

Networks, Society and Common Good

Societies of all times have modified their natural and cultural environment with the construction of artefacts and technical systems. However, from the second half of the twentieth century, the rise of a new alliance between scientific knowledge and technique led to the emergence of a technology with new and more powerful possibilities. Networks have not only generated a new type of communication but also a new type of society and culture.

The advent of the Internet is undoubtedly the most important emergent phenomenon of social networking. Technological constructivism states that the network has “interpretative flexibility”, that is, each user can count on a different mental representation of the artefacts. This opens a world of interpretations that goes far beyond what the Internet is from a strictly technological point of view.

Thus, the discussion about networks as spaces for negotiation and definition of ends, and not simple means, becomes increasingly relevant. In fact, if we analyse the structure of a social network –defined as a set of nodes and arcs– it is possible today to understand a good part of a society’s economic characteristics. The density of connections –number of arcs arriving or leaving a node–, a network’s connectivity and triangulations are indicators of social capital and they allow to quantify the speed at which information can be disseminated.

On the other hand, the possibilities of an intersection between political matters and new forms of inter-individual or collective interaction in a network will undoubtedly have consequences for the evolution of institutions and historical development. In fact, the relationship between technology and democracy is not easy to solve. Likewise, network emergence also raises a phenomenon of law transformation, since it increases pressure to adapt their traditional forms to the demands and possibilities brought by technology.

Network relationship's mode also reaches out other spheres of social fabric. The new forms of relationship, particularly the youth ones, reveal a radical change in social ties' configuration. Especially in the family and school environment, a strong process of institutions decline is verified, while a horizontal form of relationality, that sweeps away old hierarchies, emerges. Actually, it is a transformation of the whole social relations system, that includes not only the family and the school but the social environment. The latter includes public opinion, the media and the State.

These matters provoke a tenacious analysis and debate about the existence of a machinic relationship between social structures and technology in face of an unparalleled technological growth. Which would be the machine related to our ways of interacting today? Are networks an epistemological instrument, or are they concrete phenomena configured as networks? On the other hand, are we facing an actual new phenomenon that requires a new conceptualization or is this, on the contrary, a phenomenon repeated throughout history that now acquires a new appearance due to its technological enhancement? And if it is an authentic historical novelty, how far can conventional social sciences assimilate it within their theoretical means? Will it be necessary to elaborate a different theory on the ground of new bases?

These and other questions drive this number of *Cultura Económica*. In the first place, we offer an article by Martín Parselis, who analyses networks as new virtual environments linked to new ways of being and conceiving ourselves as human beings. Then, Carlos Hoewel studies the dynamics of human and social relations in comparison with those of network interactions. He focuses on their consequences in the legal, economic, human and social spheres. In addition, an article by Fernando Nicchi, reflects on the allocation of property rights over collective goods, such as networks.

We also present two essays of economic nature: an analysis by Alvaro Perpere Viñuales on W. Röpke's Social Market Economy assimilation in Argentina, and a paper by Leonardo Caravaggio on the

nature of common goods and their relationship with the concept of democracy. Finally, Dulce María Santiago takes up the issue of online interaction focusing on the analysis of digital culture's values in Latin America and in the context of youth cultures.

There is a great multiplicity of information –often dissimilar and contradictory– with regard to networks and the way we think of ourselves as human beings linked through them. The purpose of this issue is to overcome conventional ideas and to propose to the reader, from different scientific and academic perspectives, a first immersion in the networks phenomenon.

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