EDITORIAL NOTES: RESEARCHING TRANSITION, TRANSITIONING RESEARCH

GOODBYE TO THE JOURNAL OF PEER PRODUCTION

Panayotis Antoniadis and Mathieu O'Neil

The Call for Papers for the *Journal of Peer Production*'s TRANSITION issue invited research studies of societal transitions related to peer production, in the context of the ongoing environmental and health crises. It also positioned research itself as part of transition processes, particularly in regards to the conventional structures of academic publishing. And finally we evoked the role and possible transition of the *Journal of Peer Production* itself. Our CFP, disseminated in the first year of the pandemic, thus queried: 'What should be done to develop the digital and physical commons? What role should the *Journal of Peer Production* play in this development? And what shape should it take?'

Eighteen months later, a collective decision has been made that this TRANSITION issue will be the *Journal of Peer Production*'s last, with activities continuing in different forms through new projects. This fifteenth issue therefore assumes the responsibility of closing this phase in the history of the analysis of peer production.

To that end it includes a set of special pieces: 'Reflections on the past' by *Journal* editors on the overall evolution and achievements of the *Journal of Peer Production*, and on the continued relevance (or not) of the issues raised in jopp #6 Disruption and the law; discussions on how projects start and change with peer producers excerpted from the *Handbook of Peer Production*, itself produced by the members of the jopp community; looking ahead to 'The future,' it introduces relevant projects started by jopp authors and editors.

These pieces complement the peer-reviewed papers which responded to the CFP. These peer-reviewed papers explore a wide range of transition scenarios manifested through resistance, commons-based governance, infrastructuring, boundary objects, dissensus, and of course, civic responses to the COVID-19 crisis. These analyses are based on concrete peer production cases involving a wide variety of actors from academia, industry, civil society, and activism. They critically analyse current challenges and suggest ways to defend and promote key peer production principles such as cooperation and trust, transparency in production, openness, and collective democratic decision-making. These peer principles could assist in the evolution towards a more sustainable society, by contributing to legitimise eco-sufficient processes of relocalization and degrowth.

RESEARCHING TRANSITION, TRANSITIONING RESEARCH

For a TRANSITION issue, we needed to go beyond traditional ways of documenting research work. Academic articles, for all their virtues of rigour and correctness, appeal to few people. Their complex vocabulary, whilst necessary to communicate with precision, can be exclusionary. In short, academic articles could do with a change of their own. This is why every peer reviewed article in this TRANSITION issue is accompanied by a complementary piece which refines, expands, contradicts or otherwise transforms the original article. These 'complements' are not necessarily manifestos or how-to guides. They are meant to show that research, like the world, can take many forms. We thank the authors for accepting to take on this unusual brief, and congratulate them for rising to the occasion!

The peer reviewed articles can be organised in three pairs, forming imaginary dialogues around three main themes: (1) responding to a crisis (2) transdisciplinary collaborations around technological artifacts operating as boundary objects and (3) refining already successful peer production processes toward more democratic governance and inclusion.

RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

Peter Troxler in his article Plan C – Makers' response to COVID-19 analyses how the maker movement responded to the COVID-19 crisis by supplying low cost equipment. This was supposed to be the seminal example of how distributed manufacturing could effectively and efficiently rise above the deficiencies of centralized manufacturing, and hence contribute to a transition to the peer-production of physical goods. This article traces the makers' response to COVID-19 on the basis of five public online panels with makers in four European countries. It concludes that the contribution of their work was real, but that it is too early to judge if it contributed to a long-term transition. The complement presents the perspectives of four colleagues on Troxler's article: Cristine Dyhrberg Højgaard, Yana Boeva, César García and David Cuartielles.

Cian O'Donovan's article Collective capabilities for resisting far-right extremism online and in the real world addresses a response to another crisis: the worrying increase of far-right extremism in Ireland, and unfortunately in other locales. When transition happens in a backward and negative direction, the role of civil society is to resist it. O'Donovan explores the collective capabilities of the Far Right Observatory, a network of digital advocacy organizations such as Uplift which resist far-right extremism through digital listening, campaigns, and policy work. Locating, sustaining and evaluating such capabilities into a comprehensive framework, as summarised in the complement, allows the

translation of experience on the ground to transferable knowledge both inside the national network, and hopefully also across international boundaries.

TRANSDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATIONS

Collective work becomes more challenging when actors from different domains or 'social worlds' need to collaborate while speaking different 'languages.'

Tudor B. Ionescu and Jesse de Pagter use ethnographic methods to explore a collaboration between researchers, industry and makerspace members aimed at a more creative and experimental use of Cobots, robots that have the potential to allow for close human-robot collaboration. Their article 'Meet your personal Cobot:' Framing participatory research in makerspaces as a trading zone proposes the concept of 'trading zones' to analyse the negotiations that took place, around expectations, safety, and experimentaton. The complement sheds light on the background of this collaboration. It consists in a policy piece by Jesse de Pagter that explores the notion of democratizing robotic technology through a short analysis of the European Union's policy-making efforts in regards to the future of robotic automation.

