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Is the digital economy market-driven or commons-based? Lessons for the EU digital transformation strategy

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Abstract

In 2006, Harvard Law School Professor Yochai Benkler proposed a wager to technology and society author Nicholas Carr. Benkler argued that by 2011 the most influential websites would be based on content produced by people engaged in peer production. Carr maintained that the lure of money and the corporate hierarchies will be more effective. So, after 15 years, who has really won the bet? Are the most influential websites peer-produced or price-incentivized? To address these questions, we need to dive deeper on what (commons-based) peer production is in relation to price-incentivized production and the way value is created in the digital economy.

The Carr-Benkler wager is a starting point to examine the current social and political struggles in the digital economy. It serves as a lens to unveil the adversary value systems underneath and the respective implications for organization and public policy. Considering the EU strategy for “Europe’s digital decade” for 2030, we emphasize the contribution of the commons to the so-called digital transformation, and how it is often taken for granted and becomes prone to exploitation and co-optation. On one hand, this tendency leads to the degradation of the commons upon which the digital transformation relies. On the other hand, the alternative socio-technical imaginaries enabled by commons-based practices are ignored. A truly sustainable and just deployment of digital technologies, for both society and the planet, needs to acknowledge and support the contribution of the commons.

Reading material

Pazaitis, A., & Kostakis, V. (2021). Are the most influential websites peer-produced or price-incentivized? Organizing value in the digital economy. Organization. [DOI](#)



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About the Colloquium Series: IASC Europe & CIS is organizing this colloquium series to support the communication among the IASC members in the region and beyond to facilitate content-based exchange and cross-disciplinary networking on bringing together the commons scholarship and practice with policy.