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Towards Digital Art in Information Society

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Abstract: In their article "Towards Digital Art in Information Society" Montse Arbelo and Franco propose the development of the platform of a Network of Experimental Centers be formed by small groups of people who are qualified and who seek optimal operational effectiveness and who dedicate their resources to the production of digital content and we offer *artechmedia*
<http://www.artechmedia.org> as a base point of departure. Such an international network in a collaborative structure based on national networks would make possible to coordinate existing resources to develop social networks, generate and promote content, engage in forums of discussion and creativity workshops, and establish collaborative links with universities, research centers, and producers of audiovisual content in cooperation with national and international centers.

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Towards Digital Art in Information Society

In a globalized world dominated by communication technologies and their corollaries in new media practices it is essential to consider from different perspectives how our realities are impacted by the use of new technology. Although obvious, we underline the necessity of the importance to investigate the relationships—causes, processes, and results—of technology and society. Since the eighteenth century the West constructed the myth that an increase in scientific knowledge and the emancipation of humanity go hand in hand. In the twenty-first century—while we do not believe in this "enlightened" concept any more—the explosion of digital technology results in both positive and negative developments including new forms of creativity such as net art and electronic poetry. The application of digital technology and resources for the artist implies a questioning of structural relationships on which the art world has been based. Digitality changes how we create, it changes the solitary artist into a collaborative nomad belonging to multidisciplinary, transnational groups, it changes the materials used, the concept of the unique work and its inherent rights, its exhibition, and the function of the general public. Consequently, the roles of museums and art centers, gallery owners, curators, public and private institutions, media etc., also change. Digitality allows us to find solutions to multiple problems, but it also forces us to reflect upon numerous issues which concern the globalized world. The use of technological tools makes necessary to learn the implicit social codes they carry. This knowledge and its use can become an end in itself, given the complexity of existing languages, or could serve as a way of glimpsing into the new hardly intuited scenarios in which we have become immersed without meaning to or even being aware of it. Technology is not neutral: it is more than just a tool, it has its own discourse that transforms and alters everything it touches. The lack of a conceptual, aesthetic, and ideological framework that defines where art is at the moment makes it necessary to reflect both on its practice and its interpretation. Within this context, a debate needs to take place on the influence and transformations which digitality is producing in art and there needs to be a greater understanding of the foundations for more effective cooperation between the different sectors linked to digital art.

In particular, the culture of technological innovation within social and economic processes should form guidelines for policies at both the institutional and corporative levels. Cultural diversity and the commitment to the advancement of ideas are the greatest riches we possess and from this perspective we need to develop proposals for innovation and technological development at the service of people based on individual participation, responsibility, and democratic co-existence. Establishing support mechanisms for different cultures and their cross-cutting relationships in the use of new media promotes solidarity, social cohesion, and the participation of individuals who are keen to play a role in public life, to be listened to, and to be taken into account. For example, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations <http://www.unaoc.org/> represents a viable route to a creative meeting point between nations, cultures, and societies to avoid—or at least to diminish—discrimination and inequalities which have been and remain the principal source of conflict. The old paradigms cannot be used to respond to the demands of this new society of digital culture. The current global and in particular European recession, which is having an impact on wide sectors of the population, offers us opportunities to change the model, but it also forces us to think and revise our economic and social policies. The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially the internet and the generation of cultural networks, makes possible changes in the economy and allows social relationships to play a role in all sectors of a society that is more cohesive and just. The collaboration between the arts, science, innovation, technology, business, and institutional structures will help to form the content for a Society of Knowledge and the drive for an economy based on creativity and sustainable technological innovation rather than consumerism (on sustainable environment and culture see, e.g., Náray-Szabó <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2316>). In this context and with the objective of promoting the exchange of knowledge, to encourage artistic creation, and the collaboration between various social sectors related to creativity and technological innovation at both the national and international levels we established a platform *artechmedia* <http://www.artechmedia.org>, an alliance of interested parties in art, media, culture, society, science, and technology, we have been organizing and di-

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recting debates and calls for the drive towards creativity, innovation, and digital culture, as well as the creation of a global network for institutional, corporative, and individual collaboration to encourage knowledge, participation, and the exchange of ideas and projects to optimize resources through responsible management (we would like to thank all those affiliated with *artechmedia* who have dedicated their time over the last few years: over five hundred people representing cultural, institutional, corporate, and social agencies attended our international conferences and meetings online and in person).

Activities of *artechmedia* include several national and international conferences and forums, as well as an international organization with over hundred experts, the Global Net Society Institute, whose mission is "to drive the capacity for innovation in all our societies through the articulation of mechanisms that will promote their effective participation and collaboration, with transparent, committed and responsible governance, in order to find new, durable solutions to the great challenges in Europe and the world with the new digital era of the Knowledge Society and Economy, including energy, climate change, the future of information and communication, the common digital space, the development of global digital culture etc. This has led to the need to develop a socially sustainable economy that is responsible towards the environment and its people" (<http://www.artechmedia.org/global-net-society-institute/>). We are convinced that there is great opportunity at this time to develop digital creativity based on research and innovation in collaboration with institutions and technological cooperation and coproduction on the international level. We believe that the global promotion of art, creativity, and the development of contemporary culture would foster innovative ideas and proposals.

