

## **Abstract**

### ***Gathering Open Source Information and Turning it into Intelligence*** **Adrian Taylor, Director, Policy and Strategy Advice, European School of Governance, Germany**

#### Information is abundant

Society was once governed by the notion that “information is power”. This maxim is now dead, even if a number of organisations, and especially governments, structure themselves as if it were still true. The rise of Open Source Information is inexorable, even if unevenly spread by theme or geography. It is also not limited to the internet, as some people believe, even if the internet is clearly the area where its rise is most visible. Given that the constraint is no longer access to information, the challenge has become how to turn the overwhelming masses of information available into something that can be used for meaningful action – i.e. intelligence.

#### Intelligence is much rarer

Turning information into intelligence requires a close verification of whose opinions are being presented, the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the people who are writing or acting on the ground, and above all, the willingness and desire to share information in creative formats with other experts and non-experts, so as to develop an insight into the big picture. The latter point of sharing is something that many in the governmental world find particularly difficult to handle, even within a single country (between agencies for instance), let alone internationally.

#### Tools can help

Developing scenarios as part of this is extremely desirable, as future thinking lends itself to creative and insightful discussions, and can help break down the silos, as the challenges then described do not concern today’s struggles for power. Moreover, once something happens it is usually too late to do anything but react. Hence the need to anticipate, and in some cases try to prevent trigger events from starting an undesirable chain reaction. Using software to visualise such conversations carries also a considerable benefit, both in allowing us to “outsource the brain” by creating a collective image of what is understood to be happening, and to allow us to “play” with the results. Playing is not a matter of child’s play, but a means of developing cogent insight.