

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
Department of Political and Social Sciences

**Governance of online creation communities:
Provision of infrastructure for the building of digital**

Examining Board:

commons

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Abstract

This doctoral research is framed by the notion of a transition in which distinct commons organizational forms are gaining in importance at a time when the institutional principles of the nation state are in a state of profound crisis, and those of the private market are undergoing dramatic change. Additionally, the transformation of industrial society into a knowledge-based one is raising the importance of knowledge management, regulation and creation.

This doctoral research addresses collective action for knowledge-making in the digital era from a double perspective of organizational and political conflict through the case of global online creation communities. From the organizational perspective, it provides an empirically grounded description of the organizational characteristics of emerging collective action. The research challenges previous literature by questioning the neutrality of infrastructure for collective action and demonstrating that infrastructure governance shapes collective action. Importantly, the research provides an empirical explanation of the organizational strategies most likely to succeed in creating large-scale collective action in terms of the size of participation and complexity of collaboration. From the political conflict perspective, this research maps the diverse models of governance of knowledge-making processes, addresses how these are embedded in each model of governance, and suggests a set of dimensions of democratic quality adapted to these forms. Importantly, it provides an empirically grounded characterization of two conflicting logics present in the conditions for collective action in the digital era: a commons *versus* a corporate logic of collective action. Additionally, the research sheds lights on the emerging free culture and access to knowledge movement as a sign of this conflict.

In hypothesizing that the emerging forms of collective action are able to increase in terms of both participation and complexity while maintaining democratic principles, this research challenges Olson's assertion that formal organizations tend to overcome collective action dilemmas more easily, and challenges the classical statements of Weber and Michels that as organizations grow in size and complexity, they tend to create bureaucratic forms and oligarchies. This research concludes that online creation communities are able to increase in complexity while maintaining democratic principles. Additionally, in the light of this research, the emerging collective action forms are better characterized as hybrid ecosystems which succeed by networking and combining several components, each with different degrees of formalization and organizational and democratic logics.

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