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Detailed Outline Document for The Common-Forum:
A new technology for constructive public discourse.

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Introduction

A Brief History of Mass Network Forum Systems

Unlike publishing or broadcasting, a **network forum** is fully interactive, allowing every audience member to also be a speaker. For our purposes, the term **mass** denotes tens of thousands of simultaneous users.

Vannevar Bush's visionary concepts for **a mythical "memex" machine,** publicly documented in a 1945 article entitled "as we may think", described a complex system that would allow many independent authors to exchange, annotate and link microfilm pages using special mechanical desks.

Drawing from Bush, in the 1970's **Ted Nelson** proposed a "universal instantaneous hypertext publishing network" known infamously as "**Xanadu**". Many of the sophisticated linking concepts Ted Nelson describes go well beyond the current Word Wide Web, and thus still provide direction for more innovative linking systems, such as the Common-Forum will entail.

In 1990, Tim Berners-Lee (with the help of his peers) designed HTML and programmed the first World Wide Web browsers.

[Maybe add a bit more details. Like the creation of email, majordomo, listserv, UseNet, and Gnutella. Possibly summarize the rise of virtual communities (see Howard Rheingold's writing)]

What is The Common-Forum?

The Common Forum will be **a universal technology for public communication**. It will be accessible for all citizens to communicate with all citizens. Similar to the Agora of ancient Athens, the town hall of a city, or a citizen mailing list, the Common-Forum will serve as an advanced **meeting space**. This idea has been described by other names such as **e-agora, virtual town hall or cyber-commons.** It will be a system for discussion, learning, teaching, debating, coordinating, planning, and making important decisions. It will be a tool for **deliberation** with the aim of **practical consensus**. It will not be a broadcast or publication. It will be an **egalitarian network technology** where anyone can contribute.

The system will go well above and beyond the post-reply model of Usenet, bulletin boards and email lists. It will be a practical design for **non-linear, searchable, contextual, and sorted mass interactive communication**. There will be a **wide variety of interfaces** with many **options for personalization, filtering and assisted authoring**.

But isn't that what the Word Wide Web already is?

The Web is a wonderful technology for publishing and reading hyperlink documents. Many fantastic ideas are published and read every day, and anyone with some time and web access can potentially contribute to the mass pool of content.

The problem is that the content, i.e. the public discourse, is **fragmented**. Many web users are talking about the same issues and topics, yet not talking to each other.   Each website is like a separate platform promoting its own agenda. Sure, there are links from one site to another and from one page to another, but in general**, each page is presented in isolation**; placed only in a context of the reader's experience and the publisher's intentions. In other words, the only links you will find on a web page are the links the author has created. There is no standard or simple way for other users to add links. As a result, articles talking about the same things are not necessarily linked together. Answers are not linked to questions. A text in English is not linked to its Chinese Translation. One side of an argument is not linked to other sides of the argument.

Research is not linked to the reports that apply it. Claims are not linked to the facts that disprove them. Concerns are not linked to potential solutions. In general, articles are not placed in a context that would be most relevant and useful for each user.

There are many other problems and limitations of the World Wide Web standards (e.g. searching challenges, unstable links and commercialization) that hopefully this project will also address. There are many excellent system models on the Web that the Common-Forum will draw from, such as search engines (e.g. google.com), collaborative news sites (e.g. slashdot.org and kuros5in.org), collaborative directories (e.g. dmoz.org), reference engines (like xrefer.com), and many more. **The Common-Forum could be seen as like a new upgraded version of the web** that gets rid of many of the problems with the original model and adds many new features with the aim of effective and constructive public discourse.

To understand what the Common-Forum aims to be and how it will work, please read on and hopefully all of your questions will be answered.

This document is a plan for building the Common-Forum

This paper describes, explains and specifies the design and development of an optimal public discourse technology known as: *The Common-Forum*. This document **is a set of instructions, a blue-print, a road-map a resource, a collection of descriptions and an organizational tool** for making the Common Forum a reality.

This document is presented in three parts: **Book I - Common-Forum User Experience; Book II - Common-Forum System Design;** and **Book III – Project Goals, Ethics and Analysis**. Book I is useful for those people interested in how the system will basically work and what kind of activities it could make possible. Book II is meant to be a guide for the developers involved in building the system. Book III is an academic discussion of the ideas behind the design of the system, the goals the system aims to achieve and the potential effects in will work to avoid.

Open-Design: A Democratic design Process

All aspects of the authoring, design, methodology and founding theories of this outline are open to public critique and contribution. Similar to XML, LINUX, APACHE, and other development projects, those with an interest in improving network communication will collaborate to design and build this new application.

The advanced forms of democratic decision-making and collaborative development will be employed to ensure that this plan is fair, just and most beneficial for the Internet community and the general public (including the underprivileged) that could make positive use out of the Common-Forum. The document will always be in progress and in need of improvement, but will always be useful for those designing, consulting, building and tracking the progress of the Common-Forum.

Communicationism: Self-determination through media design

This community project of designing our own communication technology is a deliberate attempt by the community to shape its own destiny. This project is us taking control of the media that influence us. This is us practicing Communicationism. See ***Communicationism.org*** to learn more about the philosophy this project is based on.

BOOK I: Common-Forum User Experience

Following are detailed descriptions of how the Common-Forum system will work. These descriptions outline the superficial design that will be visible to the average system user.   For technical specifications, please see Book II.

Introduction

This Common-Forum design is based on the network model already well proven by other Internet applications. It is designed to be extremely open and aims to create as few restrictions as possible for how people will make use of the system. The system mainly consists of **a common database** that users can submit any kind of content into, and database **interfaces** that anyone can design and modify to suite their needs. In other words, **the basic system is designed to empower citizens to choose how the Common-Forum will be used**.

Achieving the project goals will be dependent on how the system is used. Different interfaces will afford different results and different patterns of use will cause different outcomes. This document suggests designs that we the authors and consultants believe best compliment the included project goals. But the system structure also leaves open the possibility for alternative designs to emerge that better suite these goals, or possibly achieve other goals that were overlooked by the original authors.

Simple Overview of the Basic System Concept

Imagine an **infinitely large secure database** that is universally accessible (kind of like UseNet). Now populate the database with all the articles from different encyclopedias, dictionaries, and news archives (similar to xrefer.com and newsisfree.com).

Next, extend an open invitation to academics, journalists, librarians and assorted experts to **author links that signify relationships between articles**. For example:

- *A describes B;*

- *A is related by topic to B;*

- *A is the opposite of B;*

- *A supports the argument of B;*

- *A is synonymous with B;*

- *A is an example of B;*

- *A is the answer to B;*

- *and so on…*

Authors can **invent new link relationships** as they please, but certain standards will emerge. At this point, you could also open the system to the general public to submit articles and links. As you can imagine, a very complex network of relationships would quickly form, with some articles having more than hundreds of different links to and from their popular meaning.

