**OuiShare and LiteMap test**
Project report

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# OuiShare internal communications: background

OuiShare as a global community operates mainly on two levels: daily with the help of digital tools, and by gathering twice a year for offline Summits where discussions and debates on important matters are held face-to-face.

Additionally OuiShare local communities work in ways they find best related to the people and cultures involved, which sometimes means more offline activities, as MPRL (Meet People in Real Life) is one of [OuiShare's pronounced values](#).[1]

OuiShare's most active members are called [Connectors](#). They are community and project leaders who connect ideas, people and organizations around the collaborative economy.[2]

Until 2014, the only place for common online discussion and sharing crucial information between OuiShare Connectors was a closed Facebook group. This posed several problems, as all Connectors did not have a Facebook account; the social media network could be distracting, and due to information overload it was not certain that everyone would be notified of an important post in due time.

Day-to-day decisions happened over private e-mail threads or offline conversations. The remaining communication took place in local and thematic Facebook groups, where we started to observe a decrease in interaction, probably due to the same side-effects mentioned above.

By the end of 2014, it was decided to introduce OuiShare Connectors to new communication tools Loomio, Slack and Metamaps in order to make information and day-to-day decisions more easily available and transparent to less involved connectors.

Over the following months, moving to three new digital tools had significant impact on the way the community had conversations and shared information.

**Loomio** has successfully replaced Facebook group debates and enables making decisions by voting on a proposal emerging from a discussion.

**Slack** is used for fast cross-community information sharing and has replaced discussions over e-mail and private chats. Communication streams are represented as channels that any Connector can join. As of August 2015, 66% of Slack posts are direct 1-to-1 messages.

**Metamaps** is used for mapping any kind of information, relationships, and ideas. Despite personal support and coaching by the Metamaps team, the tool has not found wide adoption yet, most probably because the majority of community members people don't have time, don't feel the need for or have difficulties grasping non-linear thinking processes.

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[1] [http://ouishare.net/about/values](http://ouishare.net/about/values)
[2] [http://ouishare.net/about/team](http://ouishare.net/about/team)

# Report. Feedback and suggestions

The test period lasted eventually from February to the beginning of August 2015, during which 7 extensive maps were created based on data from different online and offline sources. Most Litemap instances were created by a single person, one map was created by a small group of people. The resources contain conversations and direct information from groups of different sizes (10-60 people), as well as documents, books or parts of common knowledge.

Subsequently we will give a summary of the testing process, and an overview of use cases based on different mapping and data collecting methods, pointing out related issues and observations. A following "Maps" appendix will list all the created maps with screenshots, as well as their source materials where available.

## Description of testing process

We launched the Litemap-OuiShare collaboration at the end of January with a digicall between the project leaders of both sides. An initial list of bugs and requests was made from OuiShare perspective, after which Litemap team proceeded to implement some changes on the tool, we created OuiShare group and started the first maps.

At the beginning of March, a status report was exchanged, admitting the changes in OuiShare workflow, and the continued difficulties with mapping user experience. In mid-March OuiShare Fest team organised the tweet chat on collaborative economy that gave input to Map 3.

By the end of April the Litemap team had implemented the ability to change node types, full window map view options, a hideable sidebar for displaying node information, and simplified the creation of connections between nodes.

We used LiteMap with selected community discussions in OuiShare Summit at the end of June, and in mid-July the project leader went to meet LiteMap team in the Open University in Milton Keynes, UK.

## Possible mapping scenarios

### One mapper harvesting a debate or conversation happening in multiple offline, online, closed and open spaces

This method was used in case of Map 1 (E-mail management solutions), Map 2A and 2B (Issues around usage of digital tools).

Creating these maps took place at the beginning of the testing when adding a node was only available through a system of several layers of popup windows with several fields that needed to be filled each time. As the data often needed to be checked and copied from another document or program, it was easy to get lost between the windows during the copy-paste process.

In immediate feedback we suggested simplifying the node add process, and replacing the pop-ups with CSS layers which was partly implemented by the end of the testing period.

At the beginning it was hard to understand the conversation structure expected by LiteMap (division of Issues, Ideas, and polarized Pro/Con arguments) and fit conversations into these. The sources of maps 2A and 2B were simple text- or mindmap-based overviews of all digital tools our community uses, and categorized issues and bottlenecks one should consider within such a context. It felt artificial to fit a category tree into a debate-like structure. However the ability to create additional relationships between issues and issue groups, and to see their visualisations in alternative map views adds better value to the general overview than a simple mindmap depiction.

As a result from OuiShare feedback to the first maps, the strict structure was somewhat relaxed by enabling adding several levels of Issues. Later it became also possible to add simple comments, non-polarized arguments, and to change the category of a node.

## One mapper harvesting a conversation on the public web

According to the proposal, this was the principal planned method of work. The method was used fully in the case of **Map 3** where highlights from a tweet chat were harvested with the help of a Storify collection[3].

The bookmarklet worked well, although it had problems interacting with and placing bookmarks correctly in Twitter posts, which is probably due to Twitter API.

It was much easier putting nodes on the map while the conversation was already gathered mostly in one place (Storify). It would have been great to be able to track the authors of tweets in some way and draw LiteMap analytics based on that information, but such a feature may be complicated to develop.

## Mapping an offline community conversation

This method was used with maps 4 and 5. Conversations took place during OuiShare Summit #6 at the end of June 2015 in Italy, where over 50 Connectors and Members gathered for the semi-annual event -- 3 days of working and discussions. Two conversations were chosen and documented for the mapping.

As wifi was scarce and slow during the event, most documentation was created offline (with offline digital tools or as notes or mindmaps on paper), and LiteMap instances were created later.

First, we had a small 1-hour session with a group of 8 people (OuiCare, Map 4). During the session a paper mindmap was created by the session documentors that was then converted to a digital offline mindmap by session leader and testing leader. Later the session points were synthesized to fit LiteMap structure.

Secondly, we had a 2-3 hours long session with a code name OuiShare Democracy (Map 5) that included almost all 50+ participants broken into groups, with conclusions delivered at the end of the day. The wrap-up session was concurrently added on a mindmap that was shared with the community but received no immediate feedback. Later the repeating issues and questions were synthesized and added on LiteMap which was then shared in the community but has not gained any specific feedback yet.

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[3] https://storify.com/OuiShare/ouishare-fest-15-tweet-chat-lost-in-transition

For both maps we had planned to complete the LiteMap instances based on offline documentation and with participation of other people from the original discussions, thus testing group features. However the interested people were not available after the Summit, and the eventual group mapping attempt was not as successful as we hoped, as explained in the next point.

## Mapping with a group of people

In order to test out the collaboration features and statistics LiteMap offers, we invited available and interested Connectors to take part in the process, giving them beforehand some explanations and links to already created maps, and proposing times for a 2-hour hangout to work on a map together. A group of three participants was interested and available to meet via an online hangout to address the task.

We had planned to continue collaborative mapping based on the Summit conversation maps, as this was something all of us were aware of and interested in. However as the hangout started with many questions and comments about LiteMap itself, it was spontaneously proposed to create a "LiteMap feedback" map (Map 6), reflecting the user experience process itself. In the end it took us all of the allocated time (2+ hours) to create nodes on the feedback map.

During the process, we realised that, before a group mapping, we need to synchronise our understanding on what mapping options are available, to define common symbols. It is complicated and time-consuming because everybody thinks differently. It is also necessary to have very good technical knowledge on the tool before a mapping session, currently the adoption threshold is quite high. (Unfortunately people were not able to spend additional time on learning to use the tool, because everyone is constantly overloaded, a typical OuiShare issue that is also reflected on the community discussion maps.)

We also missed searchable text-based documentation with screenshots on how to use some features. Currently all tutorials are available in video format, but it is not possible to quickly search for a specific answer.

As this happened at the end of the testing period, we were happy to use the quick-add features on LiteMap (adding nodes with a click on the map), and enjoyed the improved simplicity of creating relationships between nodes (right click and drag).

# Conclusion

Currently a reasonable mapping process on LiteMap is possible in case there is a previously existing well organised offline synthesis of a conversation or topic, so that LiteMap adds just the digitizing aspect to it, and the mapping process is carried out by one person to avoid possible access and edit conflicts.

In order to have the best quality and well organised maps, quite a lot of preparatory work needs to be done on a topic or conversation before it can be mapped.

