TOWARDS PEER PRODUCTION IN PUBLIC SERVICES: CASES FROM FINLAND

Editors: Andrea Botero, Andrew Gryf Paterson and Joanna Saad-Sulonen

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Towards Peer-production in Public Services

Introduction

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This publication is a collection of articles that deals broadly with the relationships between peer-to-peer dynamics, and the design, production and provision of public services. Most of the cases presented are illustrative of recent developments and discussions in Finnish society, however other broader international perspectives which give historical reflection and future-oriented speculation on what might be the outcomes are included.

There are changes taking place in how the role of citizens in society is experienced—in terms of how they feel responsible for things happening—and also in what is expected from them. The last few years have witnessed a flurry of citizen-driven and organized activities that range from guerrilla gardening with aims to beautify unattended urban spots, and pop up restaurants to comment on impractical bureaucracy; as well as self-assigned urban planning initiatives to revive the local community. This has been especially visible in the larger urban congregations in Finland, such as Helsinki (Hernberg 2012).

These developments may be seen in the context of traditional and renewed spirit of Finnish talkoot [1], as well as a combination of creative and information-sharing associational activity as an activist instrument (Paterson 2011). In many cases, self-assigned innovators and active people are taking some of their concerns into their own hands, strengthening their belonging and cooperation with others. The Internet has been a supporting factor, bypassing the limited number of physical social-forum spaces. Especially, in the Finnish context, enthusiastic broadband and mobile data usage is a contributing factor, as the mainstream (and mobile) adoption of social media platforms, such as Facebook, have provided some groups with easy ways to communicate, forming online groups and self-defined information channels.

Hand-in-hand with these above local trends, we also witness the impacts of globalized issues, such as the economic crisis, perceived stagnation of the welfare state, and the challenges of an aging population. Taken together, all these developments set the ground for a more general debate on how our relationship with the state should evolve, and how to imagine and organise common affairs in new ways (Benkler 2006). There is no doubt that there is a renewed interest to understand processes, logics and incentives that can make possible new partnerships between the public-sector, private-sector, third-sector, and citizens, in order to create and produce public services. Amongst the many aspects to consider, active forms of citizenship, broader public participation, and the role of ‘peers’ have emerged as key issues. Naturally these phenomena are not limited to Finland or Northern Europe, but are happening worldwide at different scales, speeds, and with different focuses (c.f: Borchorst, Bedker & Zander 2009, Jégou & Manzini 2008, Ostrom 2000, Parks et. al. 1999, Parker & Heapy 2006, Paterson 2010).

We are, of course, not the only ones giving attention to related issues in Finland. For example, the Finnish Innovation Fund (Sitra) has commissioned several reports on similar topics, includ-
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Introduction

ing one on the future of the welfare state in the time of communities (Mokka & Neuvonen 2006), and a more recent document providing an overview of contemporary Finnish co-production projects building on the “talkoot” tradition (Aitamurto, Siivonen & Lovio 2012). From a different perspective our own Aalto University has also been involved in experimenting with new service design approaches involving both citizens and municipalities [2].

The list can be expanded, but for now, it is suffice to say that there is a clear need to increase the understanding of the logic and incentives in these types of processes; this compilation is our contribution to this larger discussion.

We are interested in the underlying messages that these new trends and emerging weak signals are posing, and we are aware of the need for a multi-disciplinary perspective. There are many challenges and opportunities in designing, developing and maintaining services for participatory modes of governance, including co-creation and peer-to-peer aspects. We ask, what can be learned from current research, and what is happening already beyond academia? With the aim to increase the opportunities for dialogue between the Finnish scene and the international context, we have gathered this collection of articles, with some providing more background information and introducing useful concepts; the others describe and reflect upon local ongoing grassroots or organized experiments. They all deal with the collaboration and engagement of “peers” in the ideation, creation or provisioning of services. We hope to offer something for academics as well as professionals engaged in media and service-design, socially-engaged processes, cultural production and public service management located both in small to large institutions, as well as for citizens wanting to do something. Thus the writing styles and formats within this compilation are a rather eclectic mix.