To sort through the articles, users will **submit queries that return articles that match specific criteria**. For example, a query might be:

SELECT ALL ARTICLES THAT HAVE
link "A is answered by B" FROM
article "What are the practical alternatives to capitalism?".

Such a query would then return a list of articles that other users believe answer this important question. Another good example:

SELECT ARTICLES THAT HAVE
link "A describes B" FROM
article "Important issues for the London community" THAT ALSO HAVE
link "A highly recommends B" FROM [my list of respected contributors].

With the use of much more complex queries that utilize **author reputations, article popularity, user reviews and relational patterns**, Common-Forum users should be able to find **specific and high quality articles that are fully contextualized through links**. Users will be able to avoid articles that other reputable users have described as "poorly worded", "nonsensical" or "overtly commercial".

Now imagine assorted organizations facilitating interaction with the database through **publication, broadcasts, telephone calls, written letter submissions, and helps desks**.

In effect, the Common-Forum is a **centralized mass collaborative forum democratically organized through public links, yet individually sorted by complex queries**.

This should be an ideal system for practicing mass democratic deliberation.

Articles

Articles are the content of the Common-Forum system. An article is a computer file. For example: an article could be a text file, an image, an HTML file or an MP3. Articles are uploaded by users or bots.

Articles will serve many different purposes within the Common-Forum. For example:
- **Content**
    - Typographic Narrative (e.g. essays, reports, journals, etc.)
    - Animations
    - Images
    - Sounds
    - Videos
- **Characteristic Definitions** – the characteristics of other articles are defined through an "A describes B" link from one of these types of articles. Some important examples include:
    - [a specific **topic**] (similar to the dmoz.org directory or the library catalogue system)
    - [an **ideology**, bias, framework, etc.] (e.g. Marxist, Feminist, Positivist, Western, Corporate)
    - [a **content type**] (e.g. visual, audio, typographic, etc);
    - [a **critique**] (e.g. funny, insightful, well phrased, unclear, etc)

- o "a comment"
- o "a question"
- o "a fact"
- o "a suggestion"
- o "a theory"
- o "a hypothesis"
- o "a request"
- o "a summary of multiple articles"
- **Link-Definition** – an article that defines a certain kind of link. These articles denote the meaning of the relationship the link establishes from article A to article B. These articles are often just simple text strings in the form "A [relationship] B". Some important examples of link relationships:
  - o defines
  - o related by topic to
  - o is synonymous with
  - o is similar to
  - o is the opposite of
  - o is an alternative to
  - o supports the argument of
  - o is an extraction of
  - o *{see links section of this document for many more examples}*
- **Representations** – articles that represent specific things that exist in the world. Examples:
  - o A person
  - o A place
  - o A time period
  - o A Company
  - o An Institution
  - o An Object
  - o A Community
- **Published Templates** – interface templates that users have designed and released to the public
- **Published Queries** – defines queries that users have decided to make public. These could include:
  - o A single string query clearly formatted and without any syntax errors
  - o An algorithm and description of what kind of results it returns
- **Elements and extractions of larger articles.** Examples:
  - o Footnotes
  - o Quotes
  - o Side bars

Links

Links are elements that **define a relationship between two articles**. They **exist independently of the articles they reference** and thus can be avoided or presented as the user chooses.   Users can author an **unlimited number of links** to any article because there is no limit to how many links can exist between articles. A link can be viewed both FROM and TO the articles it references, i.e. if a user makes a link from article A to article B, anyone viewing either A or B may choose to see the link.

Every link must be associated to a single link-definition article that defines the relationship the link signifies. Many links may use the same link-definition article, but each link can only have one link-definition. Users can link TO and FROM link-definition articles (e.g. to recommend the link or signify similar link-definitions).

It is assumed here that relationships are best presented in the form **of a text string in the format "A [relationship] B"**. But the Common-Forum system design is left open to allow link-definitions to be presented as any kind of article an author chooses.

Example Link-Definitions

• describes	• is a comment on
• related by topic to	• is a missing aspect of
• is synonymous with	• is the goal of
• is similar to	• is a refinement of
• the opposite of	• is a simplification of
• is an alternative to	• is an evaluation of
• supports the argument of	• has the same author as
• is an extraction of	• is a continuation of
• explains	• is a strategy for achieving
• answers the question of	• is relevant to the community of
• is an addendum to	• uses language that is
• is a digression of	• use the language of
• is an example of	• discusses
• is an application of	• defines
• is a maturation of	• is important to
• is a suggested reworking of	• helps
• is caused by	• stops
• is a translation of	• degrades
• is the jurisdiction of	• applies the ideology of
• is redundant in light of	• assumes
• was researched by	• is the title of
• is based on research	• is a foot note of
• should be	• ignores the importance of
• follows the belief	• is the author of
• a summary of	• is authorized by
• is relevant to	• has been read and understood by
• is an interpretation of	
Links to author profile articles	• recommends

Interfaces

The contents of the Common-Forum is accessed through interfaces. Interfaces are apparatus that users operate to view content from the system and submit new content into the system. By designing the system interfaces standards to be open, any variety of interfaces are possible. To understand this, think of how many different kinds of telephones there are for the standard telecommunications network, or all the different web browsers and HTML editors there are for the World Wide Web.

The preliminary interface for the Common-Forum will be a template based client application, but many other interfaces will also be developed to suite the needs of users.

Template Based Client Applications

This is client side Internet application that will empower users to **modify how content is presented and navigation is accomplished** in the Common-Forum. The application will allow users to create any variety of templates for interacting with the Common-forum. Some typical types of templates would include:

- A searching form
- A critiquing form
- A sorting, organizing and categorizing tool
- A general contextual browser – shows related article in relation to the current article in focus
- Link-Maps – visually representing link relationship returned from the results of a query
- Presentation forms – presents the contents several articles returned by a query

A demo Interface for general searching and browsing:

The Common Forum Demo Interface

Search >> Author >>	Are humans killing life on earth?	**Filters**	+ Highly Recommended(v032) + Well Researched + Answers to Questions + moderately simple vocabulary + Rational + text + under 2 min reading + many links **>>**

Results:	Yes: Humans are killing the planet Pollution from modern society is killing animals Business is destroying nature	Humans are a virus on the earth Global warming will make the earth unlivable for humans 1 / 2033 **>>**

ⓘ   ?   <<   >>   !

Humans are killing the planet through climate change, toxic waste and the destruction of ecosystems. Modern industrial society (like in most cities) harms the environment through:

- poisonous pollution like smoke and garbage,
- the ruining of habitats where animals live,
- greenhouse gases that change the weather,
- the destruction of forests
- the slaughter of wild creatures
- much more...

1 / 52 **>>**

Opposing Arguments   >

The environment will evolve to support life.

Environmental destruction is exaggerated

>>

Related Questions   >

Why are we killing the planet?

What can we do to stop save the planet?

