Governance of online creation communities: Provision of infrastructure for the building of digital commons

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Online creation communities (OCCs) definition

are a set of individuals that communicate and collaborate, mainly via a platform of participation hosted on the Internet with the common goal of knowledge-making and sharing integrated into a common resource.
Exemples

Wikipedia
Communitats de software lliure
Wikihow
Connexions
Wikitravel
Crisis commons
Common-based peer production  
(Yochai Benkler terminology) 

versus 

Online creation communities 
Build a digital common only under certain governance conditions (to recall Elinor Ostrom tradition)
OCCs governance: Research question

How do OCCs organize and govern themselves?

Does governance shape the OCCs? Does governance determinate the OCCs “success” in terms of their capacity to increase participation and collaboration in the achievement of their goals?

Analytical process

- Participation size at the community
- Complexity collaboration at the community

Governance
Main methodological features

1) Large N statistical web analysis of 50 cases
2) Four case studies comparison

Combining online and offline methods
  Virtual etnography & participative observation
  Interviews
Governance of OCCs: Two components

Example: Wikimedia Foundation - Wikipedia
Infrastructure provision one of the key sources of power in network society
Dimensions of OCCs infrastructure governance

1) Level of community involvement (self-governance) and transparency in the decision-making (infrastructure provision, rules and policies of participants interaction, among others)

2) Level of freedom and autonomy of the participants in regards to the infrastructure (embedded in the Intellectual Property regime)

*Black-box* conditions (Proprietary software & copyright license)  
*versus*  
*Netenabler* conditions (Free software & free license)
Dimensions of OCCs infrastructure governance

Major Freedom and Autonomy
(Free software & license)

Closeness

Dependency

Openness to decision-making
(Self-governance)

(Proprietary software & copyright license)
Models of OCCS infrastructure governance

Major Freedom and Autonomy

(Free software & license)

Self-provision Assembly (Indymedia)

Mission Enterprises (Wikihow)

Representative Foundations (Wikipedia)

Close

Open

Corporate services (Flickr)

(Proprietary software & copyright license)

Dependency
How does infrastructure governance shape the communities generated?

Analytical process

- Participation size at the community
- Infrastructure governance
- Complexity collaboration at the community
Models of OCCS infrastructure governance
Major Freedom and Autonomy
*(Free software & license)*

- More Collaborative
- Closeness decision-making
- Openness
- Larger *(Proprietary software & copyright license)*

Dependency

Largest communities
Success in terms of **scale of participation involved** does not tend to require empowering conditions (self-governance) and could be developed under dependency and control conditions of the infrastructure provider.

Success in terms of achieving **complex goals** tend to be more achieved with empowering (self-governance) and freedom and autonomy conditions.
Infrastructure governance: Conflictual logics

- Major Freedom and Autonomy
  *(Free software & license)*

- Corporate logic
  *(Proprietary software & copyright license)*

- Commons logic
  *Dependency*

- Close
  *Openness to decision-making*
Digital Commons definition

Information and knowledge resources that
* is collectively created and owned or shared between a community
* is (generally freely) available to use and reuse by third parties.
* the community of people building them can intervene in governing their interaction processes and the shared resources.
Conflict between *commons versus corporate logic*: Free Culture Movement and digital rights movements
Thank you!

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