

CHAPTER 5

A Commons Transition Strategy¹²

How to be an anti-capitalist in the 21st century? Erik Olin Wright (2015) writes:

Give up the fantasy of smashing capitalism. Capitalism is not smashable, at least if you really want to construct an emancipatory future. You may personally be able to escape capitalism by moving off the grid and minimizing your involvement with the money economy and the market, but this is hardly an attractive option for most people, especially those with children, and certainly has little potential to foster a broader process of social emancipation. If you are concerned about the lives of others, in one way or another you have to deal with capitalist structures and institutions. Taming and eroding capitalism are the only viable options. What you need to do, is participate both in the political movements for taming capitalism through public policies and in socio-economic projects of eroding capitalism through the expansion of emancipatory forms of economic activity.

We mostly agree with Wright's point of view and suggest ways that simultaneously *tame* and *erode* capitalism. We, however, do not have the same confidence that the era of violent social and political revolutions is over. Such revolutions are organic events and the result of an unwillingness of elites to accommodate necessary system change.

For us then, eroding capitalism points to the necessity of creating a prefigurative commons-centric economy within existing capitalism. The post-capitalist future requires commoners as the agents of change, and in order to have commoners, the sphere of the commons needs to expand. Taming capitalism predicates no permanent and radical hostility to the state (Kattel, Drechler and Karo 2018), which has to be 'tamed'. This has been the strategy of all successful social movements to date, and that includes the labour movement, universal

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suffrage movements, women's and gay rights movements. This also means finding synergies and convergences among the prefigurative forces that can create the new economy, and finding political expressions for them, so that they can act in alliance with other emancipatory social and political forces.

One of the consequences of a multimodal approach is that allies should be found amongst the forces representing the other modes of production and allocation. This implies uniting the forces which support the commons, that support generative and ethical markets, and which support the development of a partner state.

5.1. Pooling Resources Wherever Possible

One of the essential features of P2P technologies is the liberation from the limitations of time and space. Hence, an ever larger number of people is not bound to their territory, which includes territory in the virtual sense (e.g. organization or enterprise). This is now possible both for 'immaterial' and material production. Workers can develop contributory lifestyles and add and withdraw from paid and unpaid projects throughout their lives.

The CBPP communities and their contribution-based technical systems of production can generally be characterized as open contributory systems though they have some filtering membranes in place to guarantee high-quality contributions and contributors. People can freely contribute to one or more commons of their choice. Pooling is, therefore, at the heart of CBPP.

Pooling both 'immaterial' and material resources are a priority. This capacity to pool productive knowledge is now one of the most important characteristics to obtain both 'competitive' and 'cooperative' advantage (depending on the orientation of the productive entity towards profit-maximization or for-benefit generative goals). Pooling – or in other words 'the commons' – should be at the heart of the productive and societal system.

5.2. Introducing Reciprocity

The mutual coordination within CBPP that takes place through open signaling can operate for the production of digital commons because these goods are nonrival. But what about material production? Since rival physical goods can be depleted (that includes human labour), and they are in need of regeneration, a different modality of allocation is needed. This is why although we have a 'cybernetic communism' at the heart of the capitalist system in the production of 'immaterial' goods (Barbrook and Cameron, 2015), we need another mechanism for material production. Instead of the practice of the 'communist' principle behind pooling ('from each according to their ability, to each according to need'), we may often need a reciprocity principle: 'to each according to their contribution.'

We thus propose the model of an ‘open cooperative’ – an entity that would be legally and statutorily bound to creating commons and shared resources. Open cooperatives would internalize negative externalities; adopt multi-stakeholder governance models; contribute to the creation of digital and physical commons; and be socially and politically organized around global concerns, even if they produce locally (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2016). In short, open cooperatives argue for a synergy between the CBPP movement and elements of the cooperative and solidarity economy movements. The difference with traditional cooperatives is that open cooperatives pool their immaterial resources, creating thus a multifaceted digital commons for other open cooperatives and for-benefit associations. As explained in 5.4, this cooperative advantage could help expand the commons sphere while subordinating capitalism.