>>

Explanations	>	Supporting Arguments	>	Related Topics	>	Alternative Views	>

How industry destroys the environment The causes of climate change >>	Humans are changing the climate Acid rain kills fish Deforestation is growing >>	Environmentalism Social Progress Natural Science >>	God is punishing us. Humans are self-destructing. Environmental damage is worth the short-term gains. >>

Templates could be designed to display both local and grand contexts of each article. The use of tree diagrams, flow-charts and other useful mapping systems could be very effective for representing the complex relationships between articles. Templates could present related articles as book, comic, slide show, or any other creative and communicative format.

Although any template will be possible, certain standards will be necessary for effective usability. For example, the use of certain icons, layouts, typography, etc. should be standardized so not to confuse users trying out new templates

[Some more demonstrations would be useful]

Other interfaces

World Wide Web Browsers
Similar to current database systems accessed through the web (e.g. PHP/MySQL, Oracle, MS SQL) dynamic servers could take content from the Common-Forum and insert it into an HTML page, and reciprocally, content from an HTML form could be sent to the Common-Forum.

Offline Publication
Publishing houses could print out selected query results and present them as book format. Organized collections of articles recommended as "important news for the local community" could be published daily as a newspaper.

Telephone Service
Similar to directory assistance, a combination of touchtone, voice and human interaction could allow users to access portions of the Common-Forum by telephone.

Assistance Desks
Similar to ticket desks in train stations, or help desks in libraries, offices and staffed desks could be set up in different kinds of institutions to give people face-to-face assistance with accessing the Common-Forum.

Postal Service
Similar to mail-order catalog shopping, users without Internet connections could request from and submit content to the Common-Forum through their local postal service.

Suggested Patterns of Use
The openness of the Common-Forum design means that people could use the system in all sorts of different ways. Below are some suggestions for methods and techniques that could prove to be very useful for Common-Forum users.

Making Sense of the Common-Forum

In general, to find and present desired content from the Common-Forum, complex queries will need to be applied. Such queries will prioritize and sort results, avoid content of poor quality and ignore content that is unrelated. Queries will need to be used to filter through the infinite links an article may be referenced from and only present options that would be valuable for the user.

Effective complex queries will be challenging to create. Less technically inclined citizens can gain access to the power of quality queries in several ways:

- Through the use of query creation **wizards** (e.g. as templates within the client application),
- The publication of **queries as articles** within the Common-Forum
- The publication of query results in **printed format**

Queries and general navigation will be achieved through referencing of articles that the user already knows the meaning of. For example:

- articles from a dictionary and encyclopedia could be used to specify the topic a user is interested in
- a question article that already has many links to it could serve as a good starting point for navigation;
- topic articles organized as taxonomies and directories could serve as general research portals
- overview articles could introduce different aspects of topic that can then be investigated further

Breaking Up Content and Putting it Back Together

Traditional united standalone content formats (e.g. essays, scientific reports, books, videos, CDs, etc) could be broken up into smaller articles, but remain associated through special links. For example, long papers could be broken up by paragraphs and then linked by "A continues to B"; smart queries could then find the entire original paper.

Titles, footnotes, abstracts, and other traditional print devices could be attached to articles via links (e.g. "A is the title of B". The extraction of such meta-content and reference material allows for users to easily comment on such specific elements, and also allows authors to propose new elements to a paper. Even though a publication could be queried for only its original text, it could also be queried for its most highly recommended amendments, in effect making every publication a collaborative and continuous effort.

Linked extractions will also be very useful for linking directly to specific quotes from a piece without modifying the original article. For instance, one word from a paragraph or one sentence from an essay. This could be accomplished by creating a new article that only includes the extraction. This extraction could then be linked directly to the original source, and to the article that refers to it.

[But there needs to be some method of insuring quotes are accurate and easily found within large texts. For this purpose, there may need to be a way of indexing all points in an article (but this will depend on the kind of data it is). Any suggestions? Maybe create index of extractions...?]

Critiquing Articles and Links.

If every user makes an effort to critique every article and link they have strong opinion on, then the Common-Forum will represent the complex of beliefs the community holds. Critiquing can be practiced in any number of ways. Some examples might include: the use of "A highly recommends B" link from someone's personal representation article to all the links and articles they highly recommend; or the use of "A describes B" links from critical comment articles, (like "poorly worded", "over simplified", "very funny", "smart idea", etc.) to other articles and links. Some users may choose to have such simple and blunt critiques as "this sucks", while others will prefer to use combinations of detailed characteristic articles.

Depending on what kind of methods become popular, different kinds of queries may be written to make use of the different critiquing styles.

Social Navigation

The system will make extensive use of *social navigation.* This simply means that users will follow the trends of other users to help guide them through the mass collection of content. Examples of social navigation in the real world include: well worn paths through a forest, the movement of a crowd towards or away from something, and dog eared book in the library. By following the patterns of many other users, people will be able to quickly learn from the experience of others.

Social navigation will depend mostly on the critical linking of users. Then by applying smart queries and data mining algorithms, computers will be able to recognize patterns that will be most useful for users. For example:

- searching for articles and links that other people have recommended,
- patterns and relationships other users have made
- following expert authors based on reputation
- finding authors with similar tastes, interests, perspective, etc
- filtering out content that other reputable users thought was of poor quality
- finding or avoiding popular content

The social navigation will be dependent on the authentic Author IDs and the popular practice of critiquing articles and links.

Decision-making

One of the primary functions of the common-forum will be mass consensus decision making. Through the advanced deliberation many proposals will be posted and discussed. Ideally, special query algorithms could be written that take into account all informed judgments made (through links) by stakeholders in a decision. By applying such a query on a set date, democratic decisions could be made. The use of popularly endorsed precedent, constitutions, charters, mandates, treaties and other forms of printed law would also provide limitations, direction and a foundation for key factors in such queries.

The **actual formula of such decisions-making query algorithms will be the center of fierce debate**. Issues such as how weighting is given to different judgments will be become a political focus (e.g.: one vote per a person, or should doctors have more votes when it comes to health issues?; should someone who has read 100 articles on the subject have more votes then someone who has read only two? What kind of objections are acceptable blocks for consensus?) But different levels of consensus and acceptance will be found for some well-proven formulas and these could provide the basis for a new efficient and dispersed decision-making technology.

Instead of politicians or parties, we will have queries that can be collaboratively updated and modified as communities see fit. It will be a **completely transparent decision-making method** that can be scrutinized and critically discussed by any informed citizen. These queries will not be computers making decisions for us; they will be a systematic interpretation of all the available knowledge and judgments made by the concerned population. Rather then a human making a vague, very subjective, limited and possibly corrupted interpretation of what he or she thinks a population wants, a query specifically determine what a population thinks is the optimum choice based on democratic access, informed judgments and widely accepted precedents.