Many of the articles presented are the result of presentations and discussions that started in 2010 at the seminar we organized in Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture on the theme of co-creation, co-governance and peer-to-peer production of public services [3]. A summary report of the seminar is included as an Appendix in this publication. The other articles have been added in the process of organizing the compilation.

We start our journey with three contextualizing articles that discuss and envision some of these developments in broader theoretical terms. The first contribution from Victor Pesto offers an account of co-production as an important element in the renewal of public services in Europe. In discussing this he clarifies some of the vocabulary associated with these developments. He does that in terms of co-production—to exemplify the relationships between the parties involved—and their motivations for engaging in such efforts, as well as the political and policy implications they entail. Using empirical materials from two different case studies of parent-participation in pre-school services, Pestoff argues that co-production has important implications for the development of participatory forms of governance, and the important role public policy plays in crowding in or out these developments.

The next piece from Michel Bauwens is more speculative in character. He explores some of the politics of new forms of value-creation, referred to as commons-oriented peer-production, that have been made visible, for example, in the software industry. This is done to highlight what can
be learned from them on a more general level of social organization. His proposition is to compare the role of for-benefit institutions—which take care of the infrastructure of common projects—to the role the state could play in the future, in this case, to provide protection to the common good and infrastructure, not simply of it’s projects, but those of it’s citizens. Bauwens believes that such a model for a partner state could transcend and include the best parts of the welfare model currently in crisis; provided that we are also willing to look seriously into other aspects of the model beyond infrastructure. For example, he highlights the development of new ‘economies of scope’ to contrast with the old and tired motto of ‘economy of scale’. In elaborating his argument he provides also a historical comparison to the times when feudalism was made irrelevant in Europe, to give precedence to the ways in which contemporary developments might prefigure the irrelevance of the capitalist mode.

Meanwhile, Teemu Leinonen, in his article, inquires on the qualities of different media when it comes to providing peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and how we might conceptualize who are our peers when doing so. To illustrate his point, three different examples are used, ranging from the assemblies devised by students occupying a high school in Santiago de Chile, the online computers used to create self organized class rooms in India, and finally the different social media services used to create complex massive open online courses. The three cases highlight important possibilities of peer-to-peer learning and related media, to develop opportunities which challenge current assumptions of how teaching and learning should happen. At the same time, the examples also illuminate an important concern: If our peers are understood to be only those with whom we share an interest, the possibilities of transcendence seems ultimately very limited.

The next set of essays offer reflection on concrete examples located in the Finnish context. The writers have all been involved in devising, setting up, or running experimental examples, and are thus interestingly positioned to reflect on the possibilities, challenges, and limitations of a peer-to-peer related way of organizing services. In her essay Pauliina Seppälä makes a reflection on three intriguing examples of grass-roots activism in Helsinki emerging from the social-media platform Facebook. These include a network of neighbours providing social activities for the residents of a local centre for asylum seekers; a platform for creating public artworks over the temporary walls surrounding construction sites in the city; and finally a carnival-like event where anyone in Helsinki is encouraged to sell and swap stuff for a day. She discusses some of the characteristics of the collective and creative process that lead to them, the services they offer, and the tensions generated along the process. She links these developments not only to the ideas of peer-production, but also to that of the emergence of everyday social movements, and how the use of online social media generates new aspects and issues to discuss. These developments, she said, also require from the public sector, not a step back or a giving up of management and authority to the peers, but an active engagement and support for grass-roots initiatives.

