

CHAPTER 6

Social Value of the Intellectual Commons: Dimensions of Commons-Based Value

6.1. Introduction

This chapter is an extensive elaboration of the research findings on the sequences and circuits of commons-based value within and beyond the communities under examination. Its key finding is that commons-based value circulates in the form of economic, social, cultural and political values. The next four sections of the chapter offer an analysis of collected research data as a basis to ground findings in relation to each of these four dimensions of commons-based values. The concluding section elicits general findings on the circulation of commons-based value, arising from common characteristics found in all four dimensions. Overall, the findings of the research show that social value within and beyond intellectual commons communities is circulated in specific forms, which can be revealed through social research and depicted in general formulae.

6.2. The Economic Dimension of Commons-Based Value

According to the findings of the research, the economic value circuits in the communities of the sample are exhibited in the table below:

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	Offline contested		Online contested		Offline co-opted		Online co-opted	
	Embros Theatre	Athens Hackerspace	Libre Space Foundation	Self-managed ERT	Athens Impact Hub	Commons Lab	Sarantaporo.gr	P2P Lab
Communities								
Value-producing practices	Collaboration/collective appropriation	Collaboration	Collaboration	Collaboration/collective appropriation	Collaboration	Collaboration/competition	Collaboration	Collaboration
Values	Use value/exchange value	Use value	Use value	Use value	Use value/exchange value	Use value/exchange value	Use value	Use value/exchange value
Flows	Gifts	Gifts	Gifts	Gifts	Gifts/commodities	Gifts/commodities	Gifts	Gifts
Accumulation	Common pool resource	Common pool resource	Common pool resource	Common pool resource	Common pool resource/private appropriation			
Redistribution	Gifts/generalised reciprocity	Gifts/generalised reciprocity	Generalised reciprocity	Gifts/generalised reciprocity	Gifts/commodities	Gifts/commodities	Gifts/use values/economic development	Gifts

Table 6.1: The circuit of commons-based economic value circulation.

Source: Author

Practices of commons-based value circulation and value pooling in the economic dimension of social activity examined in the study take certain forms, which can be depicted as a general formula. Along these lines, data analysis shows that the generation, formulation, circulation, pooling and redistribution of commons-based economic values take the general form of collaboration, use value, gifts, common pool resources and, again, gifts. Hence, the main commons-based economic value circuit in the intellectual commons communities under examination can be represented by the following formula:

Collaboration → Use value → Gift → Common pool resource → Gift
(CL→UV→G→CPR→G).

Nevertheless, in the process of data analysis, explicit and implicit differentiations emerged between the economic value circuits of contested and co-opted communities. Apart from the general circuit of commons-based economic value mentioned above, research findings show the presence of an alternative value circuit in the economic dimension of social activity, which is more distinct in the co-opted communities of the sample. The alternative economic value circuit develops in the following form in parallel to the main economic value circuit in most of the co-opted communities under examination:

Competition → Exchange value → Commodity → Private appropriation → Commodity (CP→EV→C→PA→C).

6.3. The Social Dimension of Commons-Based Value

With regard to the commons-based social value circuit, the findings of the research reveal a great variety of value-producing practices. The codification of this value circuit is presented in Table 6.2.

In its generality, the commons-based social value circuit takes the form of productive contribution, merit, trust, communal cohesion and social cohesion, which can be represented by the following formula:

Productive contribution → Merit → Trust → Communal cohesion → Social cohesion (PP→MR→T→CC→SC).

As in the case of the commons-based economic value circuit, the differences between the social value circuits of contested and co-opted communities reveal an alternative social value circuit, which operates in parallel to the main social value circuit in both the co-opted and contested communities of the study:

Financial contribution → Control of infrastructure → Monetary exchange → Social capital → No redistribution (F→MR→M→SCa→SC/N).

	Offline contested		Online contested		Offline co-opted		Online co-opted	
	Embros Theatre	Athens Hackerspace	Libre Space Foundation	Self-managed ERT	Athens Impact Hub	CommonsLab	Sarantaporo.gr	P2P Lab
Communities								
Value-producing practices	Contribution in productive activity/contribution in kind	Contribution in productive activity/financial contribution	Contribution in productive activity/contribution in kind	Contribution in productive activity/contribution in kind	Contribution in productive activity/financial contribution	Contribution in productive activity/financial contribution	Contribution in productive activity/financial contribution/contribution in kind	Contribution in productive activity
Values	Quantity of contribution/merit/personal capabilities/control of infrastructure	Quantity of contribution/merit/personal capabilities	Quantity of contribution/merit	Quantity of contribution/merit/personal capabilities	Merit/control of infrastructure/quantity of contribution/personal capabilities	Merit/control of infrastructure/quantity of contribution/personal capabilities	Merit/control of infrastructure/quantity of contribution/personal capabilities	Merit
Flows	Trust/power conflicts	Trust	Trust	Trust/power conflicts	Trust/monetary exchange	Trust	Trust	Trust
Redistribution	Social cohesion/network	Social cohesion/network	Social cohesion/network	Social cohesion	Social cohesion/network	Social cohesion/network	Social cohesion/network	Social cohesion

Table 6.2: The circuit of commons-based social value circulation.

Source: Author

6.4. The Cultural Dimension of Commons-Based Value

The data analysis revealed that the cultural dimension of commons-based values shows the least diversity of value forms, with the interviewees of the sample extensively converging in their assessments of what is valued in their communities in terms of culture. As displayed in the following Table 6.3, the research has shown that the cultural value circuit generally consists of sharing as its value-producing practice, mutual aid as its cultural value form, the formulation of a shared ethos as its type of value flow, the construction of common communal identity as value pooling and the diffusion of mutual aid ethics in society as the form of redistributing its value to society. Only at the sequence of redistribution did communities display more diverse forms of value, stating the limited presence of two other forms of cultural value redistribution, in particular the dissemination of symbols and art, in the case of the Embros Theatre, and the diffusion of an ethos of political resistance, in the case of the self-managed ERT.

Based on the foregoing, the general formula of the commons-based cultural value circuit is consolidated in the form of sharing, mutual aid, shared ethics, communal identity and mutuality ethics, which can be summarised as follows:

Sharing → Mutual aid → Shared ethos → Communal identity → Mutuality ethics (S→MA→SE→CI→ME).

6.5. The Political Dimension of Commons-Based Value

The commons-based political value circuits of the communities of the sample were found to exhibit wide diversity. In particular, the codification of commons-based political value circulation has taken the following form, as presented in Table 6.4.

The commons-based political value circuit thus unfolds in the form of participation in decision-making, self-empowerment, collective empowerment, community self-governance and, again, collective empowerment, which can be formulated as follows:

Participation → Self-empowerment → Collective empowerment → Community self-governance → Collective empowerment (P→SE→CE→CSG→CE).

Apart from the general circuit of political value, an alternative political value circuit develops in certain co-opted communities in the form shown below:

Deliberation → Self-empowerment → Collective empowerment → No accumulation → No redistribution (D→SE→CE).

	Communities	Value-producing practices	Values	Flows	Accumulation	Redistribution
Offline contested	Embros Theatre	Sharing	Mutual aid	Relative shared ethos	Relative common identity	Mutuality ethics/ symbol and art
	Athens Hackerspace	Sharing	Mutual aid	Strong shared ethos	Strong common identity	Mutuality ethics
Offline contested	Libre Space Foundation	Sharing	Mutual aid	Strong shared ethos	Relative common identity	Mutuality ethics
	Self-managed ERT	Sharing	Mutual aid	Strong shared ethos	Relative common identity	Mutuality ethics/ ethos of political resistance
Offline co-opted	Athens Impact Hub	Sharing	Mutual aid	Relative shared ethos	Relative common identity	Mutuality ethics
	CommonsLab	Sharing	Mutual aid	Strong shared ethos	Relative common identity	Mutuality ethics
Offline co-opted	Sarantaporo.gr	Sharing	Mutual aid	Relative shared ethos	Weak common identity	Mutuality ethics
	P2P Lab	Sharing	Mutual aid	Strong shared ethos	Strong common identity	Mutuality ethics

Table 6.3: The circuit of cultural commons-based value circulation.

Source: Author

	Offline contested		Online contested		Offline co-opted		Online co-opted	
Communities	Embros Theatre	Athens Hackerspace	Libre Space Foundation	Self-managed ERT	Athens Impact Hub	CommonsLab	Sarantaporo.gr	P2P Lab
Value-producing practices	Participation	Participation	Deliberation	Participation	Deliberation	Deliberation	Deliberation	Participation
Values	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment
Flows	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment
Redistribution	Collective empowerment/ melting pot of political values	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment/ vision for social transformation	Collective empowerment/ freedom of information/ media pluralism	No	Collective empowerment/ vision for social transformation	Collective empowerment	Collective empowerment

Table 6.4: The circuit of commons-based political value circulation.