Reasoning made explicit by the use of links

Because links allow users to specifically explain their rationale, effective queries and templates will make the construction of arguments most visible. Charts could be automatically produced that explain debates. (Example: Robert E. Horn's diagrams http://www.stanford.edu/~rhorn)

Defining terms within a specific deliberation

The defining of terms will both be constructive for general communication, but will be most important for aspects of law, political policy and social development. The lack of common definitions is often one of the greatest obstacle for large group decision-making. Important terms used within a deliberation could be linked directly to their established meaning, or possibly a sub-deliberation of the term's meaning.   With the inclusion of practiced linguists in the discussion, terms should hopefully be more clearly specified and agreed on.

One simple suggestion for addressing this issue, is to create new terms of word combinations whenever an obvious disagreement of meaning is discovered. For example: the term "freedom" could be divided into "economic freedom", "freedom from oppression", "freedom of opportunity", freedom from struggle", "freedom of equality", "cultural freedom", "domestic freedom", "freedom of speech", ...etc.

Official Templates

Users and organizations will be able to publish the templates they have created, thus creating a gift economy of interface designs. In effect, certain interfaces will be used for certain types of user goals. Most importantly, specific templates could be certified by respected organizations as fair interfaces for political debate, high level research, scientific reports, business dealings, etc. Such templates will begin to dictate our rules of Common-Forum conduct. Because of this power templates will have to direct any society that relies on them, they should be discussed and refined in very open, wise and constructive settings. The choice of which templates to use as official political discourse will be our first major problem that must be settled by consensus: anything less then recognized consensus will have no legitimacy.

Directed Questions

Asking authors to explain their ideas, expand, reword, etc, is an important aspect of conversation that should be promoted. To achieve this, the client application could have an option to routinely query for questions posted to any article she or he has written or has an interest in.

Being able to ask reputable experts questions about their topic of expertise would be very useful. This might be a function that makes use of user provided profiles, generated reputation profiles and client side question searches. In other words, a user would post a question and suggest the kind of person they could best address the question. Other users who are inclined to answer questions would get client applications to search for questions that match their profile either on schedule or on-command. This model has already been proven by sites like allexperts.com and answers.google.com.

Trust Metric

Because of the potential abuse of the system by attackers (e.g. PR companies, advertisers, and selfish assholes) the system should employ queries that only select content recommended by certified and highly trusted users. It would aim to be **a meritocracy based on reputation and vouching**. (see http://www.advogato.org/trust-metric.html or slashdot for such a system in use). Using even a low level of reputation as a content filter, users should be able to avoid commercial content, errors, garbage, false reports, baseless opinions, bot abuse and other forms of destructive content. Such model could give new meaning to journalistic professionalism and scientific rigor.

One concern about this method is the tendency towards 'group think' and hierarchies of trust that privilege early adopters. To address this, there should be **multiple overlapping and context specific trust metrics**. For example: just because User X is highly trusted on the topic of gardening, does not mean User X should be trusted in medical advice. Those users who are trusted across many areas of discussion will be **recognized wise persons** and may provide insightful guidance for our community.

This model will also make interest groups, lobbies, ideological factions and the complex interweaving and exceptions of opinions in our society much more obvious. Highly accepted trust metrics could serve as **guidance systems for choosing representatives and leaders** when necessary.

Democratic Censorship(?)

Originally the plan of the system was to not include any form of censorship. But this ideal may prove to be a severely destructive aspect of the design. For instance, the extreme accessibility of personal information (like addresses and phone numbers) and violent content (like child pornography and bomb making instructions) could prove to be very dangerous in today's unstable world. At the same time, what institution or group is to be trusted with the privilege of censorship?

One possible technique could be a kind of exclusion process. Assuming the system relies on a mass distributed peer-to-peer network, each node owner (i.e. the admins of each PC holding content) could choose to censor the content that is stored or moved through their computer. If each user creates a list of certain kinds of content they don't want to support the exchange of, then the offending content will be forced to use other roots, or be possibly not available at all. Under this model content is only censored from users by their own choice, or by the natural consensus of users on their network.

This model is not full proof and could have unforeseen consequences depending on what methods are used to choose content users will censor and if tracking of nodes is possible. But this is an issue that need to be addressed within the system's fundamental design.

File Translation and Conversion

To overcome and language barriers and technical incompatibilities, it would make sense to maintain translation services throughout the Common-Forum. Some examples could include:

- automated language converter bots (e.g. systransoft.com)
- volunteer and paid translations
- file converter bots that author new versions of files in more standard formats (e.g. PDF to XML)

Converted and translated articles would be attached directly to the original article with a link that specifies the conversion process, (e.g. "A is a translation from English to Spanish by Juan Ramon Jimenez of B", or "A is a conversion from WAV to MP3 by DropConverter 1.3.1 of B")

Scenarios

To help explain the value of the system design, we have included specific descriptions and stories of how communities could make effective use of the Common-Forum.

African News

1. Every civic building, magazine shop, bookstore, computer store has at least one staffed help desk that services people's access to the Common-Forum. The help desk can provide computer terminals and assist people who wish to:
    a. search for content of interest, (with priority give according to a local democratically written priority of interests)
    b. print outs articles
    c. listed to audio versions of articles
    d. respond to articles
    e. make new links
    f. submit new articles
2. Many queries can be written to select the most important information for people. Examples include:

      a. SELECT ALL (500 words of less) ARTICLES THAT HAVE link "A describes B" FROM article "important for Aficans" AUTHORED BY [authenticated African Authors] SORTED BY {recommendation/popularity/trust algorithm}

      b. SELECT ALL (30 words of less) ARTICLES THAT HAVE link "A describes B" FROM article "important announcements for the people of Abuja" AUTHORED BY [authenticated Abuja Authors] SORTED BY {recommendation/popularity/trust algorithm}

3. The top 50 or so articles could be:
      a. published and distributed as a public non-commercial newspaper
      b. broadcast on community radio

4. 20 elected professional writers could be paid to continuously rewrite (i.e. submit upgrades) hundreds of articles they find linked to "high importance" but also linked to "poorly worded". They could be paid by newspaper sales.

Advice for Mothers

There was once a keen young woman who liked to talk to strangers. She loved people and life and looked forward to being a mother. She wanted to be the best mother she could, so she decided to learn from every experienced mother she could find. She took her learning so serious that she would take notes at every talk she had with an experienced mother.

On her birthday a few friends bought her a used audio recorder. It was the most amazing piece of technology she had every seen. After learning how to use it, she took the recorder everywhere she went and taped discussions with every experienced mother she could find.

In only one month she had interviewed every mother in her village. But she was still not confident that she new everything she could to be the best mother possible. So she decided to travel to other villages and record every mother she met.

Every village she went to, people directed her to the best mothers they new. Many offered her lodging and food. In the larger villages, she would ask for blank tapes from the more wealthy of the mothers she met, and they often obliged generously. Every few months she mailed the most recent set of tapes to her aunt back home. After two years of traveling she had created a collection of over 200 one-hour tapes that included over 320 different interviews.

