

Do We Really Want a Culture of Cooperation?

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In loser Folge publizieren wir bis zum Beginn von #RKB15 eine Serie von Statements der Redner und Diskutanten. Wir bieten Ihnen damit die Gelegenheit, sich schon einmal warmzudiskutieren – entweder im stillen Selbstgespräch oder hier in den Kommentaren.

von *Maciej Maryl*

“Do we really want a culture of cooperation?”^[1]

Let me address the question raised in the title by deconstructing its core elements, namely

DO WE – REALLY – WANT – A CULTURE OF COOPERATION?

– WE –

Is it “we, the people”? The general audience? Or rather, is it “we, the academic community” or “we, the scholars” or, more narrowly, “we, the publishers” or “we, the heads of philological departments”? Or – and this will be central towards [the end of this text](#) – is it “we, the scholars with Twitter accounts”?

The answer would vary in each case. Let us think of the attitudes towards open reviewing, i.e. publishing early drafts online for the scholarly community to evaluate them (one of the hallmarks of scientific communication 2.0):

“We, the people”, are happy because knowledge is available sooner, and we may follow interesting discussions in their infancy. Yet “we, the publishers”, may question whether a text submitted after such a process of reviewing can still be regarded as unpublished and therefore “original”. We may refuse to accept it for the journal in question. In turn, “we, the deans”, may be upset that our researchers do not publish in “serious”, peer-reviewed journals. Hence, are all stakeholders happy? That brings us to the second issue ...

– REALLY –

The use of this word (at least in English) draws our attention to the fact that, while advocating for a culture of cooperation, we may, in fact (i.e. “really”), not need it at all, since the communication channels we have today are fully operational or require only minor adjustments. To put it differently: is the majority of the scholarly community (whoever constitutes “we”) REALLY convinced that we need Science 2.0? Or is it rather a minority position which is well voiced through new communication channels, but met with a certain reservation by our faculties, and which could easily be seen against the background of the normal power struggles in academia? Let me give you an example: the Centre for Digital Humanities, based at my Institute, started a campaign to fill the institutional repository with open-access articles authored by our employees. Despite the fact that we provided legal advice, scanning services and even had the upload managed by an experienced librarian, only few scholars actually submitted their works. The majority expressed disinterest, complaining about their lack of time and other things they had to do – so do WE REALLY want it?

– WANT –

Yes, do we WANT it or do we rather NEED it? Is this a question of willingness (as discussed in [the previous paragraph](#)) or rather of necessity? We may not want it, but it is already here, and we, the scholars, need competences to engage with it, in order not to stay behind. Think of Twitter, a news stream which is massive, chaotic and overwhelming until you master it and apply some strategies like the listing of certain sources or hashtags. Everything is already here, and with such a vast resource of content available online we need new, digital strategies to deal with them and to carry out research (this was convincingly pointed out by Costis Dallas in his [TPDL2015 keynote](#)). Hence, the issue is not so much about WANTING it.

– CULTURE OF COOPERATION –

Finally: the central, albeit quite ambiguous term. I agree with [Mareike König](#) (<http://rkb.hypotheses.org/1009>) that cooperation is a cornerstone of scientific activity, and it always was. Therefore, I understand the term in question – culture of cooperation – as Science 2.0, a culture of connectivity, interaction, sharing, participatory research designs, open notebooks, networking events, demos, etc. This term simply denotes the fact that the model of scientific inquiry is rapidly changing in some disciplines. Let us consider digital humanities, conceived as a research paradigm in which scholars, IT professionals, archivists, librarians and documentarists work together on the same project. Such horizontal relationships trigger cooperation which tends to avoid or bypass the established academic hierarchies. It is also related to something advocated by the European Commission as “impact”, i.e. maintaining and sustaining connections between scholars and citizens (read: taxpayers).

Therefore, the simple answer to the question raised in the title of this statement would be: [we, whoever this may be](#), do need Science 2.0, but we also need to proceed with

caution, i.e. while appreciating new forms of scientific communication, we have to tend to their merit and real value. In other words, we have to avoid a situation in which researchers' fluency in social media would be mistaken for scientific merit.

Science and Science 2.0 will coexist and probably eventually merge. A good example of this coexistence is the story of Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy*, which was submitted both openly- and peer-reviewed ([Paul Fyfe describes it in more detail](#)). Open reviewers gave many useful suggestions, but they weren't the gatekeepers. Open reviewing improved the paper, but the scholarly community endorsed it in the end.

If I were to guess what will happen next, I would say that in 10-15 years the term "Science 2.0" will become obsolete because the emerging new forms of scientific communication – if deemed useful by the scholarly community – will eventually blend in with the traditional ones.

[1] The author thanks Piotr Wciślik for his enlightening comments on the earlier draft of this statement.

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