Pirjo Tulikukka shares the development of three cases where residents and neighborhoods associations in Helsinki are learning to develop peer-to-peer practices. The first one accounts for the experiences around a free platform for neighbor-
hood websites that has existed since the late 1990’s. The second case reflects on the attempts to support the creation of a neighbourhood stakeholder network. The last one traces the open and collaborative strategies of a neighborhood association, which, in true “peer” fashion, has managed to establish locations for a community space in their area. Her cases shed light on the ways that the traditional organization of active citizens into registered neighborhood associations have lately shifted to include less-hierarchical and more peer-to-peer organizational structures. With this development, she elaborates how the process seems to manifest itself in small steps, and considers the types of supporting measures that could be made in the process. The role of “caddies”, or people who support others without doing things for them, is identified as important. She also suggest that the generational gaps and differences, in terms for example of digital literacy, as well as knowledge of the areas, need to be addressed for taking full advantage of all the possibilities with peer-to-peer strategies.

Turkka Tammi, Tiia Ruokosalo, and Henna Vuorento report two cases of publicly funded peer-based services developed by a NGO that focused on a particular set of “problematic” users: drug and gambling addicts. Both cases showcase the use of web and mobile-based tools that have enabled new types of peer-based support services for dealing with addiction. These services have proven to be successful in both cases, thus highlighting the many benefits and the reach of these approaches. The authors warn however of the dangers of taking the peer-based approach too naively, without considerations to the particularities of situations of use, and their structural implications. There is still a need for—and also the right to—access to professional support, beyond that of the one provided by peers.

Rudy van der Wekken brings to the discussion some of the experiences and concepts that time-banking communities have experimented with, in their attempts to offer alternative ways to build exchange tools. Her thoughts are grounded in the practical work she initiated to set up the local Helsinki time-bank. ‘Banking’ time—and the associated practices of sharing and solidarity—are presented as a platform for the development of local and community services, not only to supply what is currently unavailable, but as a way to reframe economical activities and provide opportunities for influencing and engaging in new forms of organization. Her reflections propose time-banking as one activity that could—if linked to structural change—strengthens local democratic action.

Our last article also reports on a Finnish case, this time from a more academic perspective, and from a different level of abstraction. Petra Turkama and Jukka Mattila have studied the collaborative creation of a new service in the area of home care, where organizations and individuals who are clients, collaborate in order to develop and provide a service. They argue that in the discussions of co-creation of services within this field, where organizations have deeply rooted traditions and structures for providing them, institutional impacts play a significant role on making the change possible, and that this issue has received very little attention in research.

To summarise, the articles in this collection confirm that something is happening in terms of experimenting with peer-to-peer activities, and that new media and the Internet in particular, play an important role in making them visible and scala-
ble. In all the accounts and reflections it is possible to see how historical conditions and local resources frame the ways in which these experimentations take shape. There are many flavours emerging from diverse historical continuities, as well as from disruptive sprouts of new activities.

Many of the authors have highlighted the challenges related to the organization of peer-to-peer networks and their working strategies; at the same time others have also proposed best practices and models. Several of the authors have also expressly taken up the need for rethinking the role of the government in a reality where peer-to-peer support and organization is becoming more viable and efficient than previously. Michel Bauwens, for example, provides a clear vision for this new role, that of the partner state. Pestoff also concludes on the need to think holistically about the policy implications, so that these developments will really support meaningful involvement and citizen empowerment. It is still early to state whether the peer-to-peer movement will gain weight, and to what extent it will change the way economic, political and social life will be organized in the future. This publication has merely but scratched the surface, and we hope it will trigger our readers to join us in asking: What are the possibilities for the future? What is the role of existing local socio-political contexts? (We’d like to hear from and about other similar experiences in the world). Ultimately, how do we find the right balance between the traditional forces of market, the state, and the emerging citizen-driven actions?
1. Talkoot is a Finnish expression for a gathering of friends and neighbors to accomplish a task. This group of people works together unpaid, for instance building or repair something that is a common concern, or to help someone with a task that exceeds his or her own capacity. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talkoot (accessed May 18, 2012).


3. A complete documentation of the seminar with videos and presentations can be retrieved from http://co-p2p.mlog.taik.fi/seminar-2010/ (accessed May 18, 2012).
References


Victor Pestoff earned his Ph.D. at Stockholm University and later became professor at Södertörns högskola and then Mid-Sweden University in Östersund. He is now Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Civil Society Studies, Ersta Sköndal University College in Stockholm. He has published many articles and books on topics like consumer organizations, cooperative movements, co-production, the third sector and welfare state. For more information contact: www.esh.se or www.emes.net.

