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Platform Design

the moving governance model

Co-design

The activity of **designing together with others**

In the current context, we are talking about bringing together who traditionally would have been recipients and creators into a team to think together, develop together, and use together

In a sense we are talking about blurring the lines between the designer and the recipient, therefore we speak about participants (and not users)

Platform

A **complex system** made of participants (both human and non human) that serves a purpose

The concept of platform has been stretched into becoming many things, but I like to distinguish it from the term infrastructure

There is **no predefined set of components** that integrate a platform, as a matter of fact, it could be completely non-digital (note, it cannot be non-technological, that is simply not possible)

Governance

The mechanism chosen to make decisions and determine the future of platforms

The participation in the platform’s governance is what makes it even more interesting from a research perspective

Open questions are: who participates in decision making and why?, when are different types of organisms formed?, are models replicable?

The role of the researcher - methodology

In my research I have chosen the *Participatory Activist Research* model

Researchers take part in the actions, make political decisions and then stop to make a snapshot of the situation, synthesise the documentation and publish results

It is a complex way of working that requires admitting the mistakes made on the field

There is also a bit of Schoen's *Reflective Practitioner* in this work

Example 1: Arduino - the open source project

Arduino is born in 2005 as an **open source project**

Created in a **collaboration between teachers and students** in Interaction Design to be used as a learning material when creating new interactive objects, 5 founders and project moderators for several years

Designs (hardware), code, and documentation are open and use existing licenses from the free and open source movements

Community members come from all over the world, currently over 39m visitors per year to the official website

Example 1: Arduino - the turning point

The amount of work to be placed on maintaining and running the web properties and software forces for rethinking the model

We used the money collected throughout the years to bring people together and discuss about the future

The decision was made that, for having a sustainable future, we should follow the path of making a company in order to hire experts that could help the project develop further

Example 1: Arduino - the company

The Arduino company is currently employing over 100 people and has offices in 3 different countries with employees in other 4

Arduino has grown into having 3 business units: maker, education, and professional with over 60 different products

The largest working team is web, followed by content, design and hardware / firmware

There is a dedicated sales team, a marketing team, a financial team, human resources, etc

Example 1: Arduino - the corporate era

Being a corporation requires a change of mindset, but more importantly, requires a change in the governance model

In the past most decisions were taken in conversation with the members of the Arduino community

Currently there is a board of directors, a CEO, department heads, etc who are obviously taking control over a lot of the governance in order to assure Arduino’s existence

Example 1: Arduino - the community

The Arduino community has shifted, and while there is a strong core of members that not only participate in specific governance aspects from their position in the forum, it has not extended to include partners, distributors, etc

In other words, the community is not purely discoursive, but it also includes other parts of society that enlarge the concept of community to **all that participate from the platform in some way**

Example 2: Coronavirus Makers - the movement

The CVM movement emerges as a way to respond to the needs of society (in Spain) in terms of PPEs and other medical equipment to respond to the first wave of the covid-19

Uses different digital platforms to communicate (telegram, forum, website, twitter)

Emerges as the “C” solution to the covid-19 problem:

- A: government gets the things
- B: the industry makes the things
- C: the citizens make the things in a distributed fashion

Example 2: CVM - the challenges

How could we operate without a proper legal entity?

How could we channel money and material donations?

How could we manage communication and get organised?

Example 2: CVM - distributed governance

The governance model for CVM is completely distributed

People join in their own capacity (which is always changing)

We had two different structures:

- the national logistics and distribution team (one or two members per region)
- the so-called coordination team, mostly focused in R&D of products and services

Added a committee to handle financial aspects and economic donations

Example 2: CVM - the months of stability

The stability period is stable only as a concept, the governance mechanism was the only stable thing, what was facilitated by dedicated leaders that had the ability of identifying challenges and getting different stakeholders to collaborate

People would come and go, but the ad-hoc structure would prevail over time

The main contribution from this movement was the production of face-shields, masks, and intubation boxes for hospitals, medical professionals, and paramedics

Example 2: CVM - saying goodbye

The moment there was no more need of 3D printed goods, the movement slowly turned it self off

The different regional communities would close their collaboration sites, their communication channels, and put their printers to sleep

Example 2: CVM - the post wave - MQM

From week 4 in the process, we were working in the creation of the post-wave form of CVM

Through a long and complex assembly process we co-designed the state of operation of an NGO that we called MasQueMakers (more than makers)

Over 100 members from the 16000 that conformed CVM joined this new installment of the movement

Similarities?

I would say that, up to the point when Arduino reached the turning point (5 years in the making) both examples responded to a very similar governance model

The use of standard communication tools is also a similarity

Both processes started through volunteer work, and developed because of the specific needs of a set of society where people with the knowledge in the production of things could help design the objects and services

Differences?

Speed: the projects happened at entirely different speeds

Scale: the movement reached the whole society

Sustainability: only time will tell, we are now in the testing phase

Governance

Lessons learned

Governance shifts over time

Humans are the ones that decide which form will entities have

Volunteer work, is still work, and it is not sustainable in a society of creation (there needs to be some sort of compensation)

Ownership is a BIG challenge, even under the openness paradigm

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