

“Think global, print local”: A case study on a commons-based publishing and distribution model

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Abstract: This article discusses an intrinsic case study which demonstrates the convergence of decentralized online and offline ways of sharing knowledge. We describe a new techno-economic form of value creation and distribution in relation to the knowledge commons and the publishing industry. The dynamics and challenges of an emerging, commons-based copyright license (the Peer Production License) are also outlined. We conclude by arguing that this intrinsic case study could build bridges across languages and cultures, and enable concrete, material commoning practices.

Keywords: digital commons; knowledge commons; distributed production; copyright; cooperativism

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INTRODUCTION

In order to bolster commoning as challenge to the standard practices of economics, alternative relations and structures of production are arguably needed. In this context, the starting points of this article are a problem and a nascent opportunity. The problem is the need to share a knowledge artifact, such as a book, with people and communities elsewhere, but in a language into which the artifact has not yet been translated. The opportunity is the convergence of decentralized online and offline ways of sharing knowledge, from the Internet and book printers to commons-oriented copyright licenses and crowdfunding platforms.

This article discusses an intrinsic case study that synthesizes the aforementioned dynamics and tools and, therefore, presents a new commons-based publishing model codified as “think global, print local”. The uniqueness of the case rests in its goal to pioneer a commons-based model of artisanal, decentralized text translation and international book distribution and publishing. By utilizing the digital knowledge commons as well as distributed nodes of printing hardware, the current case study attempts to avoid centralized production and environmentally harmful international shipping in an economically viable way for its contributors.

There is no specific research question since, in an intrinsic case study, the case itself is of primary interest in the research endeavor (Stake, 1995). This article focuses on two interrelated aspects which may allow us to further the understanding of institutions for the use and management of shared resources. First, we describe an emerging techno-economic model of value creation and distribution in relation to the knowledge commons. Second, we discuss the dynamics of the chosen commons-oriented copyright license, named the Peer Production License.

The paper is structured as follows: In section 2, we provide a literature review on an emerging model of value creation, which inspired this paper's case study and builds on the conjunction of digital knowledge commons with distributed manufacturing infrastructures. Section 3 contains a description and discussion of the case study with regards to the commons-based publishing model as well as the used copyright license. In section 4, we conclude by addressing how this intrinsic case study could become instrumental and, thus, provide proposals for future research and action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of information and communication technologies provided the foundation for the expansion of the knowledge commons (Helfrich & Bollier, 2014). Increasing access to networked computers has facilitated free cooperation and production of digital commons of knowledge and software among individuals and groups (Benkler, 2006). Illustrative of this are initiatives like the free encyclopedia Wikipedia and a plethora of free/open-source software projects (e.g. GNU/Linux, Apache Web Server). They form a novel model of value creation and distribution, which enables individuals to communicate, self-organize, and eventually, co-create and distribute use value in an autonomous way (Bauwens, 2005; Benkler, 2006).

This first form of commons-oriented endeavors of value creation revolving around knowledge now seems to be expanding towards hardware, and is expected to have a radical impact on manufacturing (Rifkin, 2014). The widespread use of local/distributed manufacturing technologies (from three dimensional printing and computerized numerical control machines to low techs and crafts) may enable the proliferation of economies of scope as opposed to the economies of scale of the industrial paradigm (Kostakis et al., 2016a,b; 2015). Economies of scope based on the commons can have the capacity to share costs of both tangible and intangible productive resources (Kostakis et al., 2016a,b; 2015). Going one step further, much like computers in a grid, networked "makerspaces" are emerging which push for the wide distribution of the means of making (Anderson, 2012; Kostakis et al., 2016a,b; 2015). Such spaces could be hackerspaces, fab labs, or any other co-working spaces equipped with local manufacturing technologies. They also present an opportunity for people to aggregate, socialize, and co-create (Troxler, 2011; Niaros, 2016).

