

# **Case Study on Project Phyrtual**

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**Abstract.** This case study briefly describes the problems and opportunities leading to the development of the Phyrtual project. It looks at Phyrtual's specific objectives, most innovative aspects and potential coverage in terms of beneficiaries and geography. It also deals with the recent partnerships and alliances established around Phyrtual.org, its current initial results and the dreams for the future.

## Background and Objectives

Humanity faces massive challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: some are fully global such as the environment, poverty, the transformations of the education and health systems; others are regional such as the greying of the population in Europe and Japan; others are local such as community development or urban regeneration, etc. At all levels, the answer to these challenges require processes of social innovation that make the best use of integrated “phyrtual” (physical/virtual) strategies and environments supporting them. Fortunately, knowledge and technological development has created the opportunity to create such “phyrtual” environments. Phyrtual.org is a manifestation of this opportunity and the need for social innovation to tackle humanity's problems is the *raison d'être* of project Phyrtual.

The specific objective of Phyrtual.org is to develop, scale up and diffuse globally a virtual environment for social innovation with the following characteristics: evolutionary, interactive, modular and configurable. From the viewpoint of social innovation, the website aims at enriching and empowering people's and communities' multi-dimensional potential through the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, arts, positive emotions and values, community building, and the application of supporting instrumentation for all these aspects. It is a virtual environment that integrates with physical innovation environments (Physical & Virtual = Phyrtual) giving rise to Phyrtual movements dedicated to social innovation projects, programmes and initiatives for a better world. Phyrtual intends to be an environment favouring the individual and collective growth of positive human traits in the “battlefield” of humanity.

To learn about the background of Phyrtual.org, you can read the story of the vision and development of Phyrtual in the section “Stories – Social Inclusion” inside project Phyrtual.

<http://www.phyrtual.org/en/project/953/story/e-inclusion/the-story-of-the-vision-and-development-of-phyrtualorg>

In principle, Phyrtual can be used in any geographical location. For this to happen, however, the website needs to develop further, for instance, in terms of languages and access to persons with special needs. There are also infrastructural barriers in terms of Internet access in poor areas of the world, above all, in Africa. This creates a sort of paradox because people suffering from poverty are intended to benefit from Phyrtual.org, yet they lack either physical and/or economic access to Internet. Phyrtual, however, can be useful in supporting the development of social innovations projects aimed at reducing the digital divide and poverty. These projects can help facilitate both: access to computers and Internet and the development of poverty-elimination initiatives in areas currently excluded from the benefits of the technology.

### **Activity and Innovation**

So far the main activities of the project have been research and development. These activities are in fact continuous, but Phyrtual.org has now reached the implementation stage and this is occurring through its use by projects of the Fondazione Mondo Digitale and other organizations. Amongst them is project Phyrtual since, like all projects, Phyrtual needs to communicate its vision, objectives, story and efforts to scale up and diffuse globally.

Phyrtual activities as reflected in the structure and functionality of the website are geared to offer a knowledge-based, community-building environment for social innovation projects across the world. In this environment individuals and projects can share the best traits of humanity in pursuit of improving the lives of others. Today, all good ideas of social innovation have the potential of developing into global movements. Phyrtual offers the online innovation environment that complements the physical (territorial) environment of these processes. An important ideal is to try to bring the best instruments the online world has to offer to the reach of the weakest and most disadvantaged sectors of humanity. For this reason, all areas of Phyrtual must continue to develop quantitatively and qualitatively. For instance, knowledge codified into manuals must develop into e-learning courses that operate within the experiential social innovation environment offered by each one of the projects; the area of creative ideas must develop into an environment of tools that realizes perhaps the most ambitious objective of Phyrtual, namely, the empowerment of the most disadvantaged people

not just to participate but, above all, to become creators and innovators of their own processes of social innovation; the same must happen with evaluation instruments that must be automatized, customized and become part of real-time evaluation as an intrinsic part of a culture of continuous learning and innovation. These are all part of the activities of project Phyrtual as it is the construction of a global community that helps to make these requirements a reality.

Herein lie the most innovative aspects of Phyrtual, amongst them:

- (a) integrated physical-virtual vision and strategic thinking for of social innovation processes;
- (b) sociotechnical configuration offering environment to nurture phyrtual social innovation movements in the style of open innovation;
- (c) codified-knowledge and active-learning approach to learning and social innovation;
- (d) holistic approach to people's multi-dimensionality reflected in the architecture of the website.