The mapper needs to have extensive understanding of how LiteMap works technically and structurally, which can also take quite some time. Argument process is not native to most people and does not necessarily accommodate the variety of conversation structures emerging in a collaborative group.

It is hard to use LiteMap at its current state for mapping collaboratively because of the complex user interface and restricted data edit access, as well as the time delay it takes to see others' changes.

It is nearly not possible to use LiteMap in a live documentation process. The situation has improved with the node Quick Add features, but the brainstorming speed in a live session is too high to enable capturing all the ideas effectively. Also in the case of internet connectivity issues one risks losing valuable information.

Currently it is nearly not possible to engage normal (not tech-savvy) users in the mapping or even viewing process. On one hand it may be caused by the nature of OuiShare community, characterized by high level of focused commitment in pre-defined projects either in- or outside the community (or both), where the global network and its knowledge base serves as a pool of resources of immediate interest, necessity, availability and usability. Additionally the state of the map currently requires specific attention and commitment at the entry level which is not something that the community members typically take time for: a digital tool is preferably seen as means to an end, not a focal point in itself.

The biggest challenge for LiteMap is to become attractive enough to naturally call for user engagement. The aspects of general aesthetics, overall visuals, primary engagement patterns and usability need to be taken care of. It would be good to lower the overall barrier of entry and work on tutorials, keeping in mind the speed and ease of finding options and answers, so that the user can spend the maximum available time on working with the actual data.

Nevertheless we see LiteMap as a tool of great potential, especially considering the presence of the entire Catalyst toolset and its interoperability. In addition to the collaborative mode, LiteMap has possibilities for extensive analytics, as well as for displaying and arranging data in different ways, which could be used for a variety of purposes like interactive presentations or as collaboratively created illustration material.

## Suggestions for further development

**Improve user experience and design**

The greatest difficulty in using LiteMap, mentioned by each participant, is the complexity of the user interface and design in general. There were some improvements made during testing as for simplifying adding and connecting the nodes, as well as the mouse-over titles. However when arriving at a map, the node and relationship texts are not in immediately readable size. When zooming in to readable size, one loses overview of the entire map.

As a mapper, it is hard to navigate and understand what one can and is supposed to do. There are too many options that are not intuitively understandable. The live editing experience is lacking the instantaneity of familiar collaboration tools like Google Drive. Due to restricted node access management (in more detail below) it is not currently possible to use it for mapping with a group of people. It is hard to hit the tiny icons on each node that enable interactions with the content. It is not possible to change the type of a node after it's linked to another.

**Add flexibility to the access controls system**

In a collaborative process all nodes and connections need to be editable by other group members or at least some of them. Group participants are often volunteers who pass by, contribute a little and move on, while their contributions need to be organised or changed later by others. Currently it is not possible to edit any other nodes or relationships than one's own.

For example Metamaps uses access control by 3 map and/or node types: Private - Public - Commons.

| Map/node type | Editable by | Viewable by |
|---|---|---|
| Private | Owner | Owner |
| Public | Owner | Anyone |
| Commons | Anyone | Anyone |

It would also be great to be able to share access and edit rights by group members. Considering that full wiki-like approaches often lead to spam issues, it would be good for communities to be able to restrict the edit access to group rather than leave it open to full public. In case of private or closed maps, at least group admins should have the ability to edit data on the map.

The viewing rights should also be reconsidered. There are community conversations that are held in circles within the group with no immediate public access.[4] Some data may be sensitive at a time, but become public later. Sometimes people are not comfortable expressing themselves even in closed group space, or consider the information not relevant, which could explain 66% of OuiShare Slack posts being private messages rather than posts on a stream accessible by the whole community.

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[4] *Some of the rationales for having mostly closed (rather than open) Facebook groups since the beginning have been keeping the quality of conversations, having new people introduce themselves to nurture more responsibility and personal relationships, and creating more community feeling by making sure that each new member has some personal contacts within the community beforehand and is not just joining an anonymous online group.*

| Map/node type | Editable by | Viewable by |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Group private | Owner / Group | Group |
| Group commons | Group | Anyone |

**Rethink the focus**

LiteMap could have a lot of added value as a tool for simple mind-mapping, creating collaborative graph-based illustration materials for presentations or other online or offline displays. This might encourage its use by wider public not directly focused on argument mapping, while the added content would be available to harvest for using in LiteMap debates and other Catalyst tools if suitable.

Currently there seem to be two main goals - mapping a conversation, or having a debate - it can be confusing with both goals being visible.

## Potential for more testing

At the very end of the testing period we thought to create and send out a questionnaire in order to gather data on understanding the viewer experience. However the previous experiments revealed the weaknesses of the user rights system in collaboration, and continued difficulties of engagement, which discouraged us from introducing a questionnaire that late in the process.

Nevertheless a questionnaire assessing user engagement and understanding of the tool is something definitely worth working on. It might be necessary to clearly separate the roles of a mapper (community manager) and viewer in the questionnaire.

It would be also good to think of small incentives or a reward mechanism for those engaging with the maps as viewers, because the complexity of the tool, even with possibly reworked UX and design, requires significant time to learn and understand that most community members are not available for.

# Recap table - list of recommendations

Finally we will give an overview of the requested changes, features, bugs and ideas for future that came up during the testing process and conversations between team members.

As some of the suggestions are technically complex, it was clearly not possible to implement all the ideas within the scope of the project. However it is worth considering a follow-up project to continue the development of the tool and its features.

| Category | Description | Status |
|---|---|---|
| Structure | More flexibility on node levels (ability to add arguments on different levels of mapping, both on issue and idea level) | Added possibility to connect ideas to ideas. Feedback from LiteMap team: *"The structure is built on argumentation theory, so it's rigid. The structure guides through the problem and to thinking about the solutions."* |
| UX/Design | Little arrow for additional options is uncomfortable, the menu could open by clicking on or moving over the argument rectangle | |
| Node | Adding nodes through several popups is confusing. All such content should open in CSS layers in the same window | Partly implemented with Quick Add feature |
| Map | When scaling out the map, arguments become quickly unreadable. Node texts should be at least partly readable from any point of zoom, without any interaction required. | Added mouse-over fields that repeat node titles but still require user interaction |
| Node | Need ability to multi-select a group of arguments to move several at once (currently by one) | |
| Node | Need ability to change the node type (e.g. from issue to idea to argument) | Added, node changeable between all types when unconnected. Also added new type "comment" |
| Map | Limited map view (map in a box) might be okay for embedding, but is constraining in editing. Show full screen or bigger map | Added buttons to hide/unhide page top and sidebar |
| UX/Design | Redesign Map view to be full screen by default, with not-map-related information being more discrete (E.g. see Metamaps design, http://metamaps.cc/maps/884) | |
| | It is not clear where the canvas ends and what is included in print preview | |
| Print preview | Improve readability of nodes (design and/or text size) in print preview | |
| Bug | It is not always clear which node is selected, often it moves several nodes even while only one is selected | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Map | Arranging nodes is not very intuitive. It could have a feature of auto-self-arranging, or a button for optimal arrangement around clusters | Feedback from LiteMap team: *"Most users don't want it actually because they're meticulous about arranging it on their own. There are 2 auto-arrange preview options: network and tree. (Under Map Topic → Explore items)"* |
| Node | Enable adding nodes by simply clicking on the map | Quick Add options implemented, it is possible to add nodes with a click. The option is also available in sidebar menu. |
| | Enable creating relationships more easily (currently choosing from the menu opened by clicking on the arrow in the corner of the node) | It is now possible to create relationships with a right click and drag. |
| | Use a system like GitHub issues to enable filing tech/design issues and feature requests | Feedback from LiteMap team: "We are thinking about a reporting system within LiteMap." |
| | When opening a linked map from a map, open it in a new browser tab or regular window, instead of a popup window | |
| | In map sidebar search list view, add ability to view the node content beyond headline before adding on the map, e.g. by opening a layer or node view when clicking on the title | |
| Bug | Map created as private and later changed to Public is not showing up in the group where it was created. (See this map) | |
| Idea | Enable relocating nodes in Linear view by drag and drop (like in mindmaps) | |
| Idea | When harvesting from social networks, automatically link nodes to their authors' profile in respective network, and enable user activity analysis based on this | |
| | Saving and scaling items vectorially rather than as a rasterized image would add a lot to readability | |
| Print preview | Enable vectorial output (print or download map as PDF file or SVG image) | |
| Idea | Add interactive presentation effects like in Prezi: e.g. ability to zoom in to node groups, create grouped "views" and their sequences | |
| | Enable group admins to have edit access to all nodes and relationships on a map | |

# Relevance to the initial proposal

LiteMap testing proposal was based on the following assumptions:
- the community has conversations in multiple (public or half-public) spaces
- it is difficult to find and follow important information
- remarkable ideas, initiatives and skills are not being noticed
- ability to visualise such conversations in attractive presentations might help in decision-making processes
- ability to visualise information might help in building conversations and preparing events.