Traditional cooperatives have historically served as viable alternatives to the capitalist organization of production. They have proven a distinct capacity in providing employment and security for workers and promote a broader reconfiguration of social structures. However, Rosa Luxemburg’s (1899) critique holds for cooperatives using hybrid forms of social production struggling within the capitalist system, which gradually forces them to either adopt competitive and exploitative mentalities or eventually dissolve. Cooperatives often self-enclose around their local or national membership and are less concerned with serving the broader community and thus fail to fulfil their transformative role (Pazaitis et al., 2017b).

In a similar direction, platform cooperatives have been proposed as alternatives to exploitative sharing economy models. They offer a radical redesign of the ownership and control of online platforms, promoting democratic governance, solidarity and social benefit (Scholz and Schneider, 2016). Platform cooperatives create an enabling environment for employees, customers, and users of digital services and contribute positively to the commons. However, platform cooperatives still pose isolated alternatives designed to counter old forms of capitalism, prone to the frailties of traditional cooperatives.

Open cooperatives aim to expand and interconnect to aggregate, support and protect collective knowledge, tools, and infrastructures. They produce locally but organize around global concerns to build a counter-economy that can deem CBPP to be a full and autonomous mode of production. They seek to create new types of vehicles, through which self-organized workers can realize surplus value and emancipate themselves from the confines of the dominant system.

Perhaps a right way to understand these multi-modalities of the new post-corporate entities is to look at the functioning of the medieval guild system. Externally they were selling their goods on the marketplace (but even that was subjected to ‘just pricing’ practices), but internally they were fraternities and solidarity systems. This offers a historical analogy to understand the double logic of the new entities connected to the commons. In a commons-centric economy, new purposes could be achieved through open participatory systems

that would connect producers and consumer/user communities, through mutual solidarity, as in the model of community-supported agriculture. We thus propose models that intertwine contributors with various roles, in one solidarity ecosystem. Furthermore, to the degree that these entities can use open contributory accounting systems, parts of the management of material production could be moved towards mechanisms of mutual coordination and pooling, which require a different sort of distributed collaborative planning (e.g. Sensorica).

Physical resources and means of production could also be pooled themselves. Commons-based forms of property could be implemented that are neither state property nor necessarily individual private property. Think about ‘commons funds’ to which all contributors participate and co-own. These processes would create the linkages between the still scarcity-based distribution of physical resources, which need to be regenerated and therefore require reciprocity; and non-reciprocal general pooling, for resources that need not be regenerated. To the degree that physical resources become more abundant, these resources could move to more abundance-based commons-centric models.

In conclusion: a distinction is made between commons-centric models that are appropriate for rival resources and commons-centric models that are appropriate for non-rivalrous resources. These models should be seen as polarities, with possibilities to move in one or another direction using hybrid combinations. While some communities may want to commonify their physical resources and eventually move to full non-reciprocal sharing modalities, other communities may wish to increase demands for specific reciprocity.

5.3. From Redistribution to Predistribution

5.3.1. *The Partner State Approach*

As was explained, the CBPP ecosystem has its productive communities; coalitions of entrepreneurs; and the ‘management’ or ‘governance’ institution, that of the for-benefit associations. For instance, the nonprofit foundations of free and open-source communities often manage and enable the infrastructure of cooperation. They defend the use of open licenses, sometimes provide training or certification, but generally, their task is to enable cooperation. Unlike the post-democratic dynamic of polyarchic contributory communities, these for-benefit institutions generally function with formal democratic procedures, such as elections.

In this context, these for-benefit associations operate as mini-states of the CBPP ecosystems. Hence, moving from the observation of the existing practice at the micro-level to the vision of a full social form, we observe that there is room/need for the ‘state form’:

1. a productive civil society contributing to the commons;
2. a predominantly generative market that creates added value around the commons;
3. a partner state, whereby public authorities play a sustaining role in the direct creation of value by civil society (i.e. they sustain and promote CBPP).