The convergence of local/distributed manufacturing technologies with the digital knowledge commons has tentatively been named “design global, manufacture local” (Kostakis et al., 2016a,b; 2015). This model embodies the processes where design is created, shared and built-upon as a global digital commons, whereas the customized manufacturing takes place locally with “specific local biophysical conditions in mind” (Kostakis et al., 2016a, p. 8). Simply put, whatever resource is non-rival (i.e., knowledge, design) is global, and whatever is rivalrous (i.e., hardware) is local (Kostakis et al., 2016a,b; 2015). “Design global, manufacture local” projects like the RepRap 3D printer, the Wikihouse project, the Wikispeed car or the Open Source Ecology demonstrate how a technology project can leverage the digital commons to engage the global community in its development (Dafermos, 2015). They present instances of how digital commons along with local manufacturing could promote autonomy and transform all sectors of production in the direction of sustainability (Kostakis et al., 2016a,b; 2015). In this vein, the current paper will explore the application of this model modified to facilitate an alternative vision of the publication process.

“THINK LIKE A COMMONER”: A CASE STUDY

This paper adopts a participatory approach to case study research where case participants become contributing researchers (Reilly, 2010). In particular, two of the authors have been playing a key role in the selected case study and are, thus, experts in the underlying processes of the issues within the contextual setting (Reilly, 2010). To balance the bias and the tendency to confirm any preconceived notions, the other author attempted to provide critical checks. Moreover, as has already been mentioned, we aim at understanding a particular case because the case itself is of interest (Stake, 1995). The discussion is organized around the two interrelated features: the commons-based publishing and distribution model as well as the Peer Production License.

The idea and the consortium

The commons-oriented communications collective Guerrilla Translation was created in early 2013 as enabler of trans-linguistic knowledge exchange. Starting as a website featuring translations of commons and activist texts, the collective was also designed as a functioning translation/general communications cooperative, where translators could be compensated for their pro-bono efforts through paid agency work. Taking an active approach to securing paid work, Author 2 and Author 3 drew up a “wish list” of books they would like to translate. One of these was David Bollier’s *Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons*. In February 2014, after a series of conversations with the author, it was decided that the translation and publishing of a Spanish edition would follow the general train of thought expressed in the book itself.

The following guidelines were agreed on between Bollier, Author 2 and Author 3 at the start of the project:

- The text would be translated by the professional translation and copyediting team working on Guerrilla Translation's pro-bono content, given to their linguistic experience and familiarity with the book's subject matter.
- The translation would be undertaken by several translators in order to speed up the process, but the final translated text would be copyedited by one individual to ensure consistency.
- Rather than searching for a traditional publisher to fund the translation/copyediting process, which would thereby retain distribution and reuse rights, Guerrilla Translation would finance their labor through a crowdfund campaign with the commons-oriented micro-financing platform Goteo.org.
- The translated text would be released under a Creative Commons License (as is the original book) or under the Peer Production License.
- The digital translated text would be made freely available and downloadable online in a variety of formats.
- Paper editions of the text would be produced and distributed by either: a) print on demand services operated by local collectives; or b) commons-friendly independent publishers in Spain and Latin America.
- Following the formation of an ad-hoc network to carry out this project, the experience could lead to the formation of a more stable production/distribution network, not just for translated works but for book publishing in general. In this sense, the project would be a prototype for future interactions of the design global, manufacture local form using book publishing as a pilot experience.

Although these guidelines remained unchanged, the project was delayed due to the high level of activity in Guerrilla Translation during 2015. A first attempt at forming a publishing network project was made in the summer of 2014 with a combination of commons-sympathizers and independent publishers. Crucially, an early agreement was made with Spanish publishing collective Traficantes de Sueños, who expressed an interest in the book translation and the proposed process. Talks ensued with Goteo.org, a commons-oriented crowdfunding platform, on how to focus the crowdfund campaign and a roadmap was established. Ultimately, partly due to other commitments on behalf of Guerrilla Translation and a lack of follow-through from the other partners, this iteration of the project was abandoned. During the following year Guerrilla Translation remained in contact with Goteo and Traficantes de Sueños to determine when to retake it.

In the summer of 2015, it was agreed that Traficantes de Sueños would help gather a network of publishers while Guerrilla Translation would provide a person (Xana Libânio) to manage the project. The initial consortium was then established with the following partners and roles: Guerrilla Translation (Spain, Portugal and Argentina;

translation editing, project concept and management); Traficantes de Sueños (Spain; paper and e-book pre-production, book editing and distribution), Tinta Limón (Argentina, book editing and distribution), La Libre (Perú; campaign video, book editing and distribution), Sursiendo (México; book design, book editing and distribution).

The crowdfunding campaign

Goteo.org is an open-source and commons-oriented crowdfunding platform based in Spain but operating internationally. Focused on building and maintaining communities beyond the crowdfunding process, the platform has had an astonishing success rate for its campaigns: 70% of campaigns have been successfully financed (Goteo, 2016), in contrast to Kickstarter's 31% or IndieGoGo's 13% (Clifford, 2016). Guerrilla Translation has always had a close relationship with Goteo, including an ongoing collaboration with Author 3 as a communication and storytelling team member for the latter. Additionally, Carmen Lozano Bright (responsible for Goteo's International Community Care) has also been a member of Guerrilla Translation.

This closeness resulted in a campaign designed to maximize Goteo's most outstanding features and, concretely, their belief in financing ongoing socially beneficial processes rather than one-time commodities. Goteo's website, in fact, lists the "Social Return" of a project as prominently as the rewards. Furthermore, only projects with a positive social impact are allowed on the platform, while all materials financed by the campaigns must be published under open licenses.

With this in mind, it was decided to shift the focus away from the translated book (which would still be the physical output of the campaign and chief reward) in favor of the process: the prototyping of a new commons-oriented standard for book translation, manufacturing and distribution. The chosen campaign title "Think Global, Print Local" played with the book title and the "design global, manufacture local" model.

Author 2 and Author 3 wrote a campaign text based on Goteo's standard template explaining the nature and idiosyncrasies of the project. The text refers to the book itself and the production process as valuable resources for commoners worldwide, characterizing the latter as "...a new mode of artisanal, decentralized text translation and international book distribution and publishing". The word "artisanal" is also key here, as Guerrilla Translation wanted to foster an imagery that would transcend the tech-oriented associations that usually go with concepts such as "peer production" (Benkler, 2006) and the like. By treating translation as the translingual stewardship of a common pool resource and highlighting the "handmade" aspect of their "craft" (Guerrilla Translation does not use machine translation), the campaign sought to appeal to commoners who may otherwise feel alienated by their lack of technical and theoretical wherewithal in regards to the knowledge commons.

The publishing and distribution model was described as beneficial, not just for the decentralized aspects, but also for its sustainability potential, as it effectively eliminates the need for long distance book shipping. It was also explained that the digital version of the translation would be available online with no barriers to access, presenting the digital/physical continuity of the campaign outcome as a best-use practice of the digital knowledge commons. The campaign was not solely focused on Spanish speakers. Instead, it was targeted to commoners worldwide, explaining that 400 million native Spanish speakers, and particularly those Latin American cultures with a rich history of commoning, need access to one of the best introductions to the commons available in any language, and that this increased communication outreach would benefit the commons movement as a whole. Additionally, the unique characteristics of the production process and its creation of new relations and structures of production were portrayed as challenge to the standard narrative of market economics. Focusing on “learning by doing” the campaign as a whole could serve as the first iteration of many regarding digital/physical knowledge production and distribution, regardless of the language.

In parallel to the development of the campaign’s narrative, intense work regarding budgeting and logistics was undertaken by Xana Libânio. This included cost estimates for the bulk of the labor: the translation and copyediting process, which was budgeted at €5,050. Other costs included campaign management, image rights, book formatting, graphic design for the book and campaign alike, the production of a short campaign video and the manufacturing costs for the books themselves. All these costs, as per Goteo’s conditions, were prominently broken down and displayed on the web platform. The campaign text justified the budget with the following paragraph:

The first goal is to enable the translation *Think Like a Commoner* into Spanish, with the time and dedication of a group of translators who are familiar with the commons and the linguistic idiosyncrasies of its terminologies in both English and Spanish. The campaign will also support the simultaneous publication of the book in four distinct manufacturing and distribution locations, through the work of commons-oriented small publishers and a globally-available e-book. These communities will host events focused both on the commons in general as well as the book itself, grounding and developing the book’s theme. This campaign is a pilot project for an expanded, transnational publishing network which is commons-oriented in content, as well as practice.

The campaign text also described the five consortium members, characterizing them as “P2P-minded translators and copyleft publishers”. This latter assertion was detected as potentially problematic, as we will see below. In addition to the campaign text, written by Author 3 and Author 2, and with added suggestions from the consortium, Peruvian publishers La Libre concocted a brief animated-clay video defining the commons and showcasing the crowdfunding campaign. Likewise,

Mexican publisher Sursiendo submitted a cover design and ancillary graphic material.

The campaign was launched on February 29th, 2016, accompanied by a wide ranging outreach campaign through social media, newsletters, email and selected commons-oriented media outlets, such as Shareable, or the Post Growth Alliance. Goteo's literature highlights the need to achieve at least 20% of the campaigns' minimal goal within the first week. This, in their experience, is a proven indicator of a campaign's future success. This initial target was met with a total collection of €1,911 (24%), sourced from 85 contributors within the first seven days. After this initial success, momentum was kept up through continued social media, selected interviews and personal outreach.

It is worth noting that Goteo's crowdfunding campaigns are organized around two "rounds" of financing, lasting forty days each. The first round seeks to achieve the minimum viable amount for the production of campaign deliverables and is an "all or nothing" call for micro-contributions. If this minimum goal is not met, the campaign is cancelled and all contributions are returned to the individual donors. If successful, the campaign automatically enters a second round to try and achieve the "optimum" amount, which typically provides additional deliverables or services. Focusing back on the Think Global, Print Local campaign, the amount for the minimum round was set at €8,042, which would cover labor for book translation, editing and proofreading, and e-book design, as well as the physical production of 500 copies of the translated book and the campaign commissions. This initial amount also covered labor and production costs for campaign material, project management and campaign-related translation and subtitling work. The "optimum budget" was set at €10,602 to provide for graphic design, video work and additional rewards, including translation services.

Near the end of the first forty day round and still 5 days and €921 short of the minimum objective, Guerrilla Translation and members from the consortium made a final push to obtain the remaining funds. One of the strategies used to redirect attention to the project was the decision to switch licenses from a Creative Commons Non-Commercial License, to the Peer Production License. This was reflected in two bilingual blog posts authored by Author 2 which gathered considerable attention. This strategy, along with the concerted final push in social media and selected interviews in Spanish language press, managed to increase the pooled amount to €8,591, €549 above the minimum goal.

Automatically entering the second round of financing, the campaign gathered additional funding, albeit at a much slower rate. The second round ended on May 18th, 2016, with a total of €9,076 collected. It is at this stage that the production process began, first with the translation and editing (completed on August 31st, 2016) and then with book design and physical production tasks (ongoing at the time of writing, with an expected release date of November 1st, 2016).

The Peer Production License

As mentioned above, licensing the Spanish translation under the Peer Production License was an early suggestion at the outset of the project in early 2014. At that time it was felt that incorporating the Peer Production License would highlight its existence and serve as an ideological statement of support for its usage. But the idea was not completely fleshed out at the time and, therefore, not prioritized during the development phase leading up to the final campaign in 2016.

The Peer Production License was written by Dmytri Kleiner and the Telekommunisten collective, and legally formalized by British barrister John Magyar. It is an example of a “copyfarleft” type of license. The ideological arguments justifying its needs are outlined in Kleiner (2010), an in-depth analysis of art, culture and the politics of the networked age. The Peer Production License is, in essence, a copy of the Creative Commons “Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike”, subsequently forked in the following aspects:

1. You may exercise the rights granted in Section 3 for commercial purposes only if:
 - a. You are a worker-owned business or worker-owned collective; and
 - b. all financial gain, surplus, profits and benefits produced by the business or collective are distributed among the worker-owners.
2. Any use by a business that is privately owned and managed, and that seeks to generate profit from the labor of employees paid by salary or other wages, is not permitted under this license. (P2P Foundation, 2016)

These characteristics turn the Peer Production License into an explicitly anti-capitalist license: it only allows commercial exploitation by collectives in which ownership of the means of production is in the hands of the value creators, and where any surplus is distributed equally among these (and not exclusively into the hands of owners, shareholders or absentee speculators).