The test period was initially planned from January to April 2015, but lasted eventually from February to the beginning of August 2015, while seven maps were created based on data from different online and offline sources related to OuiShare community and conversations happening during the time.

As explained in the communications background chapter, OuiShare adopted three new available tools to manage its daily operations and communications shortly after the proposal was written. The tools (Slack, Loomio and Metamaps) partly covered the needs we had proposed to meet with LiteMap, and especially Slack helped give more internal visibility, inclusivity and focus to the conversations happening in the community.

As an interesting observation, Metamaps as the only concurrent information mapping tool has not found wide adoption within the community either. It is possible that non-linear descriptive models require a certain type of information analyst profile that OuiShare community currently does not have or attract in numbers, or such people are not visible or active.

**Collective building of conversations around OuiShare Fest**

We had anticipated using LiteMap in the process of building one of the Fest thematic tracks (decentralization track). However it is difficult to foresee the exact work processes in OuiShare's very agile work environment. Therefore we ended up working on the track structures in a way where there wasn't time or possibility to involve a new tool with quite a complicated UX in the process.

However, a public tweet chat on the impacts of collaborative economy, named after the OuiShare Fest slogan ("Lost in transition?") was mapped instead with the help of communications team and Storify synthesis. (See Map 3.)

# References

Mindmaps are made with an offline app [MindMaple Lite](MindMaple Lite) and exported as PNG files.

Other visuals are represented as screenshots from different [LiteMap](LiteMap) [views](views) and other tools where mentioned so.

Slack [slack.com](slack.com)
Slack is a team collaboration tool that offers searchable chat rooms, private groups and direct messaging. It also integrates with a number of third-party services like Google Drive, Trello, GitHub, Twitter and many others.

Loomio [loomio.org](loomio.org)
Loomio is collaborative decision-making software that enables users and groups to initiate discussions, set up proposals emerging from the discussions and receive feedback as votes and comments. Loomio is open source.

Metamaps [metamaps.cc](metamaps.cc)
Metamaps is information and relationships mapping software. It enables to add data marked with a wide range of pre-defined categories and create freely tagged relationships between any items.

Storify [storify.com](storify.com)
Storify is a service that lets users create timelines using various social media such as Twitter, Facebook and many others. Users search through several networks while on Storify platform, and can then drag individual posts into stories.

OuiShare [ouishare.net](ouishare.net)
OuiShare is a non-profit and global community empowering citizens, public institutions and companies to to build a society based on openness, collaboration and trust.

LiteMap [litemap.net](litemap.net)
LiteMap gives online communities a place to map out visually a debate that may be happening in other forums or websites. It is a place to harvest the main issues, ideas, pros and cons happening in an online debate and to connect and visualize them in the form of network graphs.

# Appendix 1. Maps created during test period

Maps have been planned and created by a single person (project leader) unless mentioned otherwise. All described maps can be found in [OuiShare group on LiteMap](#).

## Map 1. E-mail management solutions

[E-mail](#) [management](#) [solutions](#) map is based on a discussion born from the need to change the e-mail server used at the time. The problem brought up general questions about what kind of solutions we should use.

The decision was eventually made and implementation carried out by the few people directly working with technological solutions within OuiShare, and did not require community involvement at that point.

*E-mail management solutions LiteMap (Treemap - Leaves view):*
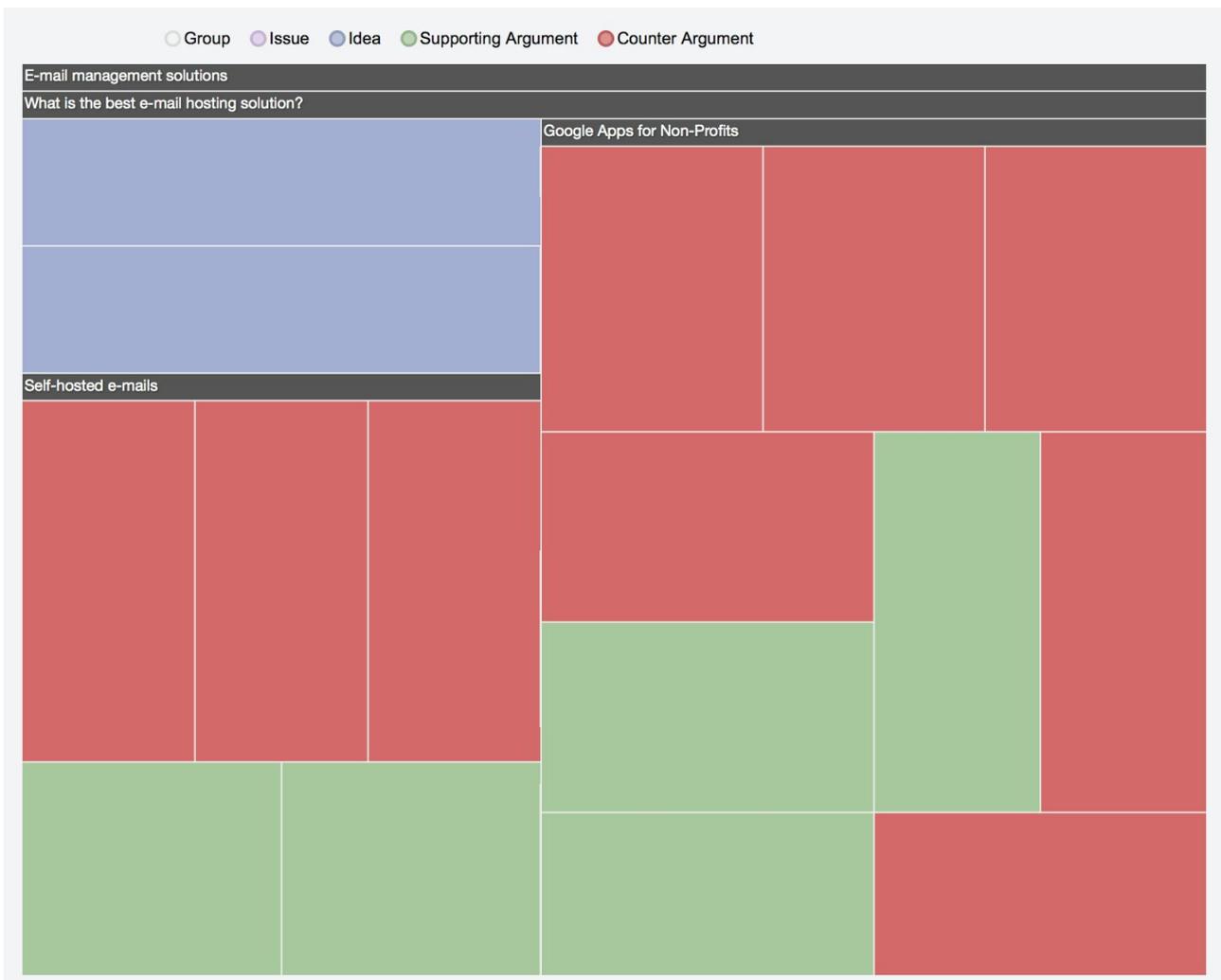
# Map 2a. Digital tools issues

Digital tools issues map is based on overview mindmaps and reflections made about the digital tools used within OuiShare community. The source mindmap (which in turn is a visualisation of a Trello board) lists used tools by tentative subcategories, with some tools named under several categories.

The same source material helped produce another submap describing user access management issues related to the use and need of such an amount of working tools (see map 2b).

