

On the sociality of knowledge

How ICT might change the way we think about knowledge?

Recent developments in so-called knowledge technologies, social software, web2.0 or even web3.0 applications as new classes of information and communication technologies (ICT) have raised hopes and fears not only for economics, politics and society more generally, but are also challenging the very notion of knowledge.

A glut of these new IC technologies is launched every week. One of their commonalities is their emphasis on the relevance of communities for the quality of information and knowledge. For instance, Twine¹, a new semantic web technology launched recently promises its users "a smarter way to share, organize, and find information with people they trust" and to help "you better leverage and contribute to the collective intelligence of your network." Obviously, in applications such as Twine, notions of intelligence or knowledge are deeply related to the notion of communities and related concepts of sociality.

But how central exactly is the community for knowledge? To what extent is knowledge social? Is the community only a means for sharing and distributing knowledge or is it essential for the construction of knowledge, in fact for conceptualizing knowledge itself? These questions are not only of concern for cognitive science, psychology, pedagogy or software development, but also for social epistemology, a field of philosophy inquiring the social dimensions of knowledge. I argue that within social epistemology, two entirely different approaches towards the sociality of knowledge can be distinguished. One line of research relies heavily on notions of epistemic communities for the construction or even the *constitution* of knowledge, while other theoreticians rather develop stochastical recommendations concerning the *distribution* of knowledge.

I will show that these two very distinct ways of accounting for the social nature of knowledge, are already inscribed into ICT. In applications, such as the social bookmarking service del.icio.us², procedures of stochastical information aggregation are combined with functions enabling and fostering interactive and communicative processes in (epistemic) communities not only in order to improve the distribution of existing knowledge, but also to enable its construction. Taking into account the pervasiveness of ICT and its importance for scientific as well as other forms of reasoning, it should be evident that a thorough analysis of these developments should be of vital interest for understanding knowledge and the processes of achieving it.

(374 words)

¹ Please consult <http://www.twine.com/about> [Last visit: 15.03.2008]

² Please consult <http://del.icio.us/about/>. [Last visit: 15.03.2008]

CONTACT DATA

Primary Affiliation:

Judith Simon

Department for Philosophy

Philosophy of Science: Cultures and Technologies of Knowledge

University of Vienna

Universitaetsstr. 7 | A-1010 Vienna | Austria / Europe

Email: judith.simon@univie.ac.a

Current Affiliation & Contact Data:

Judith Simon

Forum on Contemporary Europe

Encina Hall C100

616 Serra Street

Stanford, CA 94305

Tel: +1 (650) 724-4716

Fax: +1 (650) 724-9656

Email: jsimon1@stanford.edu