Different groups, but with shared agendas
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Over the last year, there has been an interesting evolution on the web.

Open Social is a network that allows developers to deploy applications and 'gadgets' across multiple platforms. The Open Web Foundation is evolving into a group that will house a lot of existing open technologies. The DiSo Project is an umbrella group of technologies that enable distributed social networking. The DataPortability Project is an independent advocacy group promoting interoperability through open standards and user control over data. Different personalities drive each of these efforts, but they constantly cross paths that they've become more than just casual acquaintances. Whether they like to admit it however, one thing is sure: their common agenda will influence the way the web and the Internet will be adopted in future.

There has been a perception (as evidenced in the problem statement) that these groups are competing with each other. This is a mistake, and in fact, the only thing they can compete with is attention! But what is not realised, is that even with a shifting spotlight between these groups, the spotlight will still be shown on their core activities which are common.

The DataPortability Project is slightly different from these groups in that to further its vision, it advocates existing efforts and tries to shape the conversation. As the Vice-Chair of the Project, it is more appropriate for me to speak on behalf of it rather than make any sweeping statements of these other groups. But I will flag that I'm involved in the above mentioned groups - lurker or more - and I wouldn't be doing so if I didn't see synergies with the work we are doing.

The year 2008 was a year of foundation for the DataPortability Project, as it was for the various other groups mentioned above. Having all formed at the same time, it has taken time for them to mature, sort out their organisational issues, and focus on the original task at hand. However whilst the DataPortability Project invested a substantial portion of 2008 establishing its core foundations (like governance, process and other issues), we are now starting to really see a lot of work being output. We now have work-in-progress at various stages on the following areas:

- a dynamic grid tool that will assess companies and websites with their compliance with open standards and other facets with our vision

- a health care task force that is expanding our work into other industries beyond social media and social networks

- a EULA and Terms of Service taskforce that will be establishing a set of templates that sites can adopt to provide a standard way of describing the relationship between user and the site, in the spirit of Creative Commons but for data beyond just media (like personal information)

and several others quietly working in the background which will be announced in due time.

And yet, what you will notice is that our work will benefit the other groups. Our Grid Tool, which webservices will be able to query the API to retrieve data, will give a means of tracking compliance of the open standards we support (like the ones under the future custody of the Open Web Foundation). The EULA and ToS task force will create a 'policy' deliverable that will complement the currently 'technology' solution of the DiSo Project (and which again, are technologies linked to the Open Web Foundation). There are certainly many more examples of how each of these groups are pursuing activities that complement each other, and that under the broader picture, are advancing a common cause.

So what does this mean? Time will tell - but these are several groups with bases across the world with supporters in the major companies innovating in this sphere like Google and Yahoo. One thing these groups all in common have and which will see them drive independently or together, is that of distributed social networking. Social Networking is evolving into a feature of the web ecosystem, rather than a traditional destination site that has been known through MySpace and Facebook - an ecosystem that includes anything that can be connected to the Internet. And it's a flavour being styled in a way these groups want it to be: open.