*Overview of OuiShare collaboration tools (Trello board):*
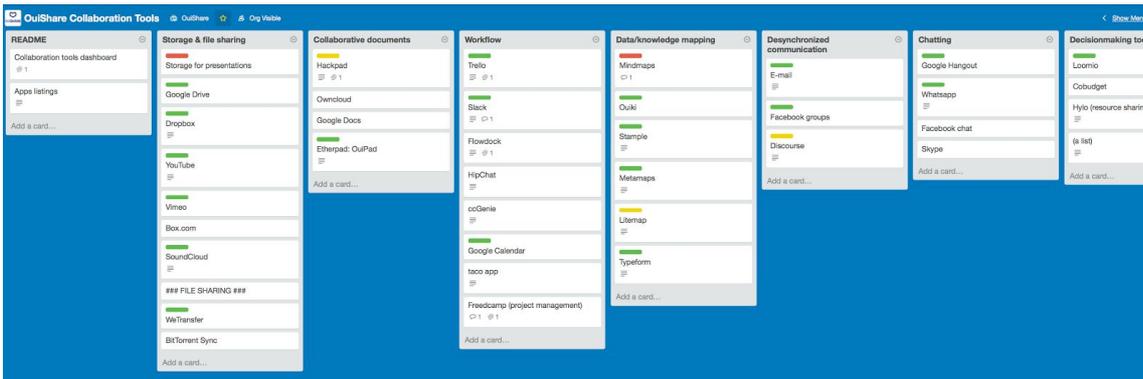


*Collaboration tools visualised by categories on a simple mindmap:*
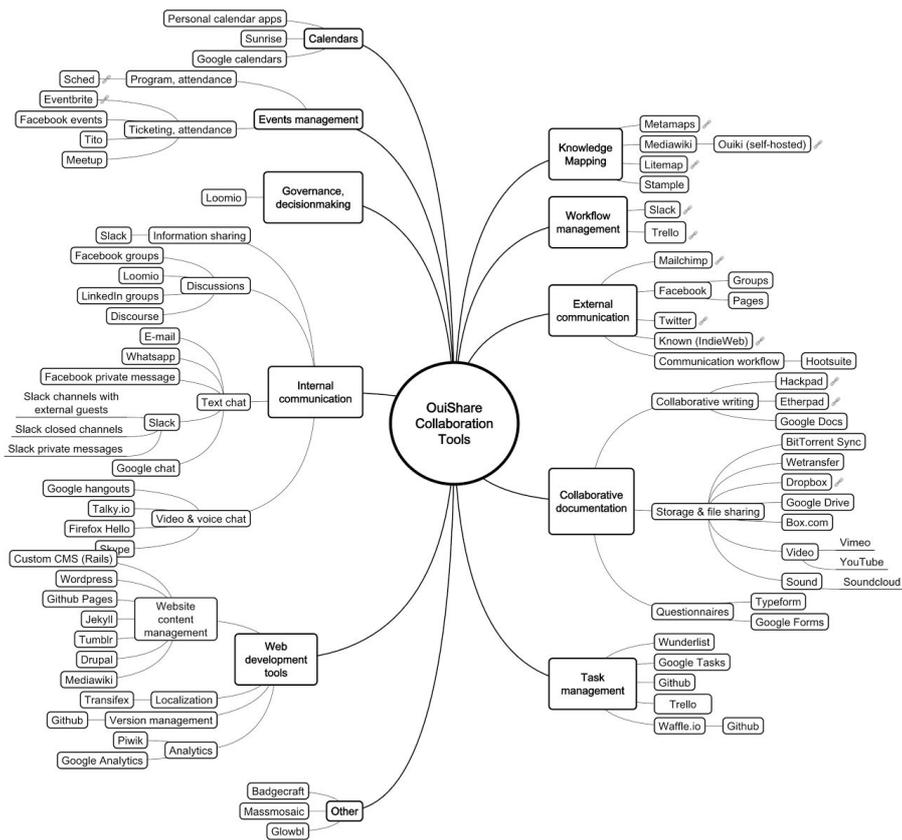
*Digital tools issues LiteMap (Treemap - Leaves view):*
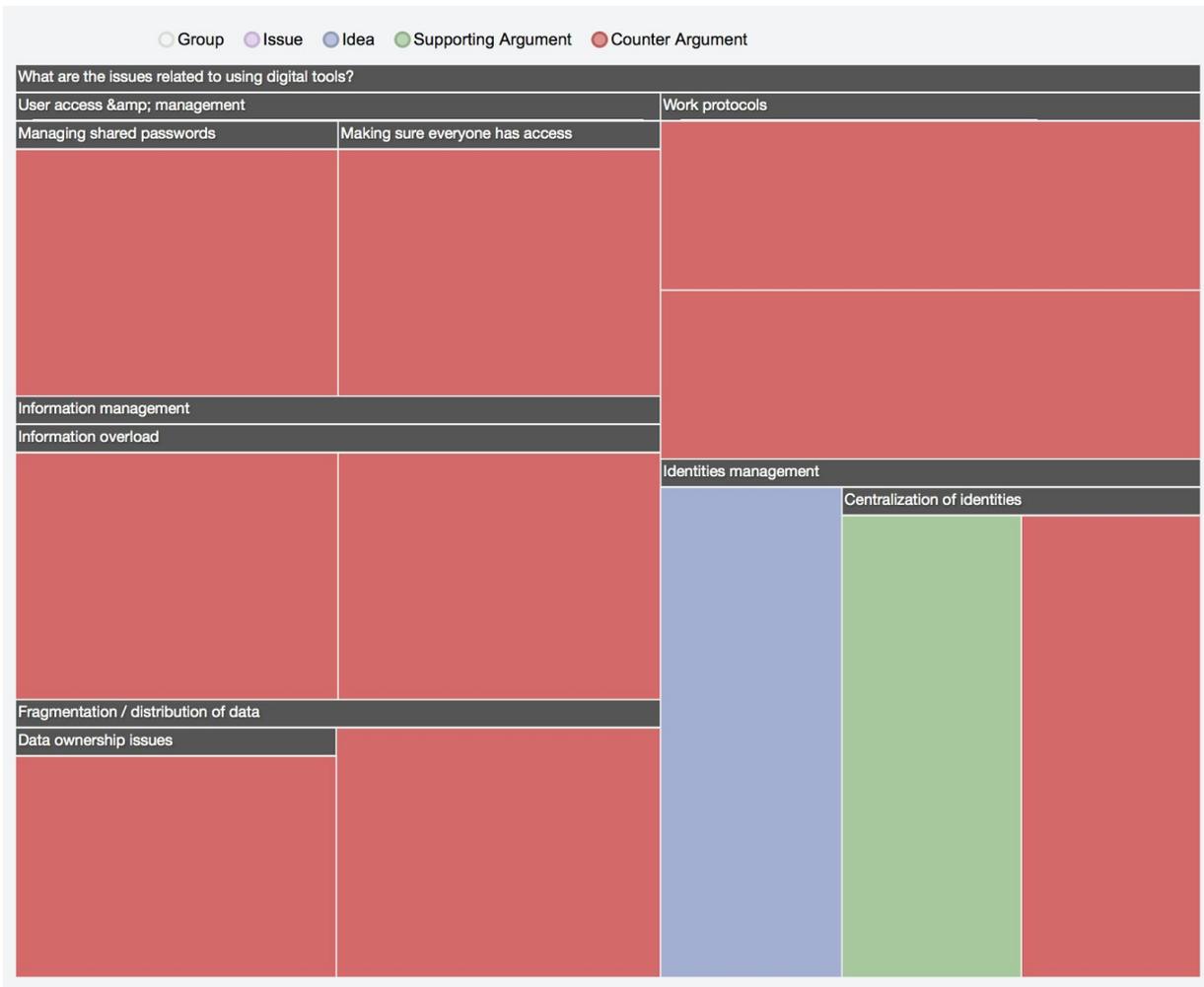


# Map 2b. Digital tools issues: user access management

[User](#) [access](#) [management](#) [issues](#) map describes accessibility and interoperability issues arising in a global digital community, based on OuiShare experience, and lists some tools as examples.