Michel Bauwens is the founder of the Foundation for Peer-to-Peer Alternatives and works in collaboration with a global group of researchers in the exploration of peer production, governance, and property. Michel is currently Primavera Research Fellow at the University of Amsterdam and external expert at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (2008, 2012). Michel Bauwens is a member of the Board of the Union of International Associations (Brussels), advisor to Shareable magazine (San Francisco) and to Zumbara Time Bank (Istanbul). He functions as the Chair of the Technology/ICT working group, Hangwa Forum (Beijing, Sichuan), to develop economic policies for long-term resilience, including through distributed manufacturing. Michel writes editorials for Al Jazeera English and is listed at #82, on the Post-Carbon Institute (En) Rich list. Michel currently lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand. (http://p2pfoundation.net/Bio)

Teemu Leinonen is a Associate Professor of New Media Design and Learning at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. His areas of interest and expertise include design for learning, computer supported collaborative learning, online cooperation, learning software design, educational planning and educational politics. As part of this work, he is developing new learning tools for web and mobile environments.

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Pirjo Tulikukka is currently working as the manager of Helsinki Neighbourhoods Association Helka. She has worked in various local communication and participation projects in Helsinki, for example in the construction process of a citizen moderated neighbourhood web page platform (www.kaupunginosat.net) or the EU-funded CADDIES Project (project report: http://issuu.com/annajonsson.eu/docs/caddies). She is interested in accelerating participatory processes and empowerment in neighbourhoods. Previously she has worked as Program Manager of Global Action Plan Finland and been engaged in the translation and adaptation of an international behaviour change program on sustainable consumption habits (Household Ecoteam Program) into Finnish language and culture.

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Henna Vuorento, Master of Social Sciences, works as a project coordinator at A-Clinic Foundation. She is currently creating a website for youth, aimed at preventing drug and alcohol abuse as well as supporting holistic life management. Also working with a nationwide service (www.pelivoimapiiri.fi) that offers support for gamblers and their significant others.

Ruby van der Wekken has been active in various organizations on global democracy and environmental issues. So also in the World Social Forum process, the experiences of which have been an impetus to the founding in 2009 of Stadin Aikapankki (Helsinki Timebank) of which Ruby is a co-founder. She is also currently taking part in discussions around the commons and solidarity economy. www.stadinaikapankki.wordpress.com

Petra Turkama has vast international experience in technology and innovation management both in corporate sector (Nokia 1998-2009), and academia (Nanyang University of Technology, Helsinki School of Economics 2006-2009). Currently Dr. Turkama is heading a research team focusing on systemic innovation through human-centric, demand and user-driven open innovation ecosystems. Her research main interest is Information Technology Management, Systemic Innovation and Knowledge Networks, which she is conducting in several national and European Commission funded research projects. (http://ckir.aalto.fi/en/research/systemic/)

Jukka Mattila works as a Project Manager at the Aalto University School of Economics, and is finalizing his Ph.D dissertation about organizational performance in Finnish food retail sector. Mattila has acted as a Programme Manager for Certified Management Consultant Programme at Organizations & Management Department at the Aalto School of Economics since 2005. His research interests include management consultancy, management systems, and leadership and organizational development.
There are many challenges and opportunities in designing, developing and maintaining services for participatory modes of governance, not to mention their co-creation and peer-to-peer aspects. We ask what can be learned from current research, and what is happening already beyond academia? With the aim to increase the opportunities for dialogue between the Finnish scene and the international context, we have gather this collection of articles that deal broadly with the relationships between peer-to-peer dynamics, and public services. Most of the cases presented are illustrative of recent developments and discussions in Finnish society, however, also included are broader international perspectives, giving historical reflection and future-oriented speculation on what might be the outcomes.

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