Many discussions see open source software as foremost a technical issue, focusing on topics like functionality, source code or different quality aspects, most notably security or performance. While this is certainly important, and a worthwhile area of research, there is a whole other dimension to the development of open source software: This is a process which is performed by human beings, which are globally distributed, in a majority non-paid participants, and who manage to collaborate on a scale which is nearly unparalleled. Research on this social phenomenon, the underlying motivations, and mechanisms through which problems and disputes are settled, is highly relevant to areas much beyond software development, but to all forms of production.

In this issue we see major examples of research focusing mostly on this social side of open source software development. Papers highlight topics like conflict and climate (by Levent Yilmaz), communication networks (by David Hinds and Ronald M. Lee) or motivation (by Mark R. Allyn and Ram B. Misra). Even the last paper (by Luyin Zhao, Fadi P. Deek and James A. McHugh), although dealing with usability issues and inspection, stresses the social side in that it proposes a solution using which non-expert users can contribute.

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