments and companies will need to find new ways to connect. To do so, a mix of digital and analog strategies is advisable. By engaging in both worlds, the virtual and the real, networks can reinforce each other. This "move" is quite different than before. More than ever, the responsible citizen is in charge. As a consumer but also as users of services from governments and support organizations. The latter will have to follow instead of send, participate instead of support, connecting instead of coordinate and feed rather than convince. This requires a different attitude of the organizations and people who work in it. An office and a desktop computer become redundant, because the time you spend at the office and behind the computer is wasted at the expense of being part of the energetic society. The new network employee

works evenings and weekends, his office in his pocket and his archive in the cloud.

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