Reviewing and challenging socio-political approaches in the analysis of open collaboration and collective action online

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ABSTRACT

Empirical research on open collaboration and collective action online has begun in earnest only recently. Different research approaches have emerged over the last decades that aim at explaining the socio-political base of open collaboration. The panel focuses on several key issues and challenges facing socio-political approaches in the analysis of open collaboration and collective action online, will atempt to map the main theoretical and methodological research trends, and finally, challenges the limitations and traps of current approaches while reflecting on the suitable ways to fruitfully analyses open collaboration.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.4.0 [**Computers and Society**]: General – *open collaboration, online communities, collective action, socio-political approaches.*

General Terms

Management, Economics, Human Factors, Standardization, Theory, Legal Aspects.

Keywords

Keywords are your own designated keywords.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Empirical research on open collaboration and collective action online has begun in earnest only recently. Different research approaches have emerged over the last decades that aim at explaining the socio-political base of open collaboration. The term socio-political aims to be inclusive sociology, political science, social and cultural anthropology, organizational theory and social media studies. In particular, we will focus on three important themes that require further reflection:

1.   Several authors have argued that the categories applied to open collaboration adopted from political science and political sociology seem to be better adapted to representational politics forms such as political parties and administrations or to primarily offline forms of

collective action such as interest groups, NGOs, and social movements than to collective action with a primarily online base open to participation in a variety of forms. Is this the case? How can researchers overcome this limitation?

1.   Empirical organizational research on Free, Libre and Open Source Software projects (FLOSS), and on wikis and social media production more recently, has primarily focused on case studies of the most successful projects. Which are the limitations of this empirical approach? How can we expanding organizational theory and methods from other fields of open collaboration online than the FLOSS? How can researchers overcome the limitations of case study approaches?

2.   Although social movement theory contributed to early field level analyses of open collaboration, research on open collaboration has problematized social movement theory's tendency to approach social movements in a protest perspective and their impact in terms of national state political institutions. This narrow conception of social movement expression and outcome has prevented researchers from realizing social online collective action' promise. How can researches adapted the social movements theory to open collaboration research? How can we overcome this limitation?

2.   WORKING PLAN

The panel will be structured as follows:

1.   Introduction and short presentations to warm up the discussion, by the following speakers:

   a.   Benjamin Mako Hill: *Moving beyond case studies and studying failure in free/open collaborative communities* (10-15 minutes).

   b.   Mayo Fuster Morell: *Limitations and challenges of the social movements theory to analyse online open collaboration* (10-15 minutes).

   c.   Johanna Niesyto: *Categories applied to open collaboration* (10-15 minutes).

2.   General discussion (approximately 45 minutes), covering topics of interest for the audience, building on top of the comments and perspectives presented in the first part of the session.

3.   BIOGRAPHIES

Benjamin Mako Hill is an academic, activist, and consultant working on issues of technology, intellectual property, and society. He is currently a researcher and PhD Candidate in a joint program between the MIT Sloan School of Management and the MIT Media Lab and a Research Fellow at the MIT Center for Future Civic Media. His research focuses on social scientific analyses of social structure in free software and free culture communities. He has been an leader, developer, and contributor to the Free and Open Source Software community for more than a decade as part of the Debian and Ubuntu projects. He is the author of several bestselling technical books, and a member of the Free Software Foundation board of directors. He is an advisor to the Wikimedia Foundation and the One Laptop per Child project. Hill has a Masters degree from the MIT Media Lab.

Mayo Fuster Morell is finishing a doctoral research on "The Governance of online creation communities for the building of digital commons" at the European University Institute supervised by Donatella della Porta. She explores the democratic logic of the Internet in knowledge making processes and the relationship between governance model and community growth. She compares World Social Forum, Flickr, Wikihow and Wikipedia governance models (http://www.onlinecreation.info). Last year she was visiting researcher at the School of Information – UC Berkeley and provided teaching assistance at the Communication Department – Stanford University. She is co-author of the books "Rethinking political organisation in an age of movements and networks" (XL Editorial: Rome 2007); "Activist research and social movements" (Spanish) (El Viejo Topo: Barcelona 2005); and "Guide for social transformation of Catalonia" (Catalan) (Edicions Collectives: Barcelona 2003).Finally, Mayo is promoter of Networked Politics Collaborative research (http://www.networkedpolitics.info), International forum on Free culture and access to knowledge (www.fcforum.net) and developes technopolitical tools at the frame of the Communication Commission of the World Social Forum and European Social Forum.

Johanna Niesyto is PhD student in political sciences. She works as research fellow in the project 'Changing Protest and Media Cultures' at the Collaborative Research Centre Media Upheavals at the University of Siegen (Germany). Her key interests cover globalisation, public spaces, democracy, political campaigns, contentious politics, political consumerism, cyberculture, and social web. In her thesis she looks at Wikipedia as translingual public space of political knowledge production. Johanna is coeditor and author of "Politik mitdem Einkaufswagen" (Politics with the shopping trolley) and "Political Campaigning on the Web". Also, she has helped organizing several conferences such CPOV, sponsored by the Institute of Network Cultures (The Netherlands).