Something more than a redistributionist welfare state is necessary, which would go beyond accepting the supremacy of capital and disciplining the capitalist market players from the outside. We need a state that would create the conditions for the creative autonomy of its contributing citizens. Predistribution of resources is necessary rather than post-facto redistribution.

The partner state would ideally be the guarantor of civil rights, but also of the contributory equipotentiality of all citizens. It would empower and enable the direct creation of value by civil society at the scale of territory, by creating and sustaining infrastructures for CBPP ecosystems. Without such a territorial function, productive communities would have unequal access to resources and capabilities, leading to a continuing unequal society. In our vision, such a state form should be one that would gradually lose its separateness from civil society, by implementing radical democratic and even rotational procedures and practices.

A partner state approach would not be opposed to the welfare state model, but rather should transcend and include it. It would retain the solidarity functions of the welfare state, but de-bureaucratize the delivery of its services to the citizen. The social logic would move from ownership-centric to citizen-centric. The state should be de-bureaucratized through the commonification of public services and public-commons partnerships.

In the face of rising individualistic political philosophies, such as anarcho-capitalism that only sees individuals making contracts with each other, public good institutions are necessary. Society exists and needs its specific forms of expression. The state is one of them. Also, the state imaginary we argue for, synchronized with the unique characteristics of digital technologies, could be that of the partner state.

A partner state approach is seen prefiguratively in some urban practices, such as the Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of the Urban Commons or the Barcelona en Comú citizen platform.

5.3.2. *The Urban Commons of Barcelona and Bologna*

The urban commons are the locus of convergence between the digital commons of knowledge and culture, and the material reorganization of post-capitalist modes of production and exchange. It is thus not coincidental that such configurations have surfaced on a city-level. Within a globalized economy and with the transnational system of nation-states unable to address contemporary

challenges, cities provide an alternative transnational governance structure that complements and transcends the current institutions.

The recent emergence of commons-oriented municipal coalitions evinces such a dynamic. In the following sections, we offer a brief description of two paradigmatic cases¹³ of city councils that pose interesting alternatives to the traditional municipal form of government. In contrast to the short cases presented in Chapter 2, the aim here is not to present a generalized set of patterns. Instead, they serve to explore different approaches of cities facilitating types of citizen participation aligned with the commons.

The City of Barcelona

Barcelona is a momentous case that signifies a new form of radical municipalism directly confronting the current limitations of the nation-state. The city has a great diversity of grassroots initiatives, from the commons-oriented crowd-funding platform of Goteo and the Cooperativa Integral Catalana, to Guifi.net, a free/open telecommunications community network. This rich civic ecosystem has marked Barcelona as a reference point for CBPP.

Barcelona is not a city in reform from the top down; it is a city in a transformation from the bottom up. This is how the Barcelona en Comú (BeC) citizen platform emerged, took power and now governs in the minority in the City of Barcelona. Activist-level praxis matured into a political force attempting to share its hard-won knowledge and experience internationally. The BeC platform has been built step by step, acknowledging every little victory that adds up to something (previously) unimaginable. Moreover, finding the appreciation for the small steps is part of the change.

BeC is an illustrative case of a citizen platform created by social movements along with political parties to reimagine citizen participation in governance. It was launched in 2014 with an electoral programme collectively drafted by over 5000 people contributing in open assemblies and online procedures. The primary objectives addressed timely political issues, such as austerity, evictions and mass tourism, while particular importance was placed on the improvement of living standards and the urban commons. Moreover, the programme championed openness and democratization of local government institutions and direct citizen participation in local governance, while it explicitly refers to the commons as a central aspect of its political vision.

The BeC political coalition holds 11 seats out of 41. Within the small space between simple legislation and doing nothing at all, BeC attempts to embrace cooperatives and citizen activism despite the many limits and problems at government level. Central to this approach has been the support of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). This effort has been materialized in the Impetus Plan, a set of policies directed towards the development of new SSE

organizations and the transformation of traditional commercial entities, as well as the improvement of coordination across the sector.

The Impetus Plan includes a dedicated section on the commons, with a policy framework for the Commons Collaborative Economy (CCