

Francesco Rullani, “The debate and the community: the ‘reflexive identity’ concept and the FLOSS community case”, Working Paper No. 2005-18, Laboratory of Economics & Management - *Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies*, Pisa, Italy: (July 5) 2005.

Abstract

The empirical studies relative to the Free/Libre/Open Source Software (FLOSS) case stress the important role played by psychological and social motivations. However, the theories elaborated to cope with this dimension, such as “gift economy”, “epistemic community” or “community of practice”, are not combined into a unique structured framework. It is possible to draw inspiration from philosophical studies about language and from sociological studies about collective action in order to construct a mechanism – here called “reflexive identity”- able to bridge the analyzed theories and to explain the empirical evidences left aside by self-supply, reputation and signaling. The reflexive identity mechanism is triggered by the dialog between the members. In order to simply communicate, in fact, members have to “negotiate” the system of meanings they use to interface with the world and with the communitarian environment. But this means reshaping also their own vision of the world, redefining their identity. Community aims, principles and *ethos* act directly on members’ identity, making them internalize the communitarian structure of rules. The reflexive identity principle, then, merges the psychological and social dimension of the FLOSS phenomenon with the structure of rules adopted by the FLOSS community, and thus it constitutes together with selfsupply, signaling, reputation and peer regard the basis upon which the FLOSS community is built.

URL: <http://www.lem.sssup.it/WPLem/files/2005-18.pdf>