## **Partnerships and Alliances**

Social innovation particularly that related to the big challenges facing humanity in this century, for instance, environment, poverty, 21<sup>st</sup> century education, greying of the population, etc., is increasingly pervading the activities of all sectors: social, forprofit, government and community sectors. This gives rise to a multi-sectoral hybridity of organizations that may be new for academia but is increasingly becoming the way forward to tackling the challenges of these century.

This implies a wide horizon regarding partnerships and alliances in social innovation. This is certainly true for Phyrtual where all types of organizations involved in social innovation are potential partners in the evolution of the website. **Partnerships** are agreements signed between organizations to work together in activities that advance the technical, content, organizational and social evolution of Phyrtual. **Alliances** may take shape between one or more organizations, for example, around a specific project involving Phyrtual.

The partnerships and alliances are established through the Fondazione Mondo Digitale and they are just beginning to accumulate.

**Partnerships** so far include:

Viraçao [www.viracao.org/](http://www.viracao.org/) - Brazil

Aequinet [www.aequinet.it/](http://www.aequinet.it/) - Italy

Fundetec [www.fundetec.es/mte/home\\_fundetec/index.html](http://www.fundetec.es/mte/home_fundetec/index.html) - Spain

Datamation Foundation <http://datamationfoundation.org/> India

MitraMandal Foundation [www.mitramandal.org/](http://www.mitramandal.org/) - India

The University of Edinburgh [www.ed.ac.uk](http://www.ed.ac.uk) - UK

**Alliances** involving the use of Phyrtual in projects include the following organizations:

***Project Nonni Sud Internet (funded)***

- Auser <http://www1.auser.it/IT/HomePage> - Italia

- Anteas <http://www.anteasnazionale.it/> - Italia

***Project Knowledge Volunteer (submitted)***

- Romanian Society for lifelong learning (<http://www.srep.ro/>) - Rumania

- 50 Plus Hellas (<http://www.50plus.gr/english>) - Greece

- ICVolunteers, (<http://www.icvolunteers.org/>) - International

***Project A Physical-Virtual Environment for 21st Century Learning and Inclusion (submitted)***

- Zentrum fuer Soziale Innovation (ZSI) <https://www.zsi.at/> – Austria

- Delft University of Technology <http://www.tudelft.nl/> - The Netherlands

- Social Innovation Fund - Lithuania

- Centre for Visualisation and Interactivity in Education (CVIV) - Czech Republic

***Project 5 x 5 Formazione e Risorse per i Cittadini Stranieri e per la Comunità di Accoglienza (submitted)***

- Associazione Nuovi Europei - Italia

- Lazio Form <http://www.lazioform.it/> - Italia

Contacts, conversations and negotiations for other partnerships and alliances are under way.

## **Beneficiaries**

As a virtual social innovation environment, Phyrtual's beneficiaries are all citizens of society, and particularly those disadvantaged segments of the population at risk of exclusion from the benefits of knowledge society. Commonly, the latter are treated as beneficiaries of social projects. In Phyrtual, however, the idea is that by participating in projects driven primarily by the motivation to generate social value, people playing any of the multiple potential roles inside social innovation projects will also reap benefits for the development of their multi-dimensional humanity.

People can play multiple roles inside Phyrtual social innovations: social innovators and entrepreneurs, originators, developers, champions, financial donors, in-kind donors, teachers, volunteers, supporters, traditional beneficiaries (disadvantaged people), etc.

All these people are potential beneficiaries (broad sense) of Phyrtual and, given the huge challenges facing the world in the 21st century (e.g., education, poverty, health, environment, peace and security), the potential numbers are very large indeed. At the core of the growth of Phyrtual, however, are the social innovators, originators, champions who are the initiators and the energy pulsing social innovation processes everywhere.

## **Beneficiaries' Point of View**

As originator of Phyrtual, I derive strong personal benefit from the simple fact of putting my heart and mind at the service of a dream aimed at improving the lives of fellow human beings.

## **Results**

So far, the main result of the Phyrtual project is the development of the first beta version of Phyrtual.org. As this version has gone public very recently, other results are beginning to accumulate gradually, for instance, in terms of partnerships, alliances, media outputs, number of projects, number of people, knowledge content, etc., etc. Eventually, Phyrtual.org will have statistical illustrations of the evolution of its activities and projects will begin to evolve into targeted Phyrtual movements.

## **Dreams for the Future**

The dream is to see the continuous growth of Phyrtual into a global social innovation environment supporting the rise and development of Phyrtual movements (projects) that themselves will join forces into larger movements that become a powerful force for a better world – a global social innovation utility that stimulates the development of the full-dimensionality of individuals in their local and global communities.