*User access management issues LiteMap (Map view):*
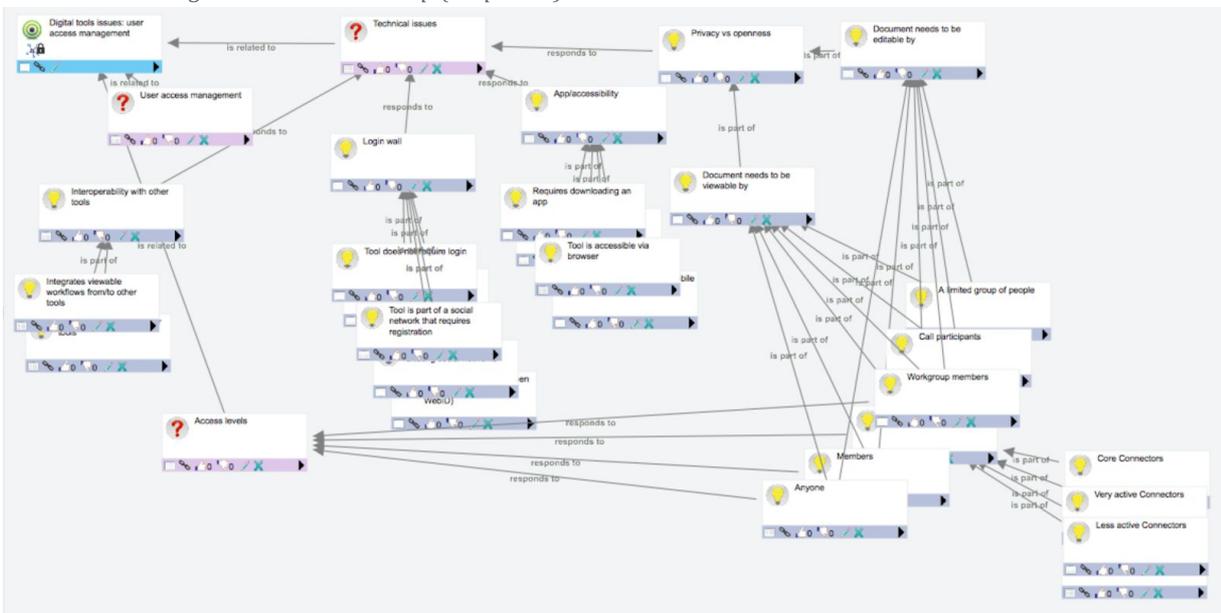
*User access management issues (Mindmap):*
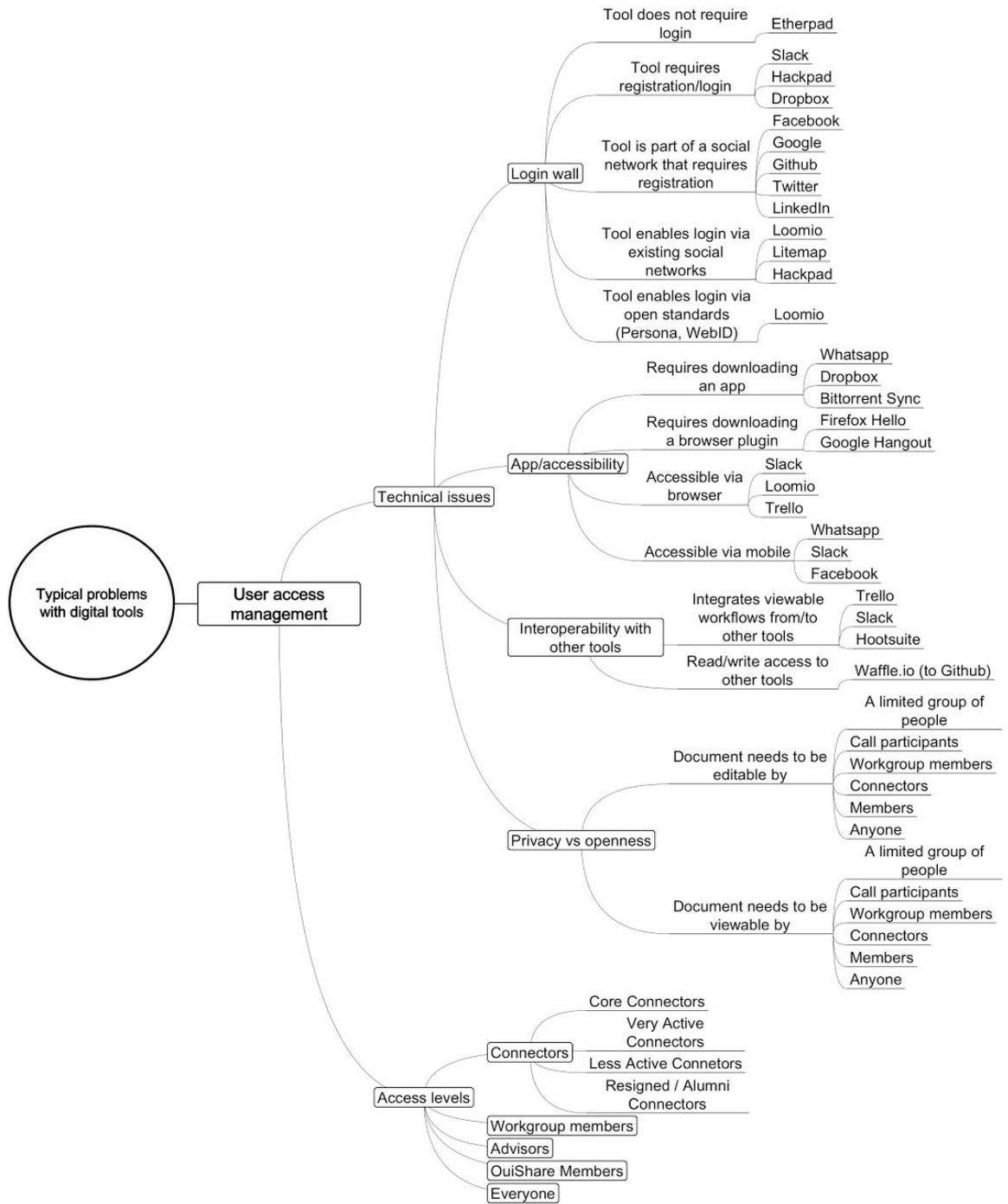
# Map 3. Collaborative Economy: Lost in transition? (Tweet chat map)

Collaborative Economy: Lost in transition? map is based on a tweet chat preceding OuiShare Fest 2015. A Storify synthesis was made on the tweetchat by OuiShare communications team which eased the collection of arguments on LiteMap with the help of the browser bookmarklet.

*Tweet chat LiteMap (map view):*



*Tweet chat LiteMap (Treemap Leaves view):*
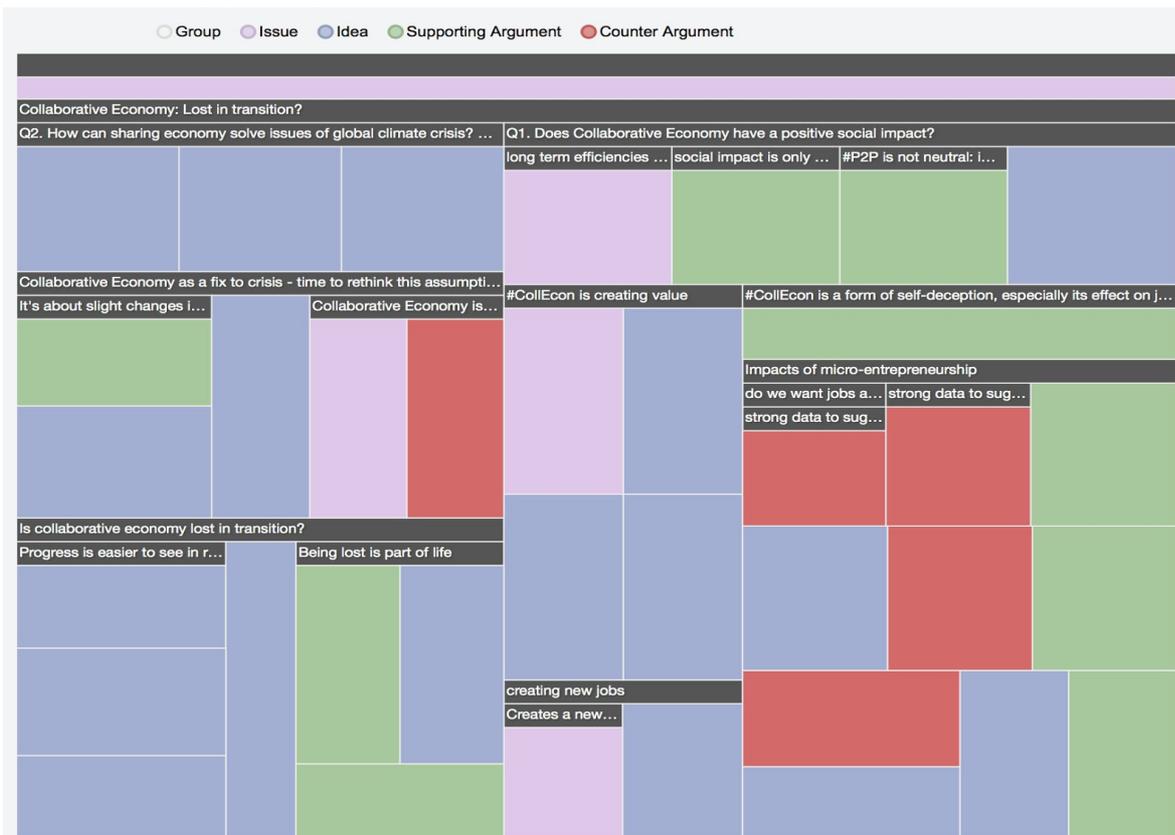
# Map 4. OuiCare summit discussion

