

Google and The Commons: How Sharing and Collaboration are Driving New Business Models

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Since the inception of the Internet, we have seen a rise in the potential for non-market practices through peer-to-peer collaborations. This adoption of non-market or "free" practices into the existing capitalist economy has been cause for much academic discourse. There is argument over whether the capitalist co-optation of this culture is devaluing its ethics and whether the adoption of these practices is realistic amongst capitalist ideologies (Bazzichelli, 2010; Pasquinelli, 2010). The digitalisation of information and the growth of networked technologies triggered an explosion of online communities, changing the way information is distributed and shared. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of technological communication networks in changing the way we interact with each other globally, with the emergence of peer collaborative development in a commercial context being the focus. Subsequently, it examines the potential meanings for society that arise from this change; how or whether capitalism and non-market practices can co-exist whilst still upholding their own ideologies.

The paper consists of three main areas of discussion. The first is how innovations in networked technologies since the inception of the internet have created a platform for collaborative development, both socially and commercially. In the context of the emergent Web 2.0 concept, I discuss Google's incorporation of these collaborative development models in an open source business model. The third part of the paper covers Google's bipartite relationship with free culture; its parasitic nature on the commons and contributions to the commons.

In light of this discussion, I conclude that the relationship between Google and free culture is symbiotic, with both parties standing to gain. Google expropriates the commons and the commons gains from the innovations that Google feeds into it. A new type of 'netarchical capitalism' (Bauwens, 2009) is emerging; a tertium quid where free culture has the opportunity to assert its ideologies in a capitalist economy.