

Speech for the Milan Community Network's 10th birthday

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Bon Giorno,

I'm delighted to be here with all of you electronically and in spirit and to be a part of and witness to a most important occasion. The 10th anniversary of any experiment let alone a social experiment and let alone a social experiment involving technology is a major achievement. If one sees that for Information and Communications Technology, a generation is roughly 18 months, then RCM is now into its 7th generation—almost 200 years old in people time!

I've watched and been inspired by RCM for over half of its lifetime and for almost all of my own period of involvement in somewhat parallel and occasionally overlapping activities. I've been inspired because RCM seemed to combine what I consider to be the most important characteristics of community based initiatives—local control, responsiveness to local concerns and a capacity to innovate and respond as conditions change and perhaps most important to have an effective involvement with and influence on its local environment and through that the larger global environment.

I'm currently the Interim Chair of the Community Informatics Research Network which is a global network of researchers concerned with enabling communities with Information and Communications Technologies. Fiorella and RCM are founding members of that Network and one of its key anchors and models in that they combine both practical activities and strong and growing links to research. The intent with CIRN is both to support the practice of empowering communities with ICTs through research but also to provide a means for the practice of community technology to reflect and grow and to develop the self-knowledge and documentation through which it can influence the policy environment in which it is embedded.

Community Informatics is an inter-disciplinary approach to communities and technology combining computing and engineering with social science and social practice. In this Community Informatics presents a challenge to technology and technologists to respond to the needs of those who wish to use technology to better their daily lives. Equally it presents a challenge to academics and academic researchers to move beyond narrow and self-reflexive disciplines towards an engagement with the ways in which technology is and can be made to transform the world. Finally it presents a challenge to policy makers to recognize the ways in which ICTs are now making possible new modes of governance, of self-organization and self-management and to provide those in communities with the means to respond effectively to their own challenges.

In all of these RCM has been a leader and a moral compass for my work in Canada and now the US and for the emerging activities and influence of the broader CI Research Network.

So, a toast to RCM, to the next ten years...