OuiCare discussion map is based on a real-life discussion session on OuiShare Summit #7. The session leader documented the ideas of about 8 people during an offline brainstorming and drew a mindmap on paper. Later in the day it was copied to an offline digital mindmap, which was then used as a base to visualise the issues on LiteMap.

*OuiCare session mindmap:*
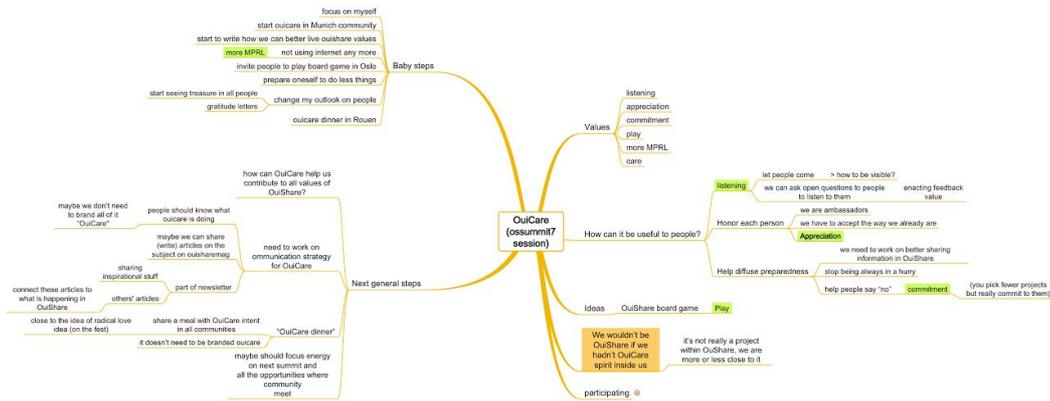


*OuiCare session LiteMap (Map view):*
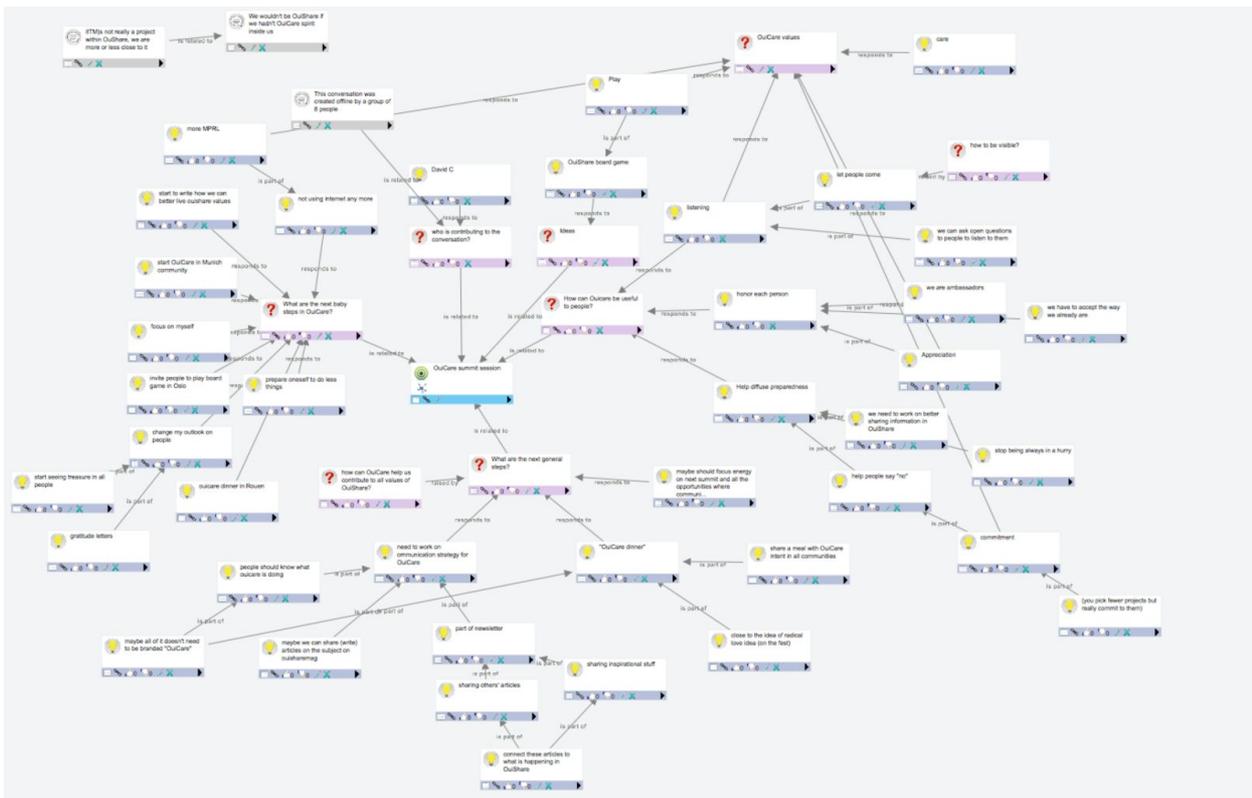
*OuiCare session LiteMap (Treemap Leaves view):*
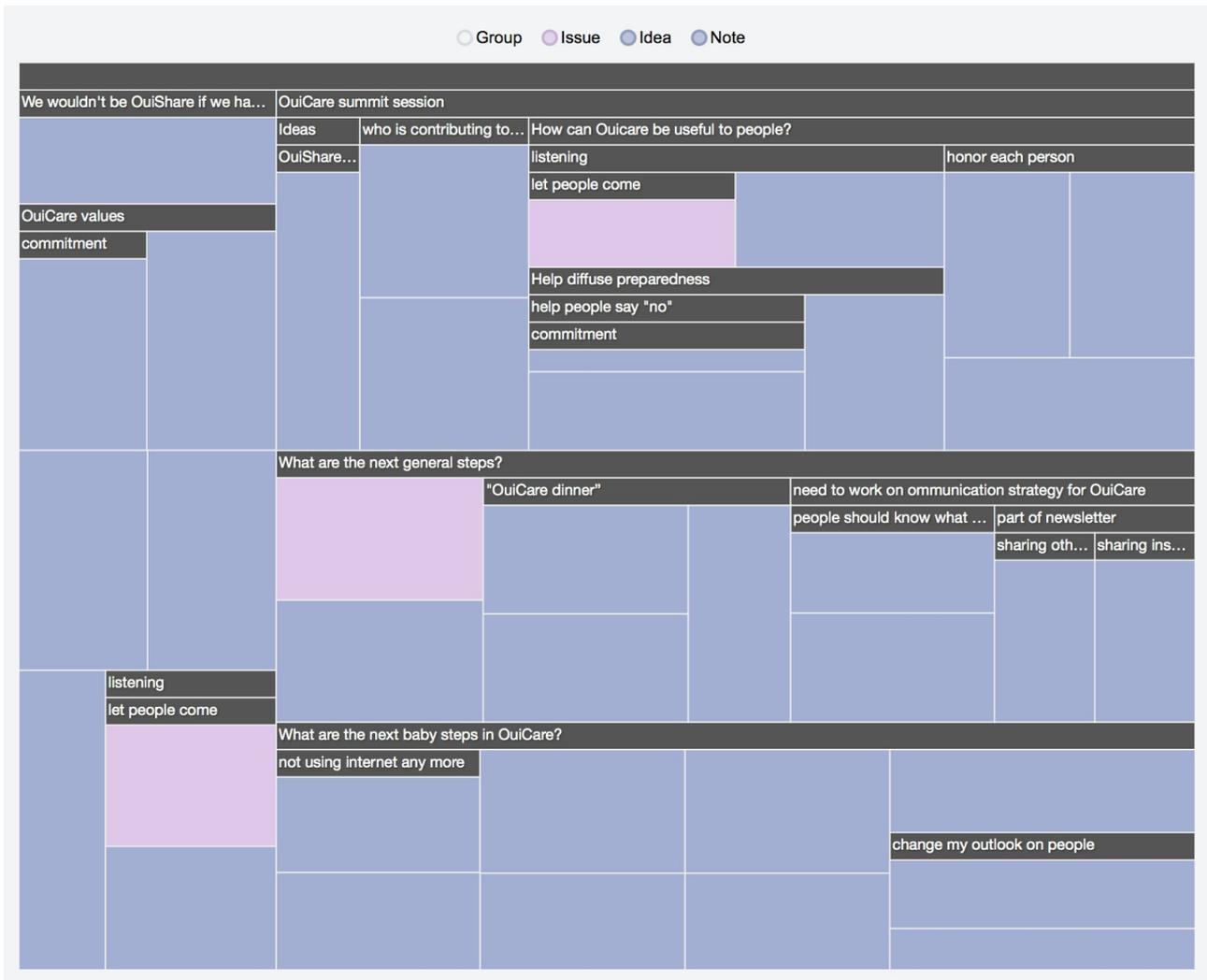
## Map 5. OuiShare democracy