Source: *Author*

6.6. General Dimensions of Commons-Based Value

Based on the foregoing analysis, the first general finding of the study is related to the value sequences and circuits of commons-based value. Elaboration on coded data has confirmed that commons-based value does not remain static but rather undergoes various phases of transformation in its form. Repetition in data patterns shows that value transformation generally follows specific sequences. As a rule, interviewees have confirmed the transformation of value throughout the sequences of generation, circulation and pooling. Correspondingly, almost all interviewees responded with a definite yes to the question of whether their community redistributed values to society. Furthermore, the data analysis showed that commons-based values and their circulation spread across all dimensions of social activity, i.e. economic, *stricto sensu* social, cultural and political, forming specific circuits of value transformation in each of these dimensions. Thus, practices of commons-based value circulation and value pooling in all four of the dimensions of social activity examined in the study take certain forms, which can be depicted as general formulae.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, an unexpected finding emerged in the conduct of the research. Commons-based value circuits appear to be interconnected. Furthermore, they seem to be constituted in two stages. At the first stage, commoners build interpersonal circuits of reciprocity, by circulating commons-based values among themselves. Dense value kettles at this stage strengthen the second stage of value circulation, in which interpersonal gives its place to circular reciprocity. Multiple kettles of commons-based values form common pools of value, which then feed back and reinforce the interpersonal circulation of value. Finally, the establishment of robust common pools of value within intellectual commons makes them capable of redistributing commons-based values to society. By contrast, weak value practices at the phases of generation and circulation generally result in weak or no value pooling and redistribution, and vice versa. The two stages of value circulation are thus dialectically interrelated, with constant sequences of influence and counter-influence between each other. This key finding concurs with the phenomenon observed in all communities, in which the quality of value circulation at the first stage is reflected in the quality of value pooling and redistribution.

The second general finding of the study is related to the comparison between the contested and co-opted communities of the sample. In the process of data analysis, explicit and implicit differentiations emerged between the value circuits of contested and co-opted communities. Apart from the general circuits of commons-based value mentioned above, research findings show the presence of alternative value circuits in three dimensions of social activity, which were more distinct in the co-opted communities of the sample. These alternative circuits are constituted by value forms, which can be widely found in commodity markets and the capitalist mode of intellectual production, distribution and consumption.

Hence, the intellectual commons communities of the sample are reproduced by two types of value circuits in each of the four social dimensions of the study.

The first value circuit is constituted by commons-based values. The second value circuit is constituted by forms of value, which dominate commodity markets and the capitalist mode of intellectual production, distribution and consumption. These two distinct circuits of value co-exist within communities and reproduce them in a contentious and contradictory relationship between each other. The prevalence of commons-based value circulation and value pooling over capitalist-based forms of value constructs contested communities of the intellectual commons. The dominance of capitalist-based value circulation and accumulation over commons-based values co-opts communities of the intellectual commons to forces of commodification.

To sum up, the contested and co-opted circuits of value in the communities of the study take the general forms described in the two tables below:

	Economic	Social	Cultural	Political
Value-producing practices	Collaboration	Contribution to productive activity	Sharing	Participation
Values	Use value	Merit	Mutual aid	Self-empowerment
Flows	Gift	Trust	Shared ethos	Collective empowerment
Accumulation	CPR	Communal cohesion	Communal identity	Community self-governance
Redistribution	Gift	Social cohesion	Mutuality ethics	Collective empowerment

Table 6.5: Contested circuit of value in the communities of the intellectual commons.

Source: Author

	Economic	Social	Cultural	Political
Value-producing practices	Competition	Financial contribution	x	Deliberation
Values	Exchange value	Control of infrastructure	x	Self-empowerment
Flows	Commodity	Monetary exchange	x	Collective empowerment
Accumulation	Private appropriation	Social capital	x	No accumulation
Redistribution	Commodity	No redistribution	x	No redistribution

Table 6.6: Co-opted circuit of value in the communities of the intellectual commons.

Source: Author