The revolution in communication including all aspects of culture that humanity is currently experiencing is owing to a large extent to advances in information and communication technologies. The massive changes which characterize this development include the widespread use communication networks based on said ICT-s and the globalization of information. The expansion of these technologies based on microelectronics, informatics, robotics, and communication networks is being produced at great speed and affect all areas of human activity and so at all socio-economic levels. At the same time, ICT-s define an array not only of technological innovations, but also of the tools needed to allow them to radically redefine how society functions. The development of information society represents a profound change in itself, but also within the art world and in the processes of creativity and its ensuing production processes and ways of consumption (see, e.g., Barrett; Castells; Castells and Cardoso; Liu; Rheingold; Stiglitz; Vesna). The digitality of artistic creation, production, and consumption is understood as integrated in which everyone can create, consult, utilize, and share information, knowledge, and enjoyment. Further, in order for people, communities, and populations to be able to fully explore their possibilities in sustainable development and improvements in the quality of life, we can only talk of a true information society once the creation, distribution, manipulation, and consumption of the digital form an important part of cultural and economic activity.

Technology today is ubiquitous and the great changes about to happen can already be seen. We are constructing a society through whose veins runs the internet. Intelligent communication systems allow us to access information from our homes, our cars, and our cell phones. The development of networks in all social fields makes greater and better mutual knowledge possible, coordinating and optimizing resources, and exchanging our experiences globally. Nevertheless, despite these possibilities there is a long way to go before these potentialities can be seen fully developed. We continue to witness the dispersion and lack of coordination of resources both in terms of infrastructures and in technical and human resources. Numerous groups exist which are working in the fields of art, research, and development with little connection between them. This situation prevents the implementation of protocols for systematic research that might have an impact on art to bring societies closer together. On the other hand, effective coordination will make it possible to use ICT in relationships between administrations and users for the realization of artistic projects with international reach.

The challenge for individuals is to live in accordance with the demands of information society in order to be informed and up to date, to innovate and above all to generate knowledge. Information and communication technologies, especially the internet, represent a new environment that will strengthen the possibility of converting marginal areas into questions of general interest. Phenomena will be developed by people not just from those working in media and at institutions. Information

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needs to be proactive and as a part of each one of us. It is the individual who decides what is important and acts in line with how we want the world and that the world holds its intrinsic value. We never need to become desperate with the magnitude of the problems that globalization has brought. We should never be made to feel small by living in such a large world. We should never forget or minimize the infinite importance of people. It is absolutely necessary to establish communicative networks of art which will make communication and collaboration possible between society's, its parts, and individuals and groups in a fluid and attainable way.

Today we live in a period of uncertainty at a global scale, but we also have the opportunity to address uncertainties through imaginative initiatives reflecting new paradigms which have emerged and are emerging. We argue that there is the need to establish channels for greater social participation in the construction of a multi- and intercultural Europe based on social inclusion and gender equality. If we are to take this reality seriously, we need to consider the validity of our current economic and cultural models. If we are going to build an Information sustained by interdisciplinary and horizontal relationships which define our societies, we must make a clear commitment to quality education that incentivizes and encourages creativity, research and an innovation culture free of sexual, economic, or racial discrimination (on this, see, e.g., Seyfried <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2515>; Tötösy de Zepetnek and López-Varela). Information and hence knowledge in the digital age is determined by the rapid expansion of technologies in microelectronics, nanotechnology, computing, robotics, and communication networks, as well as sustainable ecological development. These fields have brought about profound changes and a radical redefinition of all social economic spheres and also, logically, in human endeavor in culture and the arts. As such we need to ensure that new technologies are common tools to all sectors of society and that they offer an environment for effective collaboration whereby the creation, distribution, manipulation, and consumption of information form an important element of cultural and economic activity. As we postulate previously, there should be a focus on the individual who is integrated and directed to development so that everyone is able to create, consult, use, and share information and knowledge for a better society not only in industrially and technologically advanced societies, but also in societies which lack wealth and the necessary infrastructure.

In order to achieve ICT-driven information and the distribution of knowledge globally, it is necessary to develop an infrastructure and implement practices including quality education which can exercise critically informed control and enjoy the full benefits knowledge where digital culture and art assist to disseminate information and knowledge throughout all strata of society. The rigid boundaries and traditional division between the arts and the sciences need to be eliminated in order to become a creative meeting point with social and economic repercussions resulting in said inclusive society. The traditional configuration of research and development ought to include creativity because it is ideas and creativity which move the world and allow societies to progress. We can only generate sufficient innovation to design our future for and among all if we can forge an alliance between all structures of society where individuals, groups, and institutions are involved with art, science, technology, innovation, and enterprise. The challenge for individuals developing skills in any area of knowledge is to take on board the needs of this new model of society, to be informed and up to date, to innovate, but above all, to develop new propositions and generate knowledge.