Hagit Keysar, Elizabeth Calderón Lüning, and Andreas Unteidig explore another form of collaboration between researchers and activists. In Prototypes as agents of transition: The case of DIY wireless technology for advancing community digital sovereignty, the boundary object is also a technological artifact, a DIY networking toolkit, around which a three-year long EU project developed various pilot programs. Diverse challenges have been identified, relevant in most such collaborations: the structural power relations in academy-community partnership and the tensions between experimental realms and epistemic norms. This resonates with similar tensions between experimentation and industrial requirements documented by Ionescu and Pagter. The complement is a poster summarising the results of one of the workshops documented in the article, a sort of manifesto on collective learning.

REFINING SUCCESSFUL PROCESSES

Transdisciplinary exchanges and negotiations over meanings and processes can be very demanding. Reducing the negotiation space by agreeing about very simple but strict rules for collaboration can be very productive in certain cases.

Curtis McCord, in his article Civic spaces and collaborative commons analyzes the creation and evolution of a very successful network of tech actors in Toronto, Civic Tech Toronto, who engage in long-term peer production processes based on a very thin governance layer, heavily concentrated around the weekly "hacknights", that bring together participants of many different professional backgrounds, encouraging them to interact and make things together. McCord asks whether the commons-based peer production framework could help this ecosystem to further advance its operation and impact. The complement documents the return of the researcher to the community, and corresponding outcomes of this action. The Civic Tech Toronto governance model – letting things grow and adding more refined mechanisms afterwards, according to real needs – is also relevant for Wikipedia, one of the historically most significant peer production projects.

Steve Jankowski's article Making consensus sensible: The transition of a democratic ideal into Wikipedia's interface offers a critical perspective on one of the most fundamental principles and design decisions of Wikipedia, the consensus. The article investigate the multitude of ways Wikipedians perform consensus: through understanding and decision-making, but also through acts of composing, showing, processing, closing, and calculating. It argues that since Wikipedia's socio-technical vision is over-determined by consensus, its political design is ill-equipped to address the political conditions of pluralist societies. Jankowsi argues that Wikipedia should therefore strengthen its democratic commitment by engaging with dissensus. Fittingly, the creative complement describes how fictional character 'Kay' attempts to support a new *WP:Dissensus* policy through Wikipedia's labyrinthine proposal process.

JOPP'S PASTS AND FUTURES

Not all peer production initiatives reach the massive scale and multiple-actor involvement of Wikipedia. Indeed, the dependence of smaller-scale projects on the voluntary and often continuous commitment of their founders and core maintainers pose significant challenges for their sustainability. This is because these over-contributing peers often – and in most cases, unintentionally – concentrate excessive amounts of power. They hence become single points of failure when burnout, changes in circumstances, or new interests inevitably occur. Asymmetry can then create conflicts (in the case of the P2P Foundation for example), or discourage the handing-over of responsibilities by founding members to a new generation of leadership (in the case of the *Journal of Peer Production*).

There is a lot to learn – both from success stories and abandoned projects – about how to design from scratch smooth transitions of leadership and other responsibilities to multiple actors, which if successful can strengthen the sustainability and adaptability of peer production projects over time. Wrapping up successful initiatives before they become dysfunctional should not be considered a failure, and this issue provides enough evidence that the *Journal of Peer Production* served its purpose. The *Journal* helped to articulate new concepts and methodologies to map how people self-manage common resources and in doing so created bridges between activism, art, and research. In the 'Reflections on the past' section of this final issue two *JoPP* editors share thoughts about the *Journal*. In A short history of the *Journal of Peer Production* by its founder, Mathieu O'Neil revisits key moments in the *JoPP*'s evolution and reviews some of its main contributions. Angela Daly assesses in Revisiting JoPP #6 Disruption the Law whether disruptions analysed in the 2015 issue are still pertinent in 2022, and what new disruptions have erupted since.

One of the *Journal*'s signature achievements was that it helped to develop a community. In a sense, this was formally marked by the 2021 publication of the *Handbook of Peer Production*, to which many *JoPP* authors and editors contributed. To celebrate this community, we publish Interviews with practitioners discussing processes of transition in projects such as Rhizomatica, Harassmap, Ushahidi, Wikimedia Deutschland and Debian. These interviews are excerpted from the *Handbook of Peer Producti*on's Chapter 28: Making a case for peer production.

In dialectical complement and opposition to recognition by dominant institutions, the *Journal* also stimulated the development of strategic tools and directions aiming to question corporate economic models. Members of the jopp community have thus created new projects, including a 'think tank for the commons,' the Digital Commons Policy Council, and Really Simple Federation (RSF). 'The Future' section of this final issue of the jopp offers some insights into these projects' aims and operations.

2022: JOPP'S YEAR IN TRANSITION

The *Journal of Peer Production* has always innovated and this final issue is no exception: we will keep our two final sections, *Reflections on the past* and *The future*, **open for submissions by members of the jopp community until the end of 2022**. We define anyone who has edited an issue or published a contribution in the jopp as a member of our community.

Please send further contributions to *The future* and *Reflections on the past* to transition@peerproduction.net

Dear members of the jopp community: we will invite you for a hybrid closing party at the beginning of 2023, which will hopefully be a year of recovery and positive transition. In the meantime please note the following timeline.

28 February 2022: jopp #15 TRANSITION released, including call for further contributions

30 December 2022: Final deadline for further contributions

January – February 2023 (TBC): Closing ceremony

Archives

- July 2020
- 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

- About
- Issues
- Peer Review
- News
- Projects
- Home