



opencare

Deliverable 4.4: Accountability and ownership in community-led welfare innovation: its potential role in EU policies

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Abstract

Community driven care design and provision is a growing trend in the face of current austerity policies and generalized welfare spending control.

However, it is all but granted that this could sustainably scale to offer a dependable and realistic alternative to more formal care offers, and part of the challenges descends from the fear that activism could become a fig leaf to cover for further cuts, and that the mechanism become essentially extractive further exposing the participant communities to vulnerabilities.

In the present study we report of the motivations and fears shaping volunteer participation in community driven care, and we argue that some best practices of commoning relating to accountability of contribution and ownership play an important role in lowering the entry barriers by volunteers.

Background

OpenCare is a CAPSSI project of H2020 that is devoted to piloting and studying bottom-up care design and provision, and the role of distributed intelligence in facilitating and nurturing its emergence.

Among the challenges of such initiatives, facilitating the design of appropriate governance is arguably the most important. In facts, as argued by Elinor Oström [REF#1] the care of commons relies on a fine balance between sharing and appropriation, and ultimately on a social contract of trust and commensurate contribution and care. This has not been studied when the common of focus is *care*, and should not be taken for granted since the latter is a funding element of communities social contract, beyond being a mere common [REF#2].

Previous authors [REF#3] have argued that also trust towards the intention of incumbents (e.g. States, insurances,...) plays a role in shaping the effort a community is willing to invest in the provision of care as a common, albeit example exists of communities (e.g. Amish) that have willingly and effectively parted care provision between community and ecosystems' offerings. This realization captures our attention as it opens to realistic opportunities of identifying actions and designs that would allow a community to develop trust in a sustainable bottom driven and delivered form of care, while interfacing with incumbents committed to standard forms of care provision and market.

OpenCare has observed the social contract regulating community driven care design [REF#4], therein identifying the importance of value appropriation by the community, and the dependence of sustainability from the maintenance of a microscale flexibility within the ecosystem, such as that identification could happen at any given time as inclusively as possible.

Material and methods

In OpenCare 103 off-line deep games meeting have been run, each involving 9-14 participants, for a total of 728 individuals (accounting for individuals who participated to more than 1 session, 52 of whom joined 4 or more meetings). Overall the sample included 326 women and 402 men, with a median age of 29 for the former and 34 for the latter.

The subgroup of assiduous participant had significantly different composition, with men being over-represented (35 versus 17 women), and a significantly higher median age for men (46 years old).

Education level all exceeded national averages, as with few exception most of the participants had University education, or other forms of higher education (technical MOOCs, and participation to long running focus groups on technical or design topics).

All participants run through a funnel conversation with at least one of the facilitators of the deep games to be informed about the methods and scopes of the sessions, and after being offered the opportunity to ask any question or share any comment they may harbor, they have been asked to sign an informed consent.

Data have only been recorded anonymously at source, and the study focused on the conversations and dynamics of interaction emerging during the deep games session, which focused on hypothetical and simulated scenarios, thus minimizing the opportunities of identifiable sensitive information to be shared.

Annotation and analysis of the above mentioned data have been performed in double blind, after a series of 5 mock ups session had been performed and audit to ensure some tuning of the blinded analysts. A kappa concordance statistics [REF#5] has been computed for the two operators, and with a value of $k=0.46$, on over 210 hours of total interactions analyzed, it has been deemed acceptable to proceed.

Results

The deep games have focused on topics proposed by the participants in advance, spanning from blindness to the design of complements to service provision by public administrations at local level.

The analyses by the operators have focused on the considerations that were shared about viability, and sustainability.

The conversation that emerged ubiquitously focused on intellectual property, and entrepreneurship. The totality of the encountered communities would like to achieve economic self-sustainability, and share ambitions to transform their solutions in ways that would be able proactively contribute to the local well-being of their communities.

Feelings of confusion and anxiety have regularly been associated to the conversation of these topics, with recurrent views of unfair competition by incumbents, and fear of being pushed out of legality being the top causes of unease.

