

TECHNO-SOCIAL PLATFORM FOR SUSTAINABLE MODELS
AND VALUE GENERATION IN COMMONS BASED PEER PRODUCTION IN THE FUTURE
INTERNET

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Report 1: An evaluation of the software (app) prototype

Stakeholders were invited to test the existing app prototype (which eventually became Teem). Evaluations were mainly positive with the following constructive criticism and feedback. Comprehension and immediate engagement were noted by nearly all. The responsive design and general simplicity were noted, however some bugs prevented data entry for at least one user, which signalled the possibility of discouraging potential users.

It was advised that users would appreciate the ability to add an email for update notifications. Another point was that it would help in the process of trying the prototype if more people would use one specific workspace, to provide some real activity.

Specific feedback about needed features included the possibility of joining other existing services into the platform and a framework to facilitate connections. Also, that the focus on tasks and types of needs specific enough to communities could best be described by a shared vocabulary, and that the "free form text" model the application utilized at the time was lacking. We noted that many members of the stakeholder board did not respond to this request for feedback even after multiple attempts to reach them.

Excerpts of feedback from the group:

Silke Helfrich:

1. nice logo
2. getting in is so easy. AWESOME! Will it stay like this? Just a nickname and that's it?
3. pls. add TransformMap to the list of communities <https://discourse.transformap.co/>
4. it says: "Please, select a community in the app menu" ---> but where is the app menu?
5. Then I entered the name "transformap" and I was told to "create a community", which is great -> but then I realized, that I did not even realize how easy it was to create it, that is: I did not notice I had already created a new community and created it once more; so now you have two "transformap" communities on the site and with a typing error ...
6. I wanted to correct the typing error and couldn't manage
7. I wanted to delete one of the two transformap-entries and couldn't manage (there is certainly a way, but not an easy-enough one for users like me); so: How do I delete or modify entries?
8. Is there a howto? A tutorial on how to use the website? Our questions here could help you writing the script for it.
9. I'd use Colors to differentiate the Projects from the Projects within the Projects i.e. the Subprojects
10. I created a project and entered needs and then I was unsure how to get back to the main site...

That's it, hope it helps a bit. Please let me know.

Dario Taborelli

First off, let me thank the team behind this prototype for choosing to work on such an important problem: the concept of a platform to route users of collaborative communities to tasks in need of attention by adopting principles of social translucency is absolutely critical. Many such communities are struggling to build similar systems: in the case of wikis, only few examples stand out as successful experiments in this area (like the Community Dashboard on WikiHow [1]). The vast majority of WikiProjects – communities within Wikipedia organizing activity in specific topic areas –



still use very rudimentary tools for identifying needs and coordinating work around them, despite a number of attempts at building better applications. Below, I focus on questions / comments that could make the tool useful for the specific case of Wikimedia projects, but some of this feedback can be generalized.

The prototype needs several accessibility/usability improvements, which I'd be happy to go through, but given that it's at an early development stage I imagine it's something to be expected and I'll skip feedback in this area for now.

The idea of a generic platform for this kind of purpose, abstracting from the specifics of any given community, is interesting but faces some important challenges to be successful, in my opinion. If I understand the assumption behind the platform, users will rely on it to discover community needs and coordinate their contributions *across multiple communities*. If that is the case, I wonder how far this concept can be pushed while still producing value to end users of a *specific community*. My first reaction after testing the tool was: what makes the feature selection general enough to apply to different types of peer production communities (say, a citizen science project, a local community focused on sustainable economy, a large-scale collaborative project such as Wikipedia, etc)? One might be tempted to water down the specifics of each of these communities and build a very high-level platform to facilitate task routing and their visibility. However, the more abstract the set of tools, the harder is going to be for this platform to distinguish itself from popular project management tools (such as Trello or Asana) or even forum applications / discussion systems that have been successfully adopted by many open collaborative communities to "get things done". The unique selling point of this platform compared to the "competitors" and the set of features which make it minimally viable need to be much more explicit.

One could argue that what makes this platform particularly viable for online collaborative communities is the focus on tasks and types of needs that are specific enough to these communities to be described by a shared vocabulary – a vocabulary that general-purpose project management applications lack. If this is the case, it would be great to hear the team's thoughts on how to design a typology of tasks or even "need/task templates" that users can easily identify with. The "free form text" model the application currently uses doesn't cut it for me, the success of the platform will depend on finding a design and set of solutions that users find intuitive without turning it into some kind of bloatware that can do everything.



