



## **The SOCIAL WEB AND THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION**

*Roc Fages, innovation and strategy consultant, and specialist in eGovernment, Web 2.0 and network dynamics*

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The term *social network* is currently linked to that of *social tools*, which describes tools used within the Web 2.0 concept, including blogs, and websites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, among many others. Users employ these tools to participate in social networks centered on specific interests that tend to reinforce their community or to help them reach certain objectives for improving their relationships to other communities, spaces, or public or private organizations. Therefore, social tools now provide different immigrant groups, and the public or private entities with which they interact, with an excellent opportunity to help these immigrants integrate into their new countries of residence.

There are several examples of social tools used by and for immigrant groups. However, before exploring representative cases in detail, we should first review the Web 2.0 phenomenon within social networks. The term *Social Web* can be used to describe the end result of Web 2.0 tools that create social networks. Indeed, the maxim "Markets are conversations", originally coined by the authors of the "The Cluetrain Manifesto" for the economic sector, has since been applied to the world of social networking. In that book, published in the 1990's, the authors alerted companies that once Internet use became widespread, they would have to be monitor how people exchanged information in order to directly determine the needs of potential consumers. Whereas the tools available at that time (*e.g.* forums and distribution lists) generated *conversations* in parallel to those already detected by companies and public administrations, the current ability of users to generate and exchange content at zero cost (*i.e.* through sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter), has expanded and segmented these conversations exponentially.

### *The 2.0 mindset*

Web 2.0 has provided us with conversations in countless social networks. However, these social networks only succeed when their users adopt a Web 2.0 mindset. This mindset goes beyond the users' relation to the Social Web: it implies active participation in the network, namely, by contributing and exchanging knowledge and experience with other members. Once the majority of members realize that their individual contributions pay off by generating collective benefits, this attitude begins to extend to the remaining members: "I give in order to receive from everyone else, and what I receive benefits me and the whole community."

Before Web 2.0 this mentality was more diffuse among existing networks, because it was more difficult for each member to participate and to recognize the benefits of their respective efforts. The work involved was much greater: going to meetings, making photocopies of written documents, sending mail by post to each member of the network, etc. Web 2.0 brought an end to all of that. All the members of a network can now actively participate to different degrees and reap the fruit of their labor. This last point illustrates how networks have multiplied. The integration of Web 2.0 tools into mobile devices has further enabled network members to feel an even greater sense of belonging to their network and to obtain clear benefits from it.

### *Immigrant groups and the Social Web*

As previously mentioned, the Social Web can be used to reinforce the identity of a community and foster its relationships with other communities, spaces, or public or private organizations. Therefore, immigrant groups can truly benefit from these interactions. Likewise, public administrations, especially those at the local level, can exploit these tools as a strategy to improve their services to immigrants and to facilitate the integration of these immigrants into their newly adopted country of residence.

Described below are a few cases that, despite not being directly linked to the Social Web through Web 2.0 tools, are nonetheless worth mentioning. There is a project in Belgium called *Limosa* ([www.limosa.be](http://www.limosa.be)), which helps new residents complete their immigration paperwork. It is a single website for immigrant workers, companies and public entities to coordinate the paperwork required for contracted or self-employed foreigners to normalize their legal employment status. The site allows users to fill out the form for a declaration of trans-border activities carried

out in Belgium (the Limosa Mandatory Declaration). This form is sent to all the relevant authorities, obviating the need for any additional paperwork. *Limosa* also informs its users of any documentation that they should be prepared to provide the authorities with. In Finland, the website *Infopankki* ([www.infopankki.fi](http://www.infopankki.fi)) provides all of the information that immigrants need (*e.g.* permits, housing, education, healthcare, and social services) in fifteen languages. On a smaller level, in Catalonia, the town hall of Ulldecona, realizing the importance of the local Romanian community, now offers its website in Romanian. It also provides English and French versions.

In terms of something closer to an actual network, the English municipality of Norfolk provides an online service (<http://www.welcometonorfolk.org.uk/forum/forum.php>) for new residents in which they can exchange information and obtain basic information. The website is available in English, Polish and Portuguese, among other languages.