Almost unanimously, the encountered communities expressed unquestioned commitment to opensource intellectual property approaches, often even in the face of provocations concerning the pragmatic value of IP as a tactic for sustainability.

This unwavering faith is not matched by an equally solid knowledge of business models, and the most negative feelings of aggression and fear are expressed when driving the conversation in this direction.

Only conversations about standards and quality certification would elicit equally negative emotions, being associated to ideas of monopolistic aspiration by incumbents, and of lack of trust towards central institution.

Lobbying is a theme that would regularly emerge associated to these conversations, usually framed as an enemy rather than an element of a viable strategy that a community could put in place.

The exit of most conversations would converge towards topics of evasive strategy, and with younger participants evasive entrepreneurship. Participants would express feelings of hope, and even affection, towards the idea of seeing their efforts defining entirely new niches, able of displacing those stakeholders they identify as partakers in the perpetration of the problems, often negatively discussing the focus on profit associated to this, rather than envisioning a negotiation towards coexistence.

Responding to provocations concerning continuity of social culture, and inclusion of more moderate components of the population, not all group reacted equally, almost divided in half between a conversation about realization and revolution, and more nuanced arguments of outreach and transition.

Every group started the sessions with little to no questioning of the ethical aspects of their focus, valuing action well above reflection and precautionary principles. Usually the conversations would initially converge on considerations of failure of the status-quo, and need for change, as main staples of the justification of the group ethical stance. Terminology from the agile and design thinking culture emerge surprisingly during these conversations, assimilated to strategies of risk mitigation.

Provocations concerning skin-in-the-game mitigation designs, and job-to-be-done theory as opposed to problem holder narratives, are regularly met as threatening, and usually elicit strong reactions of distrust towards the proposer, and mentions of legal awareness.

Responsibility waiving, and participation to production/provision are concepts often emerging at this stage of conversation, associated to a sense of trust and comfort that these are solutions already accepted at large on the market.

More senior groups, that have experienced failures after initial success before, have more nuanced reactions, and tend to propose reflections on balance and trade-offs, with discussions converging around overheads avoidance, accessibility, and sustainability, and an almost ubiquitous accent on fallibilism.

Inclusion and expansion of the group of supporters is usually not just a wish, but it associates to feelings of necessity and anxiety, most participants openly sharing doubts that long-term sustainability would be achievable without wide endorsement signifying an acknowledgement of the value generated.

Discussion

Unsurprisingly, communities express growing degrees of prudence and self-reflection as they grow more experienced.

Hence, time is an ally of sustainability and measures to speed up deployment and scaling should be accompanied by adequate counter-measures to compensate for the missing educational value of failures.

Our experiences with the DeepGames, as herein reported, show that provocation by simulation only can do little in a compressed time, and that exposure to online conversations is often inefficient as well.

The latter might actually be a liability [REF#6] as online echochamber can contribute to reinforcing false beliefs. Importantly, communities behind bottom-up care design and provision emerge from our analysis very self-aware. They engage in this activity consciously and with significant expectations of fall-out for their communities of origin.

Maybe even more strikingly, these communities defy literature about design thinking [REF#7], and about RRI [REF#8], by nurturing ambitions of control and ownership of their own brainchildren, which they wish to see supported with dedicated policies, a good example of which has been produced by the opencare partner Municipality of Milan [REF#9, REF#10], but with no ambitions of allowing public/private appropriation, even under the flag of scale.

In facts, this evidence partially contradicts the assumptions behind living labs [REF#11] and innovation centres [REF#12], which may then be onto some complementary activities of outreach, rather than outright co-production as it is often claimed [REF#13, REF#14].

If such findings would be confirmed by further research, these should inform future policy making, by reshaping towards an expansion the portfolio of support instruments that the public funding and legal frameworks offer to bottom-up initiatives, including legal sandboxes and spaces of suspension of belief where negotiations of support, and of alternative safety and security measures are possible, to fully exploit the enormous livelihood

communities are capable of, a potential that is currently plucked and passively opposed by focusing on more traditional, extractive forms of innovation even in the market of care [REF#15].

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