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# HACKING TEACHING FOR CREATING KNOWLEDGE IN COMMONS: OPEN WALKED EVENT-BASED EXPERIMENTATION

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**Abstract:** Open access to knowledge promotes collaboration, sharing, and exchange; further, it nourishes creativity, democratizes innovation (Hippel, 2005, 2017), and facilitates adaptation to a very volatile environment. So how can we favour collaboration and open access knowledge in education to stimulate students'creativity? We propose in this paper to present an experiment of situated learning based on the commons concept. This experiment relies on a method developed by a group of academics studying new work practices and collaborative spaces (the Research Group on Collaborative Spaces): the Open Walked Event-based Experimentation. The OWEE research method relies on collaboration to produce open access knowledge and considers walking in common as a good way to create a community. We adapted the OWEE protocol to a new context – a learning expedition mainly with students in a closed event space - to turn them into active and reflexive visitors of the fair.

**Key words:** open knowledge, teaching, learning expeditions, common-pool-resource

## 1) Context, research question and research interest

The global economy is founded on knowledge, which is thus perceived as the cornerstone of competitiveness in the context of an international competition (Foray, 2004; Powell & Snellman, 2004).

In that sense, "the best way for a firm to control and manage its environment is to become an expert in the art of learning and to become capable of swift adaptation" (Argyris, 1993, p. 4). Learning in order to adapt, being actively watchful, and making decisions informed by a strong knowledge of the environment happens much more efficiently when all the members of an organization collaborate with a common direction in mind (Likert, 1967).

Wikipedia, Creative Commons licenses (Lessig, 2004, 2006), and Open Access culture (Suber, 2012) all illustrate the creative and transformative potential of the participatory culture associated with the Internet (Benkler, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2011). Open access to knowledge promotes collaboration, sharing, and exchange; further, it nourishes creativity, democratizes innovation (Hippel, 2005, 2017), and facilitates adaptation to a very volatile environment.

So if we consider that innovation is a means to adapt to a changing environment and that creativity is positively linked to innovation (Sarooghi, Libaers, et Burkemper, 2015), how can we favour collaboration and open access knowledge in education to stimulate students' creativity?

We propose in this paper to present an experiment of situated learning based on the commons concept. Many authors (Hess & Ostrom, 2011; Benkler, 2002; Rifkin, 2014) have demonstrated that knowledge benefits from being produced and organized collectively in accordance with the principle of the commons as theorized by Ostrom (1990).

## 2) Theoretical foundations: knowledge as a common-pool-resource

A common-pool-resource is (originally) a natural resource that requires collective management (Ostrom, 1990) or else risks facing "the tragedy of the commons" (Hardin, 1968) – that is to

say, excessive exploitation of a common good (e.g., fish stock) for private purposes according to the well-known logic of the free rider (Olson, 1965). It is important to underscore that a CPR only becomes a commons once a communal management of the resource has been put into place. A commons, thus, must be governed. Conversely, a CPR can exist without implying communal governance (e.g. the climate is a CPR but not a commons). By extension, a public good governed communally becomes a commons, as is the case of Wikipedia or Linux, both of which are knowledge commons (Bollier, 2011).

Understanding properly the CPR idea requires a classification of economic goods, undertaken by Samuelson (1954), according to two criteria:

- Exclusion, which gauges the alternately public or private character of a good by asking: can one easily exclude certain individuals from the use of this good or not?
- Rivalry (or subtractability), which indicates the degree of a good's availability in relation to its use by asking: does the personal use of a good deprive others of its use?

The intersection of these two criteria results in the following table.

| | | ***Subtractability*** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Low | High |
| ***Exclusion*** | Difficult | **Public goods**<br>Useful knowledge<br>Sunsets | **Common-pool resources**<br>Libraries<br>Irrigation systems |
| | Easy | **Toll or club goods**<br>Journal subscriptions<br>Day-care centers | **Private goods**<br>Personal computers<br>Doughnuts |

**Table 1. Type of Goods Source: Hess, Ostrom, 2011, p.9.**

Useful knowledge, which is at first a public good, is threatened of subtractability. To be more precise useful knowledge is threatened in three ways:

- Information overload (too much information to deal with);
- Knowledge enclosure (intellectual property: patent, copyrights);
- Orwell's Doublethink (fake news or alternative facts).

So knowledge is, now, much more a common-pool-resource than a public good.

## 3) Methodology

### The OWEE method

A group of academics studying new work practices and collaborative spaces (the *Research Group on Collaborative Spaces*[1]) has progressively devised a method to produce knowledge collectively on the basis of learning expeditions: the Open Walked Event-based Experimentation (OWEE - De Vaujany & Vitaud, 2017)[2]. The OWEE research method relies on collaboration to produce open access knowledge and considers walking in common as a good way to create a community: "[Expeditions] are opened to various sets of stakeholders: academics, entrepreneurs, managers, artists, activists, students and politicians. The event is expected to foster collaborations between and beyond the group"[3]. The community is both physical (people engaged in the walk) and digital (people following our live tweet, people taking notes on Framapad, etc.).

We understand the word "community" according to its Indo-European roots (Benveniste, 1969), *communis*: who has reciprocal obligations. An OWEE seeks reciprocity (in the knowledge creation process of course but more basically in the open mindedness, respect, benevolence, that lead our research and teaching practices). Reciprocity is an organized process.

[1] http://rgcs-owee.org
[2] http://rgcs-owee.org/owee-2/method-4/
[3] https://collaborativespacesstudy.wordpress.com/2018/04/29/walking-the-talk-talking-the-place-three-research-protocols-for-learning-expeditions/

So while building a community we build rules (formal and informal), we build an institutional arrangement that achieve coordination. That arrangement is not as familiar as the Market or the State. It's a *commons*. With this institutional arrangement we move from walking in common to walking as a commons.

