

Chapter 4

The Organisational Architecture of Participation

ABSTRACT

This chapter starts with Tim O'Reilly, but some of the tensions in the authors' use of his Web 2.0 meme map will pull the reader away from O'Reilly's business focus into their world of communities of engagement and learner autonomy. O'Reilly focuses on the commercial possibilities of Web 2.0 in his work, whereas the authors' interest is focused on a much wider concern with ideas such as Lave and Wenger's "communities of practice" and their later work on ways of using technology in online communities, especially the role of "technology steward," helping those communities to make good use of technology for their social and educational purposes. An organisational architecture of participation is described as being "adaptive institutions working across collaborative networks."

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, O'Reilly provided the following definition of an architecture of participation in his definition of Web 2.0 that is elaborated in his Meme Map. "Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services

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in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation,” and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.” You can see that this definition continues O’Reilly’s interest in the affordances of the technology, but seeing an architecture of participation as almost, a second order effect of Web 2.0 technologies, rather than ways of using technology for learning and other social purposes beyond those of “individual users providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others.”

Our own interest in the term focused on a much wider concern with ideas such as Lave and Wenger’s “communities of practice” and their later work on ways of using technology in online communities, especially the role of “technology steward”, helping those communities to make good use of technology for their social and educational purposes. We describe an organisational Architecture of Participation as being “adaptive institutions working across collaborative networks”.

To explore Architectures of Participation and to develop our thinking, we set up a blog in 2009, *Architecture of Participation* to draw together work we were engaged in and to situate it in a “located reality” as Nixon would have it “*Notwithstanding the increasing global interconnectivity of human existence, life is lived – culturally, politically and socially – at precise points of interconnection. Globalisation is experienced not as an airy abstraction, but as a located reality.*” (Nixon, 2014 p.xiii). Despite the occasional nature of our posts to the blog, we have continually returned to the issues we first raised there, not least because we saw the closing down of possibilities for engagement and participation in post-compulsory education accelerate from 2010 onwards.

What did we mean by architecture?

“the art or practice of designing and constructing buildings.” Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online, but maybe something more?

“the complex or carefully designed structure of something” OED online (accessed 09-09-19)

The second definition comes closer to our thinking, but we had a view of participation that had elements of engagement, collaboration and the self-generation of nows and futures. Starting again, from the definition of participation we get the following from the OED.

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