

Abstract of Harry Halpin speech

The Web is the most significant computational phenomenon yet, but we are just beginning to understand it and the important human and social dimensions that drive it. The Web Science Research Initiative, under the aegis of Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the Web, hopes to start the needed interdisciplinary collaboration. But the task has only just begun, and Europe has a great opportunity to "leap-ahead" by focusing on the right research questions now.

One important question is the model of development of the Web itself. Until recently, the Web 2.0 - in other words, the collaborative and social explosion of the Web exemplified by Wikipedia, social networking sites, blogs, and more - has been more or less ignored by academia and government, despite promising a world of easier-to-use applications and participation. However, the Web 2.0 has a dark side: the increasing centralization of data in a small number of companies and their giant data silos on mostly American soil.

A merger of the Web 2.0 and models like Digital Ecosystems can lead to decentralized model of the Web that preserves the rights, privacy, and diversity of the Web. If this decentralized merger is not helped, the Web will become centralized under Google and a few other companies that have little regard for privacy and human rights. Furthermore, economically Digital Business Ecosystems point to an effective alternative that capitalize on Europe's strengths of diversity and large amounts of small and medium-sized enterprises, instead of mindlessly attempting to follow the American model in order to create the next Google.