One day the young woman bumped into a rich mother from the big city. After hearing about all the audio interviews the young woman had collected, the rich mother offered to put them on the Internet. The young woman had heard people talk about an "Internet" but she didn't really understand what it was. The rich mother offered to pay the young woman a lot of money to just borrow the tapes for a few weeks and the young woman agreed.

The rich mother was an architect who had taken a few Internet courses in her spare time. She digitized all the interviews and **uploaded them to the Common-Forum as MP3s**. She used a **basic MP3 submissions template** to describe the MP3 articles as "**interviews with experienced mothers**". She then told all her friends about the collection, and wrote messages to assorted maternal email lists. These women then recommend the collection to their friends and within a few days tens of thousands of woman from around the world were listening to the interviews.

Using *general reviewing* **interface templates**, **listeners rated, described, critiqued, related and recommended** a few interviews each. Within about a month, every article had been reviewed by at least 40 different women and the collection was completely sorted, organized and rated according to thousands of independent judgments.   Interviews were **categorized and cross-referenced by topics like: "infants", "illness", "education", and even specific questions like: "what to do if your infant won't eat", "how to deal with the rebellion of teenagers", "how to encourage healthy eating at every age"**. Users could **sort interviews by different combinations of length, languages, cultures, topics, and recommendations.**

Different mothers associations were so impressed with the collection that they paid journalism students in over 30 different colleges around the world to record and submit even more interviews. After about a year, the article "**interviews with experienced mothers" had a link "A describes B" to over 24,000 different authenticated MP3 interviews in 8 different popular languages**. About 10% of the most highly recommended interviews were transcribed to text and translated to other languages. The collection quickly gained even more popularity and with every day the interviews were reviewed and rated by more and more woman. Some woman would just listen and review one or two interviews a week, while others listened to three or four every day.

After a few months of popular reviewing, **through the process of data mining, clear patterns became apparent.** Woman could use the patterns to find advice on almost every motherly issue. The top recommended interviews were said to be inspiring to tears. Social workers used the collection as a resource for giving guidance to new mothers. In some progressive towns a public radio channel was dedicated to just broadcasting selections of themed interviews. Burned CDs were traded and shared among friends and colleagues and the collection became a part of mass culture in most industrialized nation.

After years of increasing international popularity, the collection is institutionalized into higher education in every member state of the United Nations. The general health of society increases with every new child raised and it becomes more and more difficult to comprehend a world before the global collection of motherly advice.

Civil Society Goes Hardcore

Right now there thousands [NGO report?] of non-government organizations (NGOs) all around the world actively doing stuff. The try to feed people, protect the environment, stop wars, heal diseases, protect animals and generally promote justice, equality and long term global sustainable. They have newsletters, websites, marketing campaigns, offices, retail outlets, vehicles, and many other resources, least of which is enthusiastic workers, volunteers and supporters.

At the Global Social Forum there were [report numbers] thousands of official delegates and even more supporters.

With the help of IndyMedia collectives, universities, colleges, independent technological enthusiasts and progressive Internet companies, most NGOs could be given free Internet access and general computer assistance to take part in the Common-Forum. With help of co-operative publishers, community radio and local outreach programs, the most highly NGO recommended articles could be made available to the public.

Description articles NGOs mind find useful could include:
- "People in high positions of power who are highly sympathetic to social causes"
- "Popular reporters who cover environmental issues"
- "Billionaire philanthropists"
- "Important government policy creation and court cases currently in progress"
- "Well researched counter tactics to corporate and conservative lobby activities"
- "Opportunities for political changes reflecting the interests of civil society"

Different types of non-government organizations would find specific definition articles most useful. For example:
- Environmental watchdog NGOs could use:
    - "Insider information about environmental disaster cover-ups"
- Anti-Corporate activists could use:
    - "Officially documented corporate bribes and scandals"
- Visible Minority Associations could use:
    - "Documented racist activities within major institutions"
- Anti-capitalist demonstrators could use:
    - "Successfully proven alternative economic models"

The work of the World Social Forum could continue around the clock with thousands of people worldwide deliberating to find consensus on a sensible and practical grand social plan. Well thought out suggestions found in progressive books, magazines, manuals and essays could be submitted, discussed and voted on. Professors from every university could be invited to review, critique and recommend elements of the plan according to their field of specialty. Civil engineers and local social workers could collaborate on plans for sensible and sustainable development in the most underdeveloped areas. Marketing professionals could design promotional campaigns to persuade consumers to modify their buying habits to better compliment ethics and sustainability. Transportation experts could collaborate with agricultural scientists to design new food distribution plans. Mechanical engineers could compile a recommendation list of affordable green technologies. Progressive economists and lawyers could collaborate with finance ministers to schedule economic reforms to redistribute wealth across society.

In summary, the democratic and collaborative potential of the Common-Forum could be the key ingredient to switching social progress towards the needs and control of civil society.

Other potential Scenarios

1. Deliberation to define the term "Aggression" as to be used by the International Criminal Court
2. Finding music (radical rap, European vocal blues, etc)
3. Finding healthy Recipes
4. Deliberating local community issue: what should be done with this years surplus budget?
5. Debating: Should we ban all violent weapons?
6. Posting an essay
7. Debating laws (linking directly to precedents)
8. Finding consensus on the goals of the anti-globalization movement
9. Searching for facts/checking facts of report

Book II: Common-Forum System Design

This section of the Project Plan is specifically for those people interested in the **underlying technical construction of the Common-Forum**.   It is in this portion of the document that programmers, developers, computer scientists and database experts will collaborate to define the specifications the Common-Forum will run on.

The design described here was created with the goals and ethics of the project (see Book III) in mind. Issues and ideas raised in the user experience discussion (Book I) should also inform the design outlined below.

Democratic Hard-code System Design

[There is probably a better term then "hard-code" to describe this idea. Any suggestions?]

Some aspects of this system will be completely open (e.g. file types), other elements will be modular (e.g. interfaces for how content is presented), while some fundamental aspects of the system will be virtually impossible to change once the system is in popular use. This last tier of permanent system design can be described as hard-coded or hard-wired. What is hard-coded could be understood as being **innate to the system**. This is the **system's nature that will define the limits of how we can possibly use the system in the future**.

Following the idea of communicationism, we must design these hard-coded elements of the system so they specifically **compliment the goals of our community as best as we understand.**

Within every decision made on this project development we must always ask ourselves: **will this decision establish an irreversible characteristic of the Common-Forum system design?** If so, the decision must be made democratically by the community. Depending on the importance of the decision, a larger sample and a larger majority will be necessary. Consensus should be reached when ever possible.

[Please give your critical assessment and technical suggestions for this section. It needs a lot of work.]

System Content

There are two main kinds of content in the Common-Forum:

1. **Articles**: a file of any format with associated Author ID, Article ID, and a publication date/time stamp
2. **Links**: data that defines a relationship between two articles (defined by an associated article), includes Author ID, Link ID, and a publication date/time stamp

Content is stored on distributed servers throughout the Internet. Certified complete indexes of the content are mirrored on many central high power servers across the net. Index fragment may also be duplicated on more local computers. Content is viewed on and submitted from client applications. The interface between the servers and client will be an open standard, creating the opportunity for many different client applications.

Interactions

- **Add articles**: files are indexed, uploaded and distributed through out the system.
- **Submit links**: this includes a link index entry and possibly the creation of a new link-definition article
- **Run Queries on indexes:** a simple as a **Boolean search**, as complex as **data mining algorithms**
- **Return Results**: a list of content from the article and link indexes
- **Retrieval:** find and transfer selected files to local client
- **View Content**: articles and links are presented using different kinds of browsers and templates.

Fundamental System Rules

These are the aspects of the design that are most necessary for the system to compliment the project goals. These rules will dictate what options are hard-coded in to the design. It is here that the policy and ideals as described in Book III will be expressed in very objective and functional terms. These rules should be democratically decided with extra care, intense deliberation and critical attention.

1. **Free**: there will be no cost to interact with the system
2. **Open source**: how the system works and the protocols it employs are non-proprietary and available to public scrutiny.
3. **Authenticated**: Index tables and files must be certified and authentic
4. **Permanent**: Once published an article or link can not be modified or deleted
5. **Infinite**: no limit to the number of links and articles that can created
6. **Diverse**: any kind of media can be used
7. **Efficient:** the system must make the best use of memory and processing power.
8. **Modular**: elements of the system should be independently upgradeable

Relationship Based Architecture

As you can see, this system has no hard-coded categories or taxonomies. Instead, the system will allow users to create and follow relationships of articles signified through links. Multiple and overlapping taxonomies and classifications will emerge from the patterns of relationships users create between articles that define topics and articles that discuss topics.

Queries

Queries **are requests for information**. They could be as simple as a keyword, author or date search, to as complicated as a data dining algorithm and statistical analysis.   By only selecting content that match set criteria, queries will return results that match user specific needs.

Variables used in Queries

- Link ID
- Author ID (of both links and articles)
- Article ID
- Link_title
- Aritcle_title
- Publication Date/Time
- File_name
- Variables within content of articles. Examples:
    - Metadata (e.g. XML tags)
    - Text
    - Image attributes

Backend Technical Specs (Needs to be Defined)

[The actual software, code, languages and architecture that the online portions of the Common-Forum will run on are at this point undecided.   Some rough suggestions include:

- XML based

- An apache module for the server side application

- An application within the freenet project protocol (freenetproject.org)

- SQL query interface

- Multiple mirrored index databases, but dispersed content servers

- High end Encryption to secure authenticity of content and IDs

- Distributed database analysis

Potential database systems

- MySQL

- PostgreSQL

- MS SQL server

- Oracle

- Berkeley DB

- Sybase

- A combination of:

  o McKoi   http://www.mckoi.com

  o Jtrix   http://www.jtrix.org

Please add your comments here...

Rough potential table structures:

Article Index Table					
artcle_ID	file_certification	aritlce_title	file_name	Publication Date/Time	Author_ID

Link Index Table						
link_ID	associated_article_ID	link_title	article_A_ID	article_B_ID	Publication Date/Time	Author_ID

Your comments...?

Development Releases

Alpha Version 1.0a - Simple online demo

The goal of this first version of the Common-Forum is to simply demonstrate and test the system design and principles. It will be a flexible and affordable system to let us experiment with different options that we may wish to hard-code into the next version.

The system should be produced and promoted to encourage a wide range of participation from civil society for both testing and feedback purposes.

This version should
- demonstrate the main aspects of the system design, including:
    - the submission of articles and creation of links
    - complex queries that make use of author reputations
    - multiple and flexible interfaces
- be quick, and affordable to build, modify and maintain
- be able to sustain 5000 international users who each add on average 3 articles and 7 links every week
- support the integration and syndication of content from and to already established civil society web services (e.g. mailing lists, web sites, bulletin boards)

To achieve these goals, this demo system will be built as follows:
- a massive (possibly mirrored) online database that supports popular web services like PHP and CGI [PostgreSQL?]
- secure author identification (if the author so chooses)[SSH, PGP or a more preferred technology?]
- the syndication of content should follow established protocols [XML-RPC?]
- articles would be submitted either through a text field, or as a 250 KB max file upload (RFC1867).
- Simple bots could submit content from popular blogs, news sites, discussion forums and mailing lists,
- plug-ins could be created to syndicate Common-Forum articles into scoop, Phorum, postnuke, phpBB etc.
    - these plug-ins would select articles according to queries tailored by the site masters
    - simple forms could also be included to make simple critiquing links (e.g. recommendations)
- simple tags could be released to allow any web master to include Common-Forum headlines on their site
- common-forum.net could provide direct access to the database through varied HTML interfaces, including:
    - popular queries
    - debate specific interfaces
    - simple linking interfaces
    - query wizards for general assisted searches
    - reputation statistics

Within the common-forum.net site authors could be easily identified for reputation building. External hosts/syndicates could also possibly integrate their identification mechanisms.

Because this version will most likely be limited in potential scale, it may be a good idea to privilege content that is found to be of most importance by civil society. Such content could be recognized through recommendations by reputable citizens, (reputation recognized by metric of trust signified through links). If the system begins to be overloaded, content should be removed in order of importance.

Beta Version 1.0b - Core foundation

- Provides the core and fundamental design of the back-end Common Forum system
- Concerned with the expansive potential of the design.
- User interface should be left as open as possible
- Address
    - o Open browsing and authoring standards
    - o Unlimited file format and size
    - o The highest of query complexity
    - o Speed and efficiency
    - o Multiple Languages
    - o Security
    - o Stability
    - o Reliability
    - o Mass Data storage and access
    - o Mass Scaling
    - o Modular and flexible
    - o Unique ID confirmation and Authentication
    - o System monitoring

At this stage it may advantages to release a simple HTML interface for the Common-Forum that emulates current online forum systems, e.g. scoop, slashdot, phpnuke/postnuke, Ultimate Bulletin Board, phorum, etc. The interface could be a modified version of each of these applications, except it would use the Common-Forum's common database to store and retrieve content. This would be an effective way of gaining presence within the online community and a way of filling the forum with useful and threaded content.

To give the forum real value it must contain useful and important references. Efforts will need to be coordinated on imputing such resources. Text that are already available on online or on CD seem to be an obvious starting point. Special attention must be paid on maintaining the authority and legitimacy of these texts as they had in their original format. Some suggestions may include: the complete transfer and hypertexting of all bibliographic content and footnotes; and authentication of text by authors, librarians, peers, etc. Content already in XML format would be ideal candidates for inclusion into the system.