OuiShare democracy map depicts the discussions around governance, decision-making and engagement processes during OuiShare Summit #7. Major input to the map comes from community-wide discussion held in 4-5 subgroups and summarised results from each.

*OuiShare democracy LiteMap (map view):*
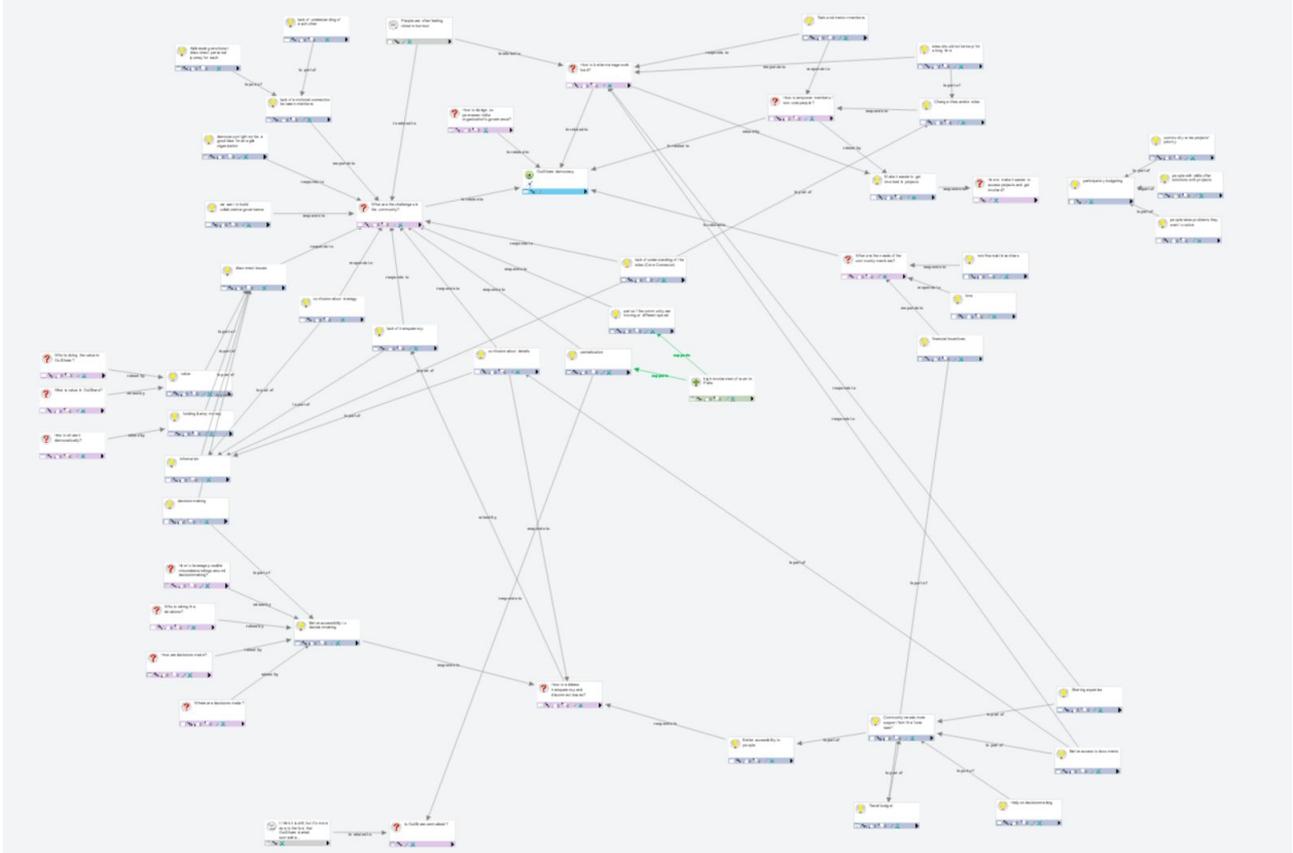
# Map 6. LiteMap feedback

LiteMap feedback map was created spontaneously during a testing session with 3 OuiShare Connectors. This is the only map testing collaborative mapping experience and is self-reflective in describing issues, bugs and missing features encountered during the process. Most of the nodes were created during a 2 hours long live conversation over Google Hangout. Because of the nature of live documentation the technical "owners" of nodes here are not always reflecting the real ownership of said words.