Kleiner (in Garrett, 2011) explains the need to open the commercial restrictions defining Creative Commons-Non Commercial as follows:

What we mean here is that the creative “commons” is privatized because the copyright is retained by the author, and only (in most cases) offered to the community under non-commercial terms. The original author has special rights while commons users have limited rights, specifically limited in such a way as to eliminate any possibility for them to make a living by employing this work. Thus these are not commons works, but rather private works. Only the original author has the right to employ the work commercially.

All previous conceptions of an intellectual or cultural commons, including anti-copyright and pre-copyright culture as well as the principles of free software movement were predicated on the concept of not allowing special rights for an original author, but rather insisting on the right for all to use and reuse in common. The non-commercial licenses represent a privatization of the idea of the commons and a reintroduction of the concept of a uniquely original artist with special private rights.

Further, as I consider all expressions to be extensions of previous perceptions, the “original” ideas that rights are being claimed on in this way are not original, but rather appropriated by the rights-claimed made by creative-commons licensers. More than just privatizing the concept and composition of the modern cultural commons, by asserting a unique author, the creative commons colonizes our common culture by asserting unique authorship over a growing body of works, actually expanding the scope of private culture rather than commons culture.

It is important to note that the Peer Production License was primarily designed to liberate cultural or consumer goods or products, and offer more choices to content creators or artists presently using Creative Commons non-commercial options. Kleiner, however, does not recommend the Peer Production License for productive or capital assets, maintaining that these should be licensed with copyleft (General Public License, Affero General Public License, etc.), allowing large corporations and capitalist consortia to exploit these commons to their benefit.

Since mid-2013 Guerrilla Translation, as a producer of derivative cultural works enriching the commons, has supported the usage of the Peer Production License for its original and translated output. It is important to note that, given that translated works are considered derivative of the original and bound by its licensing conventions. This is to say that if translation is based on a Creative Commons Non-Commercial license such as Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike, the translated work under the Peer Production License, being a derivative from this original, could not be commercially exploited by worker-owned coops and other similar collectives. Conversely, a translated work based on a public domain original or an “Approved for Free Cultural Works” Creative Commons license, could arguably see the Peer Production License limiting the commercialization of translations derived from shared works. These limitations were explained by Guerrilla Translation early on: the collectives’ reasoning for using the license was to make a statement and promote its usage, not to enforce the discriminatory characteristics of the Peer Production License in regards to profiting from cultural works. It is worth noting that all of Guerrilla Translation’s original written content (i.e., non-translated) is also licensed under the Peer Production License and fully subject to its clauses.

In the latter stages of preparation for the Think Global, Print Local campaign, Author 2 proposed using the Peer Production License. The proposal was taken into account

by Bollier and the consortium, but it was ultimately decided that it would be more expedient to simply use the same Creative Commons Non-Commercial license of the original.

Proceeding with the crowdfund, the original draft for the campaign's text in Goteo's website made frequent allusions to the ethics of Free Culture and Copyleft. These were toned down before release but the message remained: this was a campaign undertaken by proponents of copyleft culture. Although initial reactions were mostly positive, some educated commentators highlighted the shortcomings of Creative Commons Non-Commercial Licenses, linking to texts from freedomdefined.org (2016) to bolster their arguments. Sursiendo and Traficantes de Sueños, in particular, advocate and often publish works with Free Culture Approved license and, with Guerrilla Translation being a copyfarleft advocate through its use of the Peer Production License, these criticisms highlighted the decision of using an Non-Commercial license as a step back from their usual stance.