Version 1.0 - Basic User Interface

- Provides the essential components of the client side application.
- Create several applications for a variety of users
- Improved usability should allow users to accomplish difficult communication goals
- Issues to be Addressed
    - o Searching options
    - o Interface templates
    - o Encouraging authorship
    - o Practical query options

Version 2.0 - Socialy Minded Interfaces

- Insures fundamental design and all options for upgrading promote a collectively defined social progress
- Address
    - o Mass collective decision-making modules

- o Community development
- o Culture
- o Censorship
- o Economics
- o Accessibility
- o Ecology

Version 3.0 - Offline access

- Demonstrate a diversity of simple and affordable methods for publishing and contributing to the common forum from technologies besides network PCs
- Examples
    - o Telephone
    - o Local Print and copy
    - o broadsheet
    - o post
    - o broadcasting
- provide resources (e.g. equipment, designers, writers, etc) for improving the clarity and comprehendability of democratically chosen queries.

Version 4.0 - Institutional access

- Establish long term and sustainable methods for offline participation in all regions of the globe

Book III: Project Goals, Ethics and Analysis

To build a technology for mass deliberation known as the Common-Forum: a united, efficient and sustainable communication system that will eventually allow all global citizens to take part in an informed and constructive democratic decision-making process.

The ideal characteristics of the Common-Forum are derived from the 150-page document: *Ideal Public Discourse Technology (Ideal PDT)* by Jason Diceman. A PDF version of this document is available in the *downloads* section of communicationism.org or the *reports* section of jasondiceman.com. Please see this Ideal PDT document for the **reasoning behind** the goals of the Common-Forum

Bellow is a brief and updated overview of the main ideals suggested within Ideal PDT. These ideals will serve as the fundamental goals for the design of the Common-Forum.

A Common Discourse

The system should **encourage participation in a central discourse**. Members of a community should be able to easily find and take part in a public conversation that addresses the common interests of their community. Currently our media systems are following a trend, which is the **opposite of shared: fragmentation**. This is where discussions that relate to the same topic are **isolated** from each other. The other alternative tends to be a broadcast model where elites dictate the popular media, (predominantly in the interest of the capitalist class).

Alternatively, the recommendation and relating of content in the Common-Forum should encourage the emergence of popular articles and discussions that are organically and democratically decided.

Accessibility - Ability to freely and easily participate.

Accessibility is about breaking down the **barriers** to using a communication technology. The Common-Forum system should **allow all citizens equal and complete access to the reception, transmission and organization of public messages,** i.e. everyone can be an author, reader and critic.

Barriers come in many forms: physical, economic, social, cultural, temporal, linguistic, spatial, instructional and more. Barriers to access are created through incompatible relationships between community members and their technology. The design and implementation of the Common-Forum will need to keep all kinds of global citizens in mind. Many forms of **outreach, assistance, training and general support** will be required to reduce the barriers for the most marginalized citizens. *See: Book I - Other interfaces*

A barrier also occurs when a system cannot handle the **amount of interested participants**, i.e. overload. Possible solutions to this dilemma include turn-taking and access through representation. But the Common-Forum aims to go beyond such imperfect solutions and instead work **to allow for sustained interactive participation of all community members at any time**.

Support Free Speech

The Common-Forum **will not limit participants in what they can communicate nor edit content beyond the author's desires.** Citizens will individually choose (using sophisticated queries) what they will read and what they will ignore.

Users will also have the option to submit content **anonymously** in order to protect theme against persecution. By anonymous, we mean their personal identity is not included in the system, although they may choose to use repeatedly use the same author ID (for instance, to build a reputation).

To ensure citizens are not restricted in what they can communicate within the Common-Forum, the system should also have **no limits to how much content is submitted**. All content must also be **available for an infinite amount of time.**

A special effort will also need to be made to **allow for diverse kinds of media**, (e.g. graphics, animations, video, sculpture, projections, installations, etc.).

NOTE: The community **may choose to restrict access to certain extreme kinds of content**. For example: any content judged by an elected panel of highly respected individuals to directly promote violence and hatred, could be locked up in a special library that may only be accessed by responsible adults for research purposes. Methods for limiting access for young children may also be a point of contention. These cultural and social issues must be dealt with by the community in a democratic fashion. A metaphor: **just weeding the garden of poisoness plants, not esthetic gardening.**

Continuous (always up to date)

The Common-Forum will **always provide the opportunity for contribution** and will also make that contribution **immediately available to the public.**

Clarity of communication

The Common-Forum will promote the mutual interpretation of messages sent and received. One simple method for improving clarity is to include definitions of all terms and signs used in each submission, (e.g. a glossary of terms). The system should also **provide techniques for easy, efficient, useful and accurate feedback from message recipients to the content producers (i.e. readers should have the ability to ask** questions of other authors).

Accuracy of Information

The Common-Forum will **employ the skills of many reputable independent experts** *(see: Book I - Trust Metric)* **to recognize and explain what information is of the greatest accuracy**. The system will also **provide direct access to the documented original sources** of any information and will **also present the basic expert knowledge required to judge the accuracy of a piece of information** in direct relationship to the information being discussed.

Encourage a diversity of perspectives

There is no such thing as objectivity. Even with facts that are accurate, there is always bias in what is chosen to be researched and how it is presented. The Common-Forum will **not claim to be objective.**

Instead of trying to eliminate bias (which is impossible), the system will attempt to balance bias by **giving all biases an equal opportunity.** The Common-Forum will **encourage a complete diversity of perspectives on ever issue.**
[Must avoid reinforce views/fragmentation.
How? Newsletter idea. Cultural. Institutional.]

Deliberation for Consensus (was "Debate constructiveness")

The Common-Forum will promote and support discussion and debate not as a method of simply convincing others, but as **a process of deliberation for drawing out knowledge, understanding, wisdom and insight.** The aim for constructive deliberation is **mutual and united acceptance of common values and the discovery of truth.** The Common-Forum will be **the legitimate communication tool to facilitate informed consensus decision-making**

To encourage such critical deliberation, the Common-Forum **will present conflicting arguments in relation to each other.** The system will **promote interaction between differing views and will assist the development and analysis of rational arguments.**

It is also very important that the system **encourages decision-making in relation to community needs. The deliberation process needs to lead to applicable decisions in a timely fashion**. Debates must be **founded in and guided by accepted and defined common community philosophical and social** values (e.g. a Constitution or Charter). The decision-making process must be designed to **practically solve problems and set courses of actions within the limits of the available resources.**

Efficiency in Finding Content of Interest and Importance

Probably the greatest challenge for designing the Common-Forum will be the methods needed for **effective sorting and finding of relevant messages.** Users must be able to use the system to access specific content both for their personal interests and for the process of deliberation. Citizens must have **important information brought to their attention,** but at the same time **avoid messages that they deem irrelevant**. In general, the Common-Forum should **facilitate content presentation based on a combination of personal requests and public suggestions.**

Understandable Presentation of Options

Even if users are able to find content that suites their needs, they may still find the sheer number and diversity of options overwhelming. To avoid such information overload, the Common-Forum must **employ methods of limiting the presentation of information to amounts that are comprehensible and comfortable for each user.**

