



International Workshop 5.-7. May 2010

"New Forms of Collaborative Production and Innovation: Economic, Social, Legal and Technical Characteristics and Conditions"

Voluntary collaboration among numerous users is characteristic of a new type of production and innovation process, frequently seen today in the development of digital products on the Internet¹. These new production and innovation patterns as discussed in the literature contravene basic economic principles and institutions, and yet have proved to be both highly efficient and successful in many cases. The most commonly cited examples are open source software and Wikipedia. These are developed by large numbers of users worldwide, in highly decentralized and divided processes that are (self-) organized by the individual producers. These production processes are open to all interested contributors, and no exclusive rights of use and appropriation are generated. Another form of user collaboration or co-production is part of production processes organized by firms or at least loosely linked with value creation by firms.

Community-managed, collaborative or commons-based peer production on a non-profit basis is not coordinated by conventional governance forms or institutions, such as hierarchies, markets or networks. Instead, individuals make their contributions voluntarily, without contract or salary, and are free to decide which tasks to undertake. In other words, the division of labor is not organized by firms, but rather by the individual contributors, in the context of the norms and rules of the community. Weak ties and a broad base of participants facilitate highly efficient production and innovation processes.

Furthermore, the governance of these production and innovation processes does not correspond to traditional market mechanisms: Contributions are made without recompense, and prices do not serve as an indicator of the scarcity of goods. The goods produced by users in joint efforts are freely accessible as public goods on the Internet. Interestingly, although open source software and Wikipedia are public goods, they are apparently not subject to free-riding problems to the extent seen with other public goods.

¹ E. von Hippel (2005): Democratizing Innovation; Y. Benkler (2006): The Wealth of Networks; D. Tapscott, A. Williams (2006): Wikinomics: how mass collaboration changes everything; F. Piller, R. Reichwald (2006): Interaktive Wertschöpfung; H. W. Chesbrough, W. Vanhaverbeke, J. West (2006): Open Innovation: Researching a New Paradigm; S. O'Mahony (2006): Developing Community Software in a Commodity World; S. Weber (2004): The Success of Open Source.

The motives named by contributors for their voluntary efforts include reciprocity, fun, learning and reputation.

Another contradiction of conventional principles is seen in the handling of intellectual property and exploitation rights. Licensing is important, not to secure exclusive property rights, but rather to ensure the free availability of the collectively produced product, as evidenced by the GPL used in open source software.

The aim of the workshop is to discuss the characteristics of these new innovation and production processes and their links with traditional economic and legal rules and institutions. Particular attention will be drawn to the conditions that promote self-organized mass collaboration of users in production and innovation processes will be investigated. Because these new production and innovation patterns present new challenges to scientific analysis on various levels, the workshop is designed as an interdisciplinary discussion between economists, jurists, sociologists and political and computer scientists. Following a general discussion of concepts and theoretical frameworks, a closer look will be taken at the conditions for new forms of user collaboration in production and innovation processes. The objective is to formulate a precise agenda for future research in this area. Topics will be examined from the perspectives of the various disciplines represented, to address such aspects as the relationship between user collaboration and value creation, the legal and political framework, public goods and individual behavior, implications for economic policy, and project management for production processes with user collaboration on a large scale.

Organized by
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