

[ABOUT](#)[ISSUES](#)[PEER REVIEW](#)[NEWS](#)[PROJECTS](#)[HOME](#)

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF
PEER PRODUCTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

NOW, THE COMMONS

Where you are: [Home](#) · [Issues](#) · [Issue #10: Peer Production and Work](#) · [Now, the commons](#)

For the Journal of Peer Production: *Mathieu O'Neil, Johan Söderberg, Maurizio Teli, and Stefano Zacchiroli*

As the Journal of Peer Production reaches its tenth issue, it is timely to reflect on what it set out to do, what it has achieved, and what it should do next. The Journal of Peer Production represents an attempt to emulate FOSS by circumventing the academic press system, where researchers do all the work – conceiving and disseminating calls for papers, producing and documenting research, selecting contributions, writing up research, etc – and are 'paid' in the form of 60-day free subscriptions to for-profit journals which their university libraries already subscribe to, at exorbitant rates. In contrast, consider the core principles of science first identified by Robert Merton in 1942: universalism, disinterestedness, organised scepticism, and communism (later changed to communalism). 'The communism of the scientific ethos', wrote Merton, 'is incompatible with the definition of technology as "private property" in a capitalistic economy' (275).

One of the editors of this tenth issue was invited recently to edit a special issue of an academic journal on 'open collaboration'. This served as a useful reminder of the mindlessness of reviewers' work only benefiting authors: an essential part of knowledge creation, the considered advice of domain specialists, was purposely hidden from view. After working in more transparent conditions for several years, this seemed really strange and outdated. Aside from making original submissions and reviews available, we have also introduced a 'signaling' system whereby reviewers can indicate their appreciation of a completed article. This has the benefit of shortening publication time and widening the range of publishable articles whilst protecting the journal's reputation. It also avoids the invisible cost of managing peer review for articles that are ultimately rejected.

The volunteers who have contributed to the Journal of Peer Production should be congratulated: we have published landmark issues on a wide range of topics. We have made our own rules, and operated by them. We have been resilient in the face of human and infrastructural adversity. We continue to attract new contributors and editors. But after this well-deserved pat on the back, we need to remind ourselves and our colleagues that our engagement must extend beyond publishing in, and supporting the work of, open-access journals, as useful and necessary as this may be. The Journal of Peer Production was born at the 2009 Oekonux Conference in Manchester, an event that brought together researchers and activists. Oekonux was the original actor in the dynamic German commons movement, whose characteristic is the attempt to unite 'offline and online, tangible and intangible, old and new, green and social commons with the explicit aim of transforming society' (Euler, 2016: 95). Accordingly the Journal of Peer Production was intended to be a strategic tool for discussing 'new perspectives on the implication of peer production for social change'.

In the face of the continuing destruction of the Earth by industry, and of the exploitation and domination of humanity by oligarchs, we need to ask a familiar question: what should be done (what can we do)? Echoing Oekonux, Nick Dyer-Witheford put it best: 'If the cell form of capitalism is the commodity, the cellular [seed] form of a society beyond capital is the common. A commodity is a good produced for sale, a common is a good produced, or conserved, to be shared' (Dyer-Witheford 2007: 82). For the most part, the Journal of Peer Production has eschewed visions of future social arrangements and focused on concrete and practical concerns, such as the effectiveness, justice and sustainability of ethical-modular assemblages and organisations. Future issues on peer urbanism (JoPP#11, October 2017) and the institutionalisation of shared machine shops (JoPP#12, April 2018) represent exciting developments of this perspective. Such investigations need to be pursued, but also articulated with a new direction.

Indeed, we believe it is now time for the Journal of Peer Production to expand its reach, beyond an exclusive focus on the institutions of the commons. We have the means to clearly articulate persuasive ideas. As a journal and as a community of engaged scholars and activists we are in a unique position to research and develop the ecology, regulations and culture which can grow the commons. If we are serious about social change, we should strive to make the commons a core part of the collective understanding of what it means to be human.

We outline four overlapping areas of research and activism, ranging from cultural norm change to policies.

1. CHAMPIONING THE COMMONS

In order to instil new cultural standards, we need to popularise champions of the commons. Elinor Ostrom's (1933-2012) focus on social and institutional forms which enable the sharing of common resources and rights, showing how necessary it was to protect forests and rivers, are clearly more relevant now than ever. Traditional communities, in existence for many centuries, may conform to the Ostrom model, but restrict access to the resource based on family belonging, with entry gained through marriage: an inclusive, global dimension should always be incorporated. In ideological terms Ostrom contradicts how the first modernity (16th -18th Century) conceives the world, a view which still dominates our education system. By mixing law, technology and economy, 'science' became normalised as the act of dissipating non-renewable natural resources. We still live in a world where private property is better protected than common property: a concerted cultural shift, primarily disseminated through schools and popular culture, must be made to change this value system. Ostrom's contribution should inform (and ultimately direct) the governance of our global environmental commons. Identifying and researching the commons around us, such as built ones (schools and libraries), natural ones (air and sunlight) as well as communal islands in family, friendship and cooperative circles demonstrates that the commons are alive and well.