Relating Content to Encourage Knowledge Creation

Constructive deliberation requires every message to be understood in an appropriate context. Common-Forum users must be able to easily **bridge concepts, compare, juxtapose** and **relate information** to create knowledge. The system needs to **encourage users to structure information presentations in such ways that reveal greater meanings such as patterns and complex relationships.**

Usability of Contribution and Navigation

In general, the Common-Forum interfaces must **satisfy user goals as effectively possible, within the scope of constructive public deliberation**. The authorship of messages and navigation through content should

be **efficient and enjoyable**. The system should encourage **successful communication and critical deliberation, and avoid frustrating users.**

Surveying to Discover Public Opinions and Voting to Make Democratic Decisions

Without going into a heavy discussion of the different models of democracy, their is a commonly accepted belief that democratic decisions require some kind of formal polling. Assuming this is true, the Common-Forum should **include diverse methods of surveying the community to discover what are the public opinions and also support methods for formal civic voting**. Because the design of such polling mechanisms determines the kind of results they may produce, **this aspect of the system needs to remain very flexible and open to new alternative designs**.

Important Questions of Development Policy

- What are the ethical standards the Common-Forum developers must follow?
- What political objectives do we seek with the Common-Forum?
- What relationship should the project have to:
    - globalization protests?
    - civil society organizations?
    - traditional civic forums (e.g. town halls, Houses of Parliament)?
    - Business communications?
- What should be our stand on communication laws, including:
    - intellectual property rights (e.g. copyright, patents, trademarks)?
    - slander and liable?
    - violent content (e.g. hate material, child pornography, homicidal instructions)?
- Are there any charters or treaties the system should be founded on (e.g. Human Rights, Right to Communicate)
- What should our priorities be:
    - on language
    - accessibility
    - out reach programs
- Should we encourage certain kinds of discussion? Is so, what should they be?
- What is more important: privacy or accountability?
- What are the acceptable ways of representing this project to the public?
- What are acceptable forms of financial relationships the project can have with private enterprises and persons?
- Who should be our primary invitees to first use the system?

Relevant Quotes

In 1951, **Harold Adams Innis** wrote:

"We can perhaps assume that the use of a medium of communication over a long period will to some extent determine the character of knowledge to be communicated and suggest that its pervasive influence will eventually create a civilization in which life and flexibility will become exceedingly difficult to maintain and that the advantages of a new medium will become such as to lead to the emergence of a new civilization."[1]

[1] Innis, Harold A. "The Bias of Communication", *The Bias of Communication,*   University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1971., p.34

Habermas popularly introduced the term "public sphere" in his book Strukturwandel der Offentlicheit (The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere). His definition of the public sphere refers to a space in modern societies "in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is a space where citizens deliberated about common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (Fraser 2)[2]

For Habermas, "...the public sphere connoted an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion was to be open and accessible to all; merely private interests were to be inadmissible; inequalities of status were to be bracketed; and discussants were to deliberate as peers. The result of such discussion would be 'public opinion' in the strong sense of a consensus about the common good" (Habermas 4) (Fraser 4)

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[2] Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere." Habermas abd the Public Sphere, ed. Calhoun, Craig. Cambridge: MIT Press,   1992.

Appendix 1 (ideas and rough campaign notes)

Your Support is Needed

- Money
    - o to pay dedicated programmers
    - o for hardware
- System Design consultation
    - o Micro and macro scenario writing (e.g. "What if a blind kid wants to access the C-fourm in Hebrew?" or "What effect might this technology have on the US suburbs?")
- ethical design consultation
    - o out reach and fair representation of 'non-techies' interests
    - o social, cultural and ecological concerns
- Programming
    - o C-forum server apps
    - o Client Browser/Author applications
    - o Content Bots
- Testing
    - o Interfaces
    - o Security
- Adding content
- Linking and reviewing
- Moral approval
- Promotion

Benefits of the Common-Forum

- no advertising
- choose the character of the content (eg length, language, quality)
- every news article, encyclopedia entry research report, essay, recorded songs and videos: categorized, organized, searchable, rated & reviewed
- it's free
- thousands of professional & expert opinions eg lawyers, doctors, designers, artists, journalists, scientists, researchers, egineers, social workers, trade master craft-persons etc

- Auto upgrade/update options
    - o Queries
    - o Presentation methods
- use metadata from W3C Semantic Web initiative, and the **Dublin Core Metadata Initiative**

security ideas
- picture recognition
- sounds recognition (eg. laughter VS crying)

Logic and Reason (Rationality)

- ideas that come out on top from a debate should be the most **sound and rational**.
- Techniques should be used to **reduce** the **influence of factors** that are **not related** to the body of the **arguments**.
+**An ideal public discourse technology will promote the rewarding of reason and fact over other persuasive factors.**

liminating distractions from reason
- facilitate the **recognition of what is logical**
- **avoidance** of what is **inconsequential** to the topic being debated.
- easily **compare the ideas being presented** without being distracted by **differences in presentation**.
 +**An ideal public discourse technology will allow participants to avoid unnecessary presentation form and style differences between arguments within a debate**.

- common distraction from reason is the **status** of those presenting an argument.
+**An ideal public discourse technology will promote the analysis of messages for their own merit, not that of the authors**.

Recognition of logic
- **logical structuring** of arguments to help participants analyze the rationality of arguments
 +**An ideal public discourse technology would employ methods of making the strengths and weaknesses of arguments most apparent.**

Productive decision making for <u>public benefit</u>

- debating needs to be restricted to a dialogue that can **lead to applicable decisions in a timely fashion**.
+**An ideal public discourse technology will promote productive decision making in relation to community needs.**

Apendix 2 – Constitutions

Common-Forum Development Group Constitution v1.0

Agreement to this constitution defines the members of the Common-Forum Development Group. Membership is recognized whenever a member ratifies the current version of the constitution, immediately after which it begins to fade until ratified again.

We the people who will help develop the Common-Forum public discourse technology agree to the following:
1. To collectively take responsibility for the Common-Forum's design and structural production.
2. To actively listen to each other and the people from civil society. To pay attention, ask questions, and discuss in order to best understand what people are trying to tell us.
3. To cooperate with each other to be as constructive as possible
4. To voice concerns that we think are important to the stakeholders of this project
5. To not hide personal agendas related to the projects development. To be honest and transparent in the work we do and decisions we make.
6. To work with civil societies best interests in mind and to make the most effort to understand what civil societies best interests really are.

7. To make suggestions for how the constitution can be improved and to take part in evolving this constitution

The greatest of effort should be made to ensure there is only one constitution to define the group who takes responsibility for Common-Forum development. If there is fracturing in the cohesion of the development group or those interested in joining the group, it may be necessary to modify this constitution to encompass multiple subgroups. But this single constitution must remain the common umbrella of agreements to promote cooperation between all developers.   Subgroups may wish to have their own constitutions, but such sub-constitutions must remain in agreement with the common umbrella constitution.