Madrid offers a website, *SAI* ([www.educa.madrid.org/web/sai.leganes/](http://www.educa.madrid.org/web/sai.leganes/)), which is geared towards immigrant primary and secondary school students. The site was conceived such that these students could be introduced to the Spanish language online, without having to attend formal language classes. It features interactive methods designed for students of different nationalities, and has Spanish learning materials, including exercises and other activities, available for download.

An interesting example from the private sector is that of *Comunidades CAF* ([www.comunidadescaf.org](http://www.comunidadescaf.org)), an association of self-financed communities (*CAF*, in Spanish). This association aims to create groups of ten to 40 individuals that share resources and provide each other with non-guaranteed loans to enable members to meet any unexpected expenses or purchase any needed goods. Each group establishes its own lending conditions and determines how the profits from these loans will be spent. There are currently 23 *CAF*, encompassing 411 members. Sponsors of *Comunidades CAF* include *Fundació Un Sol Món* and the savings bank *Caixa Catalunya*.

In terms of true use of the Social Web, public sector initiatives have not been as extensive. In Holland there are various online services employing Web 2.0 tools that are intended to strengthen immigrant groups. The website [www.maghreb.nl](http://www.maghreb.nl) is aimed at integrating young Moroccans living in Holland into Dutch society, as reflected in the fact that it is written in Dutch. Members can access information on

culture and entertainment, post messages, upload images or videos, or debate various topics—all in Dutch. There are similar initiatives for Moroccan ([www.marokko.nl](http://www.marokko.nl)) and Turkish ([www.turksestudent.nl](http://www.turksestudent.nl)) students, both of which are also in Dutch.

In Spain, Social Web initiatives for immigrant groups are also primarily based in the private sector, and in some cases, have been spearheaded by the immigrants themselves. One example is *Workea* ([www.workea.org](http://www.workea.org)), a free online service that acts as an intermediary between immigrants and companies. On this site companies can post their job offers and immigrants can upload their CV's. Another example is *Comunidad Inmigrante* ([www.comunidadinmigrante.com](http://www.comunidadinmigrante.com)), considered to be the first online social community for immigrants in Spain. Originally, its primary functions were to provide information and legal services to community members. It then sought to incorporate the work of organizations that work towards the integration of immigrant groups in Spain. Currently, community members use the site to share information and experiences and to create links with each other. Through forums, they can post their opinions and upload photos, videos and music, among other types of files. They can also create their own blog. Similar, more informative websites include *Extranjeros sin Papeles* ([www.extranjerosinpapeles.info](http://www.extranjerosinpapeles.info)) and *Para Inmigrantes* ([www.parainmigrantes.info](http://www.parainmigrantes.info)).

In exploring user-created communities on social networking sites such as Facebook, we were interested in focusing on groups of immigrants from nationalities that are the least related to Spain linguistically, such as Moroccans. There has actually been quite a lot of activity in this area. Noteworthy groups include *Sabes que eres estudiante marroquí en España cuando...*

(<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=16119718162>), which has 361

members, and *Estudiantes Marroquíes en España*

(<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?sid=9ce9d5d1091da290385008923ba93367&gid=36974434296>), which has 81 members. Using Facebook, members share

information and promote activities. Another Moroccan student group, *Associació d'Estudiants Marroquís a Barcelona (AEMB;*

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?sid=9ce9d5d1091da290385008923ba93367&gid=22923076195>), is a restricted site: in order to join, you must be invited by a

current member and already be a Facebook user. Lastly, the group *Marroc a Catalunya*

(<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?sid=9ce9d5d1091da290385008923ba93367>

[&gid=36974434296](#)), which has 197 members, is interesting. Its success at achieving integration is reflected in the fact that it boasts an equal amount of Moroccan and Catalan members.

The Facebook groups described above represent just a brief introduction to the awesome potential of Social Web tools for helping immigrant groups to integrate into their new countries. These examples further demonstrate how immigrant groups always use all available means of communication to reinforce their collective identity. Therefore, considering that these individuals are nearly guaranteed potential users of Social Web tools for integration, public administrations should not only help them establish links with each other, but should also help familiarize them with their new country of residence. This in turn requires listening to their conversations, and conversing with them, using Social Web tools.

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