It's not easy to see the OWEE commons at first glance because commons are deeply contextual. "Each commons has its own distinctive character because each is shaped by its particular location, history, culture and social practices. So it can be hard for the newcomer to see the patterns of 'commoning'. The term communing means to suggest that the commons is really more of a verb than a noun. It is a set of ongoing practices, not an inert physical resource. There is no commons without commoning"[4].

So the OWEE commons can be seen through a set of practices. Empirical studies on the governance of CPR have allowed for the establishment of design principles that facilitate the perpetuation of communal governance and thus enable the protection of CPR. These principles do not automatically imply the success of communal governance but they have been found to be present in all instances of success. The principles are as follows (Ostrom, 1990, pp.90-102):

[4] http://www.bollier.org/new-to-the-commons ; see also Bollier, 2011 and Bollier & Helfrich, 2014.

| # | **Ostrom's principles (1990, pp.90-102)** | **Implementation in OWEE** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The limits of the common good are clearly defined; the access rights to the common good are clear | For each OWEE we specify (usually on Eventbrite) :<br>- how people can join us and what we intend to do (boundary rules);<br>- who is acting as a guide, who is taking notes, etc. (position rules) |
| 2 | The rules governing the use of the common good are adapted to local needs and conditions | The purpose of the OWEE is to produce open access knowledge, hence the distribution of this knowledge through social media, a website (RGCS blog and live area) and open access publications (RGCS White Papers) |
| 3 | A system allowing individuals to participate in the definition and modification of these rules on a regular basis has been established | The OWEE method is discussed after each event (with participants and online); modifications of the method are published on the RGCS website. A group on slack is devoted to OWEE. |
| 4 | A system for community members to self-check their behaviors has been established | The rules in use during each OWEE are defined when needed (for example being silent while visiting a place where people are working). A basic rule is reciprocity, or the Golden Rule (*tweet others as you would wish to be tweeted*): contribute to Framapad, to the live tweet, retweet, etc. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | A graduated system of sanctions for those who violate the community's rules is provided for | The case wasn't encountered yet; let's say that a call to order would suffice (exclusion should be the ultimate sanction). |
| 6 | An inexpensive conflict resolution system is available to community members | Our first choice for the moment: *Discussion*. |
| 7 | The community's right to define its own rules of operation is recognized by external authorities | This right wasn't questioned yet. |
| 8 | When applicable (such as for a common good that exists across borders or a common good assigned to a range of territorial levels), the organization of decision-making can be established at several levels while respecting the rules set out above | RGCS is a very decentralized network and OWEE events are organized all other the world. |

**Table 2. Ostrom's design principles implemented in the OWEE method**

So, walking as a commons is a way to produce collaborative knowledge (mainly scientific but not only), with an experimental and experiential method and to share broadly (following the open access philosophy) both the outcomes of the research and the method used. The commons is a very performative concept: using it (intellectually) leads to practicing it. And with the practice comes a new world of organizational experiments, social interactions, political institutions and research fields.

**Experimenting the Owee methodology with students**

In order to experiment the OWEE method for teaching, we participate with thirty double-degree students in innovation management from emlyon business school at the event of the "7th Printemps des Entrepreneurs" in Lyon (France). We led an OWEE method in this context to help them to get the most out of the event. Students were expected to collectively answer the broad question underlying the event: "For you, 'companies of tomorrow', what does it mean?" Seeing and being seen in this kind of business gathering is undoubtedly one part of their future work practices as managers, leaders, or entrepreneurs - whatever one thinks of the usefulness of these events. In line with an experiential learning lens, we let them make their own experiences in the field, after having created the conditions to make it happen. We adapted the OWEE protocol to this new context – a learning expedition mainly with students in a closed event space - to turn them into active and reflexive visitors of the fair.

First, students split into four groups to tackle the issue of what tomorrow's company would look like from four different perspectives – new work and organisational forms, internal and external stakeholders for tomorrow, time & space relationships of tomorrow's company, alternative managerial tools and methods. Then they assigned roles to the group members to gather information about their odysseys. Some were in charge of taking notes – on paper and on the collaborative open platform framapad, others of taking pictures and films, and last but not least, of drawing or innovating in the manner of gathering information. Everybody was allowed and encouraged to be also visible on social networks – twitter, facebook, instagram… One person per group was in charge of collecting everything in name of his/her group and to send it to the community manager of the cohort who retweeted and posted in real time in the blog and the official twitter account of the program. Each group had a dedicated coach (a professor or a PhD student members of RGCS). This organization was implemented the afternoon before the event. Experiential learning experiments do not aim to make them dream of futuristic digital

technologies or being the next Zuckerberg, but to expose them to the true reality of work practices – even the unpleasant and unfair ones. For example, students were very surprised to see the gap between their

vision of entrepreneurship and the fairly classical and formal worldview offered by this fair – despite its name "springtime of entrepreneurs"!

**4) Expected results and potential contributions**

The OWEE was a great pedagogical tool to demonstrate that attending such events as fair without any plans, goals and methods means losing time, money and missing opportunities. To put it in another way, experimenting, whatever you experiment is, leads to nowhere if you don't take the time to think about what you are experimenting. But we still have to imagine new types of assessment and feedback to students (Warhuus, Blenker, & Elmholdt, 2018) to generalise and legitimise this kind of practice-based approaches. OWEE is an easy and cheap – but time and energy- consuming – innovative experiential learning approach that comes back to basics: walk together, like Aristotle and his disciples. Following the tradition of Peripapeticians' practice, OWEE builds knowledge from the facts given by experience. OWEE gave the occasion to turn an individual practice – attending a fair – into a collective value creation of meaning – creating a common vision of future of work.

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