



# Digital dreams: the last word from LA

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This is my final blog from a terrific day of [debate](#) in Los Angeles about the future of social participation and media. It must have been a good [conference](#) because it has made me think very hard, think a bit more clearly and change my mind.





First, here's my overall reaction to this gathering of very clever, committed and creative thinkers and doers. On the critical side it seemed to me that most of the participants seemed to ignore the value of the market. Everyone seemed to want non-profit journalism that exists for a political purpose, isolated from concerns about audience or funding. This ignores the value of competition in producing journalism that is excellent and relevant (whoever actually produces it...). It ignores the importance of market forces in helping to allocate resources. I thought [Manuel Castells](#)' speech was interesting in this regard. He spoke about how much of the Internet is becoming 'corporatised'. But he also pointed out that by its very massive nature, it is hard for big business to capture entire, and so allows space for alternative forms of production and distribution to develop. But my point is that those other forms of communications or journalism have to be as good, in fact, better than the dominant commercial offerings. There seemed a tendency for people here to define journalism in terms of the kind of media *they* want and which *they* like to consume. Everyone wants a walled garden of highly political and liberal informational advocacy – but that's not necessarily diversity. Nor is it really a model for a whole society. Do we really want only elitist journalism funded by foundations? Ideas are a market place and democracy depends on that competition of ideas.

And let's be realistic. People will only want to participate in media when it is worth it. The rest of their lives will remain more important. You can't force everyone to become journalists or politicians. That is why journalists and politicians evolved in the first place. They serve vital functions. That is why it is even more important that the new journalism is competitive.

I was delighted that my favoured concept of [Networked Journalism](#) seems to have widespread acceptance here as a way of bringing the public into the heart of the process. And I was impressed by the recognition that dynamics are more important than prescriptions. I come away a bit more optimistic. The degree of commitment and intelligence shown by this largely American group of people pays testament to the resources being mobilised on this set of issues in the States. I have heard both dystopian and utopian visions today, but when you emerge in to the Californian sunshine it is difficult not to want to imagine a positive way forward.

Go [here](#) for Ethan Zuckerman's excellent conference blog.

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