2. WORKING LESS

André Gorz (1923-2007) is less well-known but is no less important. Gorz, one of the radical founders of political ecology and of the notion of 'degrowth' (décroissance), emphasised the increasing divorce between what is produced and what is needed. Some of his proposals have already been partially implemented: the reduction of working time was adopted by France's Socialist Government in the late 1990s with the introduction of the 35-hour work week. This measure has led to issues with overtime pay and has proved unpopular with some categories of workers who wish to earn more. Nonetheless it persists, and the Socialist candidate in the 2017 French Presidential election proposed to reduce it further to 32 hours. In order for peer production to grow, initiatives such as these should be analysed and criticised.

3. A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Another of Gorz's proposal, a Universal Basic Income (UBI), goes further. The advent of automatization has prompted approving parliamentary reports on a UBI in France and Australia; UBIs are about to be or are already being tried out in Finland, the Netherlands and Scotland. Its embrace by some conservative politicians and high-profile technology entrepreneurs could lead us to suspect that a UBI is a plot to remove social benefits for the most vulnerable by replacing them with a single income. On the other hand, a UBI could also operate as a feminist advance since 'having children markedly intensifies gender inequities in time allocation by increasing specialisation and women's workload' (Craig, 2006). Indeed a UBI would be particularly useful for single mothers, whose income is the most adversely impacted by childbirth. It would address a longstanding concern of Marxist feminists such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972) who identified the vast amount of monetarily unacknowledged but economically essential household labour done for free. Without the invisible (to male theorists) unpaid or reproductive process of caring, cooking, etc, paid labour power would not be ready for work in the morning. We invite reflections on the articulations of UBIs with local, regional and national currencies.

4. PROMOTING GOOD USES OF FREE SERVICES

Not only should deregulators wanting to privatise public services such as healthcare and education be opposed: we should also document and support efforts to make services such as public transport, public housing, and public health and education free. New institutional arrangements may be necessary. Finland has inaugurated the co-production of public services such as education, neighbourhood associations, support for drug and gambling addicts, home care, etc. (Botero et al., 2012). There also needs to be a recognition that not all uses of free services should be equal. For example, why should a cubic metre of water used for domestic work cost the same as cubic metre used to fill a private pool (Ariès, 2007)? The idea that there are 'mis-uses' of commons needs to be discussed and popularised. Good uses should be free, bad uses expensive. And to prevent rich people simply buying wasteful mis-use, should a maximum income be debated alongside a universal basic income?

We have outlined four areas of investigation and action: diffusing widely the cultural conception of the commons; reducing work time; adopting a universal basic income; making public services free, and distinguishing between their use and mis-use. Measures such as the reduction of work time and UBI point to an uncoupling of work and labour. They represent an alternative to the dominant discourse that sees jobs, however badly-paid and/or unnecessary and/or environmentally destructive and/or boring, as essential to progress. Free public services and a UBI may be complementary; they may be antinomic. The point is not to envisage a society where all these measures interact perfectly, but to research, develop and publicise one or several, as tactical and strategic opportunities arise, so that actual progress is made.

We call on Journal of Peer Production researchers and practitioners to consider, criticise, improve or supersede these areas of investigation and action, and to document their articulation with peer projects.

WORKS CITED

- Ariès, P. (2007) *Le Mésusage : Essai sur l'hypercapitalisme*. Parangon, Paris.
- Botero, A., Paterson, A., & Saad-Sulonen, J. (2012). *Towards peer production in public services: Cases from Finland*. Helsinki: Aalto University publication series Crossover.

Craig, L. (2006) Children and the revolution. A time-diary analysis of the impact of motherhood on daily workload. *Journal of Sociology*, 42(2): 125-143.

Dalla Costa, M. & James, S. (1972) *The power of women and the subversion of the community*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press.

Dyer-Witheford, N. (2007) Commonism. *Turbulence*, 1: 81-87 (online).

Euler, J. (2015) Commons-creating Society On the Radical German Commons Discourse *Review of Radical Political Economics* Vol 48, Issue 1, pp. 93 – 110.

Merton, R. K. (1973) [1942], 'The normative structure of science', in Merton, R. K., *The sociology of science: Theoretical and empirical investigations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Search

Archives

- [January 2019](#)
- [November 2017](#)
- [February 2017](#)
- [November 2016](#)
- [June 2015](#)
- [March 2015](#)
- [December 2014](#)
- [July 2014](#)
- [September 2013](#)
- [August 2013](#)
- [December 2012](#)
- [June 2012](#)
- [June 2011](#)

Categories

- [News](#)
- [Open Call](#)

Meta

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries RSS](#)
- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)