*LiteMap feedback LiteMap (map view):*
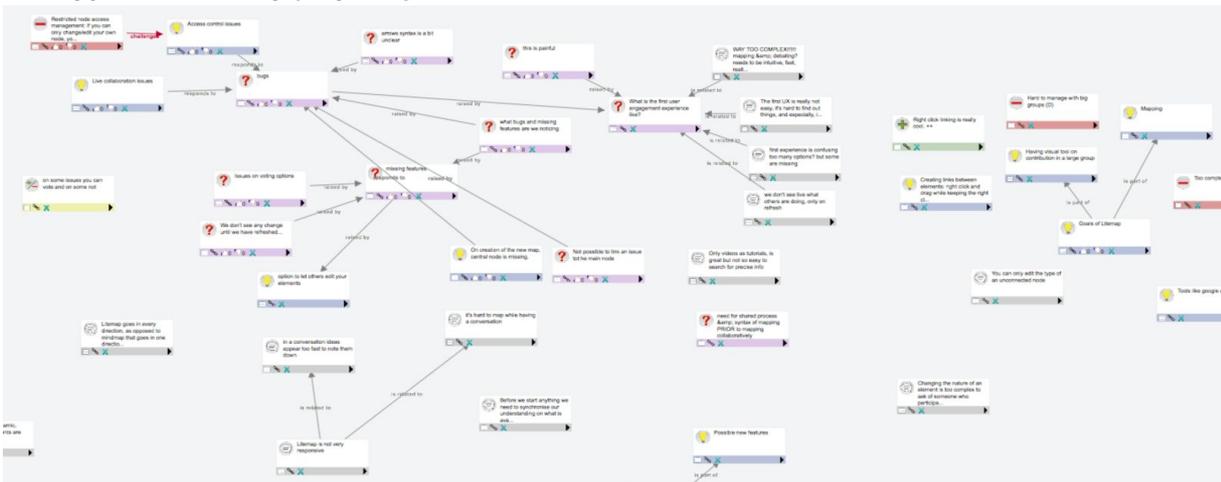


*LiteMap feedback LiteMap (Tree Leaves view):*
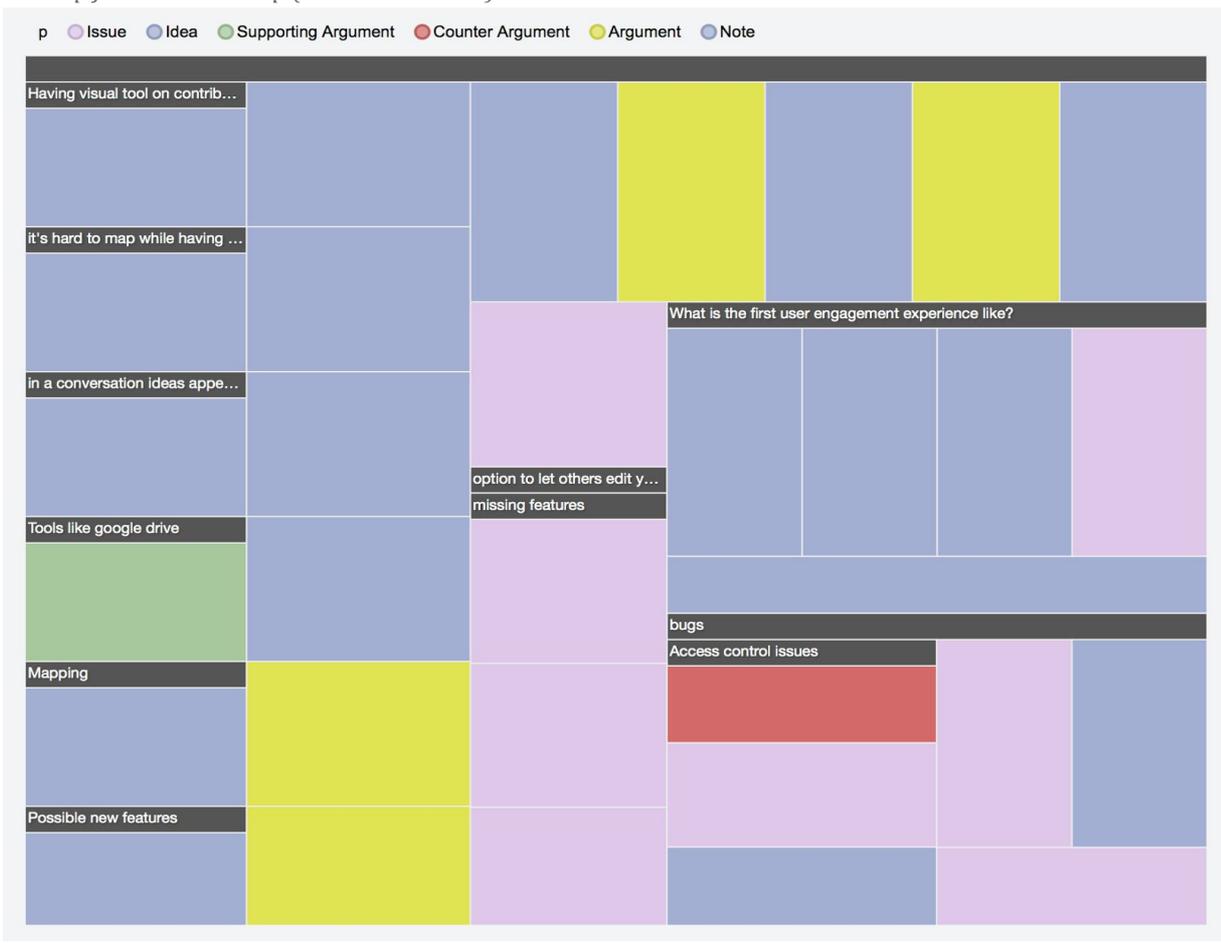
*LiteMap feedback litemap analytics (People & Issue Ring):*
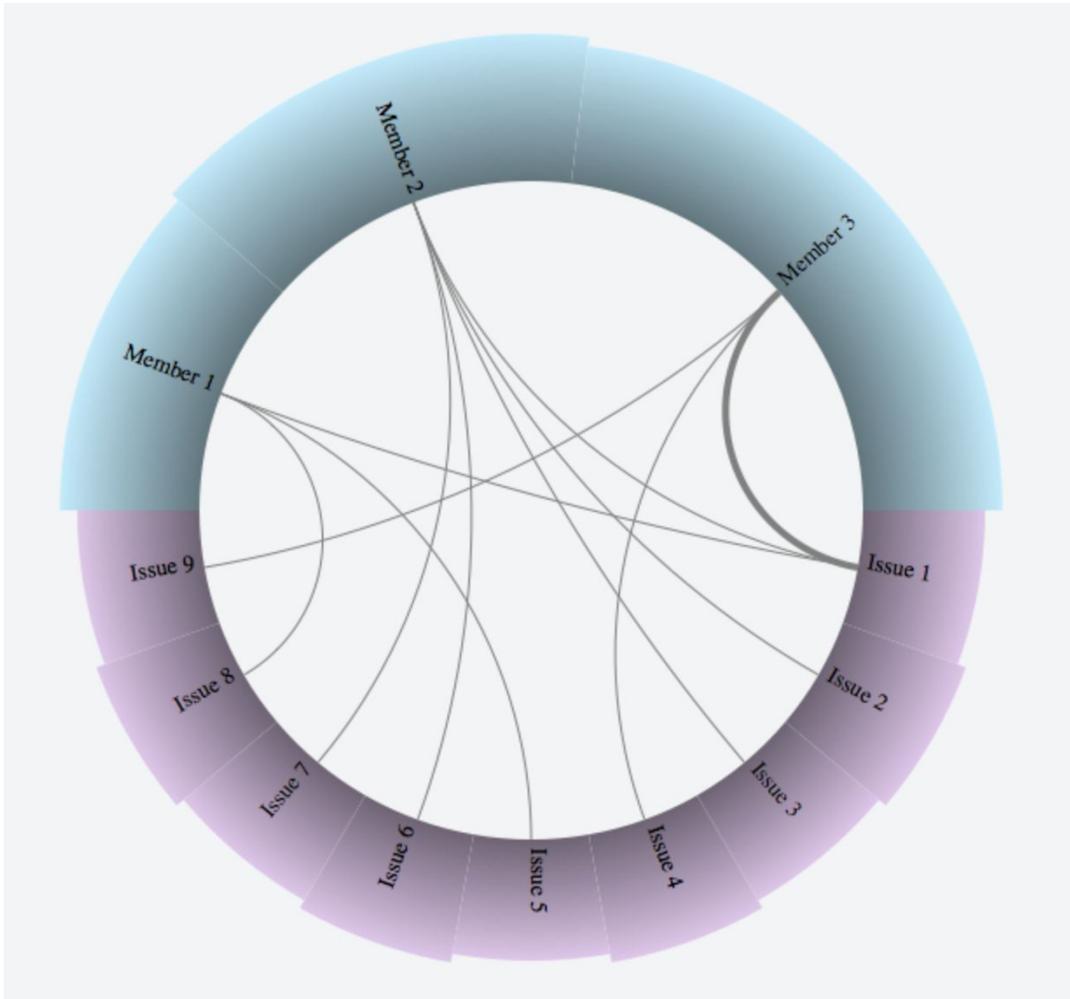
# Appendix 2. Project timeline

| When | What | Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| 19 Jan 2015 | Signed contract sent to Sigma | |
| 27 Jan 2015 | Contract received back | |
| 28 Jan 2015 | First call Anna-Auli | Map 1 |
| 5 Feb 2015 | Call Anna-Auli | |
| 10 Mar 2015 | | Status report |
| 17 Mar 2015 | Tweet chat on OuiShare Fest | |
| | | Maps 2a & 2b |
| April 2015 | | Mapping the tweet chat (map 3) |
| 24-28 Jun 2015 | OuiShare Summit #7 in Italy | Collecting info for and starting maps 4 & 5 |
| 15 Jul 2015 | Visit to Open University, Milton Keynes, UK | Plan to launch a call, prepare & share the questionnaire |
| 16 Jul 2015 | Open call to collaboration in OuiShare Connectors' Loomio group | |
| 27 Jul 2015 | Collaborative mapping experiment via Google Hangout | Map 6 |
| August 2015 | Improving and finalizing all maps | |
| 29 Aug 2015 | Final report | |