A feature that I would most welcome is the possibility of plugging existing services into the platform and a framework to make such “connectors” really easy to use:

- open authentication and authorization to allow users to reuse their credentials without having to create new accounts
- the ability for this platform to interface with specific APIs already generating list of tasks or needs
- the ability of this platform to integrate with services for user notification on the target communities

It's highly unlikely that such a system would work if it duplicated existing tools that are already fulfilling the same needs in specific communities, but if it interfaced with them gracefully and with little overheads for the end user, I expect adoption would be much smoother.

I'm curious to see how the tool evolves over the next few iterations and I'd be more than happy to hop on a call to discuss with the team how I can provide more detailed feedback on specific design aspects. Thanks for sharing this early version!

[1] <http://www.wikihow.com/Special:CommunityDashboard>

Report 2: An evaluation of the paper, P2Pvalue Guidelines, Best Practices for Collaborative Economy Platforms

The accessibility of the material was noted as a vast improvement over previous documents, and a wide variety of constituencies could benefit from such a best-practices guide. Also the report represents a significant advance over prior research specifically in its synthesis of a broad range of collaboration, and in providing more systemic ways to evaluate these and design better future models. The inclusion of a taxonomy of 30 classes of online collaboration was cited as a useful advance, one that could be improved if organized into smaller sub-sets or "clusters" around their similarities and differences. Learning about how successful digital communities navigate the tensions between commercial and social-solidarity drives was seen as a valuable area to investigate and include. The use of the term "decentralized" versus "distributed" was questioned, with the point raised that the latter is often preferred by open Internet advocates. Also noted was a lack of distinction made between "netarchical" platforms and user-controlled ones. Suggested improvements included adding an explanation of "platform cooperatives", and information on how to promote the services mentioned. This was felt to be a critical oversight because a critical mass of users is needed to make such platforms valuable. Adding fourth section was suggested, in order to expand on how platforms may grow without reliance on venture capital but instead on use of alternative currencies.

Excerpts of feedback from the group:

David Bollier

The report, "Best Practices for Collaborative Economy Platforms: P2Pvalue Guidelines," provides a rich, indepth analytic framework for understanding the often-misunderstood dynamics of commons-based peer production (CBPP) on open platforms. While much research has been done on the dynamics of open source software communities, much less has been done on the expanding world of sharing and collaboration in online contexts, and especially complications of enabling CCP to coexist fruitfully with capital-driven market activity. It is therefore helpful to have a more articulated framework for assessing the role of tech design, governance structures and the "soft" social and ethical factors in producing both nonmarket and monetized value.

The rough taxonomy of 30 classes of online collaboration is a useful advance. It would be even more useful if these could be organized into a smaller set of "clusters" based on some analysis of their similarities and differences. In other words, is there a more general structural, governance or social heuristic for distinguishing among sets of CBPP? Perhaps there are stark similarities among categories of communities that deserve to be made salient.

It would also be valuable to learn more about how successful digital commons manage the inevitable tensions between market activity (and the individual rewards that tend to follow) and the need for social solidarity and collaboration. How do tech design, project leaders, and social structures and norms help manage this tension successfully and preserve the integrity of the commons? What do social psychologists have to say about the structures, processes and norms for managing a stable, vital community?

Obviously, a topic this rich provokes all sorts of additional lines of inquiry such as these. However, this report represents a significant advance over prior research in synthesizing a broad range of collaborative activities and providing more systemic ways of evaluating them and designing better models for the future.

Neal Gorenflo

The best practices document can be useful to a number of constituencies including:

- service designers, product managers, and social entrepreneurs developing a new or improving an existing service
- academics looking for foundational information to frame in a holistic way (with both nonprofit and for profit examples, for instance) the phenomenon of collaborative economy
- students learning about emerging forms of economic life, new paradigms that may be more relevant to them and their future
- to help policy makers think beyond the strictly for-profit forms of sharing and collaboration, that there are other options for helping their stakeholders share. Could be especially important for low income or remote communities that sometimes aren't service by commercial enterprises
- to sharing and commons movement builders as a reference and resource

Suggested improvements in best practices document:

- there is no mention or explication of what platform cooperatives are, you could use our primer as a source: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/a-shareable-explainer-what-is-a-platform-co-op>
- there is no information about how to promote such services. This is a critical oversight because these platforms have no value unless a critical mass of users can be attracted. And there's a special challenge in that these platforms can't rely on huge VC investments to pump growth, different currencies need to be used (social, narrative, and reputational capital, etc.). I think you need a fourth section for this. Lots of information available in the commercial world about this, but not completely appropriate because growth there often relies on having a big marketing budget.