In the arts we are witnessing a change in the paradigms of the processes of creativity. The development of networks in all areas of society makes it possible to achieve greater and wider knowledge on a mutual basis to coordinate and optimize resources. Nevertheless, despite these possibilities there is a long way to go before such developments can be fully realized. We are continuing to see the dispersion and lack of coordination of resources both in terms of infrastructure and technological and human resources. As we state previously, there are a number of groups working in fields of the arts and in research and development, but with little connection between each other and thus there needs to be a wider and more effective collaboration between the art world, research centers—institutions of higher learning—technology companies, and businesses so that results can affect communities by making the implementation of the paradigms and possibilities of information society across the board a real possibility. Given the complexities that large art centers and other organizations and institutions face when evolving and adapting to the constant and rapid changes brought about by new technologies, we propose that a Network of Experimental Centers be formed by small groups of people who

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are qualified and who seek optimal operational effectiveness and who dedicate their resources to the production of digital content and we offer *artechmedia* <http://www.artechmedia.org> as a base point of departure. Such an international network in a collaborative structure based on national networks would make possible to coordinate existing resources to develop social networks, generate and promote content, engage in forums of discussion and creativity workshops, and establish collaborative links with universities, research centers, and producers of audiovisual content in cooperation with national and international centers. With regard to Spain specifically, the aims and scope of our proposal is to offer experimental centers in all the Autonomous Regions which would allow to be connected to the needs and expectations of their respective communities while also benefiting from coordination at a national level. This would help to develop content for governmental agencies, the art world and society in general and lend global visibility and opportunities for co-production and exchange in other centers at an international level.

With regard to our proposal of a Network of Experimental Centers one of the main challenges is that the arts and culture face rigid compartmentalization, lack of distribution, and lack of infrastructural possibilities and coordination and thus the current digital presence of the arts does not reflect productivity and vitality sufficiently. For this reason it is fundamental that we develop and articulate mechanisms which allow for and the prioritization of collaboration and the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and projects. At the same time, to develop proposals which allow to establish structures for an effective and stable collaboration between individual artists and groups and institutions at national and international levels, it is important to realize that it is institutional agencies and cultural, educational, and business organizations which have means, resources, and knowledge to send a clear, resolute, motivating message of confidence by developing and implementing the necessary mechanisms. Institutional agencies can respond to the demands of today's society with united, responsible support initiatives, with the financing of good ideas, and innovative cultural, science, and technology projects by a transparent, collaborative media campaign and the implementation of mechanisms which would demonstrate the commitment to stimulate the creative and innovative capacities of the arts.

The challenge for individuals who are creators of digital art on the policy and distribution levels is to generate proposals for the development of new ideas which include 1) the recognition that if we want to overcome the said lack of mechanisms we need to be innovative, 2) confidence in our ideas to overcome the hard times of the present and construct a future of hope, 3) the finding of avenues for collaboration between individual digital artists and institutions, business, and social organizations, 4) support of the launching media campaigns underlining the social commitment of the cultural, scientific, technological, political, social, and economic sectors, and 5) the vocal support of the funding of digital projects by various institutional agencies and businesses. In addition, digital artists of the younger generation need to be co-opted to adopt a vocation and a creative mindset for innovation in science and technology in the context of digitality in order to translate thoughts into action to improve conditions of life culturally and economically for all humanity. The development and implementation of said Network of Experimental Centers will help us to think about and articulate proposals in a coordinated and cross-disciplinary manner that will drive and consolidate an alliance between innovative sectors of society altogether. The capacity of a Center we propose will be crucial in a global society that is increasingly knowledge intensive and to become the key driver in this it is necessary to adhere to democratic, global, networked and participative, altruistic and inclusive ideals. The Center needs to drive the creative innovation capacity of our societies and the strategic alliance between art, culture, education, science, and technology through the articulation of mechanisms which promote their effective participation and collaboration through transparent, committed, and responsible governance. Digital art can be thought of and serve not only art itself, but also a sustainable environment and peace.

In conclusion, we list the principle aims of the proposed platform of a Network of Experimental Centers: 1) The implementation of a forum for digital art with scientific, cultural, technological, and business sectors in order to analyze innovative trends in today's digital society with impact on culture and the economies of knowledge, 2) The development of an alliance of digital art, culture, science, innovation technology, and institutions for the development of information society and the creation of intelligent creative systems, 3) The evaluation and monitoring of the proposals and recommendations developed within European and international institutions and organizations, 4) The implementation of research, development, innovation, and creativity in the digital arts, 5) The development educational,

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research, and creativity programs and the co-ordination of resources and objectives among all sectors linked to new media with the objective to optimize and generate content applicable to governments, organizations, and society as a whole, 6) The promotion of discussion and the research and writing of proposals for consideration in policy planning in digital art, culture, science, and technology, 7) The dissemination of knowledge in order to drive digital art content and engage with institutions and organizations nationally and internationally through the delivery of reports and recommendations, and 8) The collaboration and participation of all vested parties in order to implement the proposed activities.

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