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The Peer To Peer Manifesto: The Emergence of P2P Civilization and Political Economy

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Our current [political economy](#) is based on a fundamental mistake. It is based on the assumption that natural resources are unlimited, and that it is an endless sink. This false assumption creates artificial [scarcity](#) for potentially [abundant](#) cultural resources. This combination of quasi-abundance and quasi-scarcity destroys the [biosphere](#) and hampers the expansion of social innovation and a free culture.



In a P2P-based society, this situation is reversed: the limits of natural resources are recognized, and the abundance of immaterial resources becomes the core operating principle. The vision of P2P theory is the following:

1. **the core** intellectual, cultural and spiritual value will be produced through non-reciprocal peer production;
2. **it is surrounded** by a reformed, peer-inspired, sphere of material exchange;
3. **it is globally** managed by a peer-inspired and reformed state and governance system.

Because of these characteristics, peer to peer can be said to be the core logic of the successor civilization, and is a answer and solution to the structural crisis of contemporary capitalism.

Markets may be changing from a logic of pure capitalism (making commodities for exchange, so as to increase capital), to logics where the logic of exchange is subsumed to the logic of partnership.

There is now a thriving field of social cooperation, which some call the [adventure economy](#), emerging for the sharing of physical goods.

Today, the Internet offers a remarkable [social dynamic](#) completely based on voluntary participation in the creation of [common goods](#) made universally available to all.

Peer production, governance and property are more productive economically, politically, and in terms of distribution, than their governmental and for-profit counterparts, because they filter out all the less productive forms of motivation and cooperation, and retain only passionate production and intrinsic motivation.

The social media sharing platforms you see today blooming all around you survive from selling your reader's attention span, NOT the [use value](#) you have created yourself.

"The realization that contemporary workers are moving not just from job to job, but also from jobs to non-jobs, and that in fact, what is most useful and meaningful for them (and the market, and society) are not the paid jobs for the market, but the episodes of passionate production."

[Peer to peer governance](#), if supported by new socio-economic regulations, including a universal subsidy to all could be the means by which individuals would be able to govern themselves while engaging in the pursuit of their best interests and passions.

The Emergence Of The Peer To Peer Civilization And Political Economy



1. **Our current world system is marked by** a profoundly counterproductive logic

of social organization:

1. **it is based on a [false concept of abundance](#) in the limited material world**; it has created a system based on infinite growth, within the confines of finite resources
2. **it is based on a false concept of scarcity in the infinite immaterial world**; instead of allowing continuous experimental social innovation, it purposely erects legal and technical barriers to disallow free cooperation through copyright, patents, etc...
2. **Therefore, the number one priority for a sustainable civilization** is overturning these principles into their opposite:
 1. **we need to** base our physical economy on a recognition of natural resources being finite, and achieve a sustainable steady-state economy
 2. **we need to** facilitate free and creative cooperation and lower the barriers to such exchange by reforming the copyright and other restrictive regimes
3. **Hierarchy, markets, and even democracy** are means to allocate scarce resources through authority, pricing, and negotiation; they are not necessary in the realm of the creation and free exchange of immaterial value, which will be marked by bottom-up forms of [peer governance](#)
4. **Markets, as means to to manage scarce physical resources**, are but one of the means to achieve such allocation, and need to be divorced from the idea of capitalism, which is a system of infinite growth.
5. **The creation of immaterial value**, which again needs to become dominant in a post-material world which recognized the finiteness of the material one, will be characterized by the further emergence of non-reciprocal peer production system.
6. [Peer production](#) **is a more productive system** for producing immaterial value than the for-profit mode, and in cases of the asymmetric competition between for-profit companies and for-benefit institutions and communities, the latter will tend to emerge

7. [Peer production](#) produces more social happiness, because
 1. **it is based on the highest form of individual motivation**, nl.
intrinsic positive motivation;
 2. **it is based on the highest form of collective cooperation**, nl.
synergistic cooperation characterized by four winners (both the participants in the exchange , the community, and the universal system)
8. [Peer governance](#), the bottom-up mode of participative decision-making (only those who participate get to decide) which emerges in peer projects is politically more productive than representative democracy, and will tend to emerge in immaterial production. However, it can only replace representative modes in the realm of non-scarcity, and will be a complementary mode in the political realm. What we need are political structures that create a convergence between individual and collective interests.
9. [Peer property](#), the legal and institutional means for the social reproduction of peer projects, are inherently more distributive than both public property and private exclusionary property; it will tend to become the dominant form in the world of immaterial production (which includes all design of physical products).
10. **Peer to peer as the relational dynamic of free agents** in [distributed networks](#) will likely become the dominant mode for the production of immaterial value; however, in the realm of scarcity, the peer to peer logic will tend to reinforce peer-informed market modes, such as [fair trade](#); and in the realm of the scarcity based politics of group negotiation, will lead to reinforce the peer-informed state forms such as multistakeholdership forms of governance.
11. **The role of the state must evolve from the protector of dominant interests** and arbiter between public regulation and privatized corporate modes (an eternal and unproductive binary choice), towards being the arbiter between a triad of public regulation, private markets, and the direct social production of value. In the latter capacity, it must evolve from the [welfare state model](#), to the partner state model, as involved in enabling and empowering the direct social creation of value.
12. **The world of physical production** needs to be characterized by:

1. **sustainable** forms of peer-informed market exchange (fair trade, etc.);
 2. **reinvigorated** forms of reciprocity and the gift economy;
 3. **a world based** on [social innovation](#) and open designs, available for physical production anywhere in the world.
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13. **The best guarantor** of the spread of the peer to peer logic to the world of physical production, is the distribution of everything, i.e. of the means of production in the hands of individuals and communities, so that they can engage in social cooperation. While the immaterial world will be characterized by a peer to peer logic of non-reciprocal generalized exchange, the peer informed world of material exchange will be characterized by evolving forms of reciprocity and neutral exchange.
 14. **We need to move from empty and ineffective anti-capitalist rhetoric**, to constructive post-capitalist construction. [Peer to peer theory](#), as the attempt to create a theory to understand peer production, governance and [property](#), and the attendant paradigms and value systems of the open/free, participatory, and commons-oriented social movements, is in a unique position to marry the priority values of the right, individual freedom, and the priority values of the left, equality. In the peer to peer logic, one is the condition of the other, and [cooperative individualism](#) marries equality and freedom in a context of non-coercion.
 15. **We need to become politically sensitive to invisible architectures of power.** In distributed systems, where there is no overt hierarchy, power is a function of design. **One such system, perhaps the most important of all**, is [the monetary system](#), [whose interest-bearing design](#) requires the market to be linked to a system of infinite growth, and this link needs to be broken. A global reform of the monetary system, or the spread of new means of direct social production of money, are necessary conditions for such a break.

16. **This is the truth** of the peer to peer logical of social relationships:

1. **together we have everything;**
2. **together we know everything.**

Therefore, the conditions for dignified material and spiritual living are in our hands, bound with our capacity to relate and form community. The emancipatory peer to peer theory does not offer new solutions for global problems, but most of all new means to tackle them, by relying on the [collective intelligence](#) of humankind.

We are witnessing the rapid emergence of peer to peer toolboxes for the virtual world, and facilitation techniques of the physical world of face to face encounters, both are needed to assist in the necessary change of consciousness that needs to be midwived. It is up to us to use them.

17. **At present, the world of corporate production** is benefiting from the positive externalities of widespread [social innovation](#) (innovation as an emerging property of the network itself, not as an internal characteristic of any entity), but there is no return mechanism, leading to the problem of precariousness. Now that the productivity of the social is beyond doubt, we need solutions that allow the state and for-profit corporation to create return mechanisms, such as forms of income that are no longer directly related to the private production of wealth, but reward the social production of wealth.

Peer to Peer Innovation: Open Knowledge vs Proprietary Systems



1. **The law of asymmetric competition:** any corporation or nation, facing a for-benefit institution as competitor, which uses open and free forms of knowledge, participatory modes of production, and commons-oriented knowledge pools, will tend to lose to the latter.

2. **Any nation or corporation** using closed proprietary formats of knowledge, cannot rely on participatory communities for co-creation, and does not develop commons-oriented knowledge pools, which tend to loose to those who do adopt such practices.
3. **Therefore, we need partner-state approaches and platforms** which enable and empower the social production of use value, and mechanisms through which the benefits of private capture of positive externalisations of [social innovation](#), can flow back to the communities to make them more sustainable.

The Peer to Peer Economy



1. In the immaterial sphere

1. **Diminish artificial scarcities in the informational field** so that immense social value can be created, and immaterial conviviality can replace the deadly logic of material accumulation.
2. **Public authorities adapt partner state policies** that enable and empower the direct creation of social value.

2. In the sphere of materiality

1. **Introduce true costing in the material field** so that the market no longer creates negative externalities in the natural environment; dissociate the marketplace from the system of infinite material growth.
2. **Create more distributed access to the means of production** (peer-based financing, distributed energy production, etc...) so that the peer to peer dynamic can be introduced in the sphere of material production as well.

Originally written by [Michel Bauwens](#) - partially pre-published on July 13th 2007 as "[Summary: What P2P Means for the World of Tomorrow](#)" and inside "[Laser Theory and Peer to Peer](#)"

About the author



Michel Bauwens (1958) is a Belgian [integral philosopher](#) and Peer-to-Peer theorist. He has worked as an internet consultant, information analyst for the [United States Information Agency](#), information manager for [British Petroleum](#) (where he created one of the first virtual information centers), and is former editor-in-chief of the first European digital convergence magazine, the Dutch language [Wave](#). With [Frank Theys](#), he is the co-creator of a 3 hour documentary *TechnoCalyps*, an examination of the 'metaphysics of technology'. He taught and edited two French language anthologies on the Anthropology of Digital Society.

Although a student of [Ken Wilber](#)'s integral theory for many years, he has recently become critical of aspects of the Wilber-[Beck](#) movement, and is a powerful voice for a non-authoritarian peer-to-peer based integral society.

Michel is the author of a number of on-line essays, including a seminal thesis [Peer to Peer and Human Evolution](#), and is editor of P2P News.

He now lives in [Chiang Mai, Thailand](#), where he created the [Foundation for P2P Alternatives](#) and [maintains a blog](#).

He has taught courses on the anthropology of digital society to postgraduate students at ICHEC/St. Louis in Brussels, Belgium and related courses at [Payap University](#) and [Chiang Mai University](#) in Thailand.

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See also:

- [Peer-to-Peer Governance, Production And Property: P2P As A Way Of Living - Part 1](#)
- [Peer-to-Peer Governance, Democracy And Economic Vision: P2P As A Way Of Living - Part 2](#)

Michel Bauwens -
Reference: [P2P Foundation](#)