The criticisms were few in nature (a couple of Facebook threads, tweets and emails) but well argued. Midway through the campaign Author 2 consulted anew with Bollier about the possibility of using the Peer Production License but with his explicit permission as the owner of the licensed work, in order to articulate the Peer Production License's full potential. At the same time, a Loomio poll was presented to the publishing consortium in April 4th arguing that, should Bollier approve, the translation should be published under the Peer Production License. After conversations with noted digital-commons lawyer and researcher Primavera De Filippi, Dmytri Kleiner, John Magyar and Baruch Gottlieb (a member of the Telekommunisten collective), Bollier agreed to have the translation licensed under the Peer Production License. Likewise, the publishing consortium agreed to the license change with no dissenting voices.

The change of license was announced in Author 2's bi-lingual blog post at the beginning of May, a week or so before the end of the campaign's first round. Within, he (Author 2, 2016) justified the advantages of the Peer Production License (PPL) through a series of bullet points:

Visibility. A lot has been written on the PPL, but almost no one has implemented it. By using the PPL, we give more visibility to the license and open conversations about it. We hope that other artistic groups or content producers can learn about the PPL and put it into use. The campaign is no longer only about the book, network or other models of publishing production and distribution, but now also includes a practical experience in copyfarleft licenses. Being totally honest now, clearly we also hope this will give more visibility to our crowdfund.

Adaptability in the face of criticism. It hasn't been easy to implement this change in the middle of a crowdfunding campaign, but we always wanted this to be a dynamic project capable of establishing a dialogue with its followers. For this, we're very

grateful to all who have offered criticism regarding our use of the Creative Commons Non-Commercial.

Breaking out, and adoption by other publishers. The PPL opens the campaign beyond its initial parameters, freeing it from our control. If you'll allow me an exaggeration in terms of scale, we saw this kind of mercurial reinvention in 15-M and Occupy, and we love it. By using this type of licensing, the publishing network can be extended and strengthened through self-allocation instead of having to wait for prior approval from the existing publishing consortium. We would be delighted if other publishers and collectives would contribute to the campaign by spreading the word or offering material contributions. They, in turn, can benefit through the production and physical distribution of the book. Ultimately, we'd love to see examples of indirect reciprocity and communal shareholding, not just with this project but with future uses of Copyfair licensing.

Commons publishing networks in other languages. Moreover, with the P2P Foundation and Telekommunisten (the political/art collective Kleiner belongs to), we are planning to launch Think Global, Print Local in English-speaking countries by working directly with the PPL, broadening the scope of the initial campaign.

The article explaining the license change was met with interest in both languages and the publicity it garnered arguably helped boost crowdfund contributions towards meeting the minimum stipulated amount. There was almost immediate interest by publishers in Colombia and a second publisher in México. These were invited to the Loomio group and to also help with the second round of the crowdfund. However, after the initial contact the conversations stalled and, at the time of writing, these groups have not been heard from again. The consortium would be happy to see such efforts self-coordinate and produce additional editions but, given the present workload, none of the publishers, nor Guerrilla Translation itself feel emboldened to assist with the coordination of these projects. It is nevertheless expected that the publication of the translated book will renew interest from other Spanish language small-scale publishers. The book launch will be celebrated in Madrid in November 19th, with a special personal appearance by Bollier himself which will be streamed live over the Internet.

Talks are ongoing between the P2P Foundation and Telekommunisten on the idea of a Peer Production License-centered book publishing network, although no concrete project has yet been submitted. Both organizations expect that, similar to the Think Global, Print Local campaign, this potential network would coalesce around and develop from a specific project. Separately, the P2P Foundation plans to release printed general-reader materials during 2017, and would like to use a similar model for the physical production and distribution of these, contingent on agreement of all parties.

CONCLUSION

We shed light on a case study which tried to pilot and demonstrate a new commons-oriented model of knowledge creation and distribution in relation to publishing. Inspired by the “design global, manufacture local” model, we codified our pilot-model as “think global, print local”. We reckon that the production and distribution model introduced here can help build bridges across languages and cultures, and enable concrete, material commoning practices. Moreover, we discussed an alternative license to the Creative Commons licenses, named Peer Production License. Through our practical experience with the latter, we outlined the basic challenges and opportunities emerging from using such a copyfarleft license. Hopefully, some of the lessons drawn from this case study may help other content producers, publishing houses, artistic groups, translation communities and scholars to repeat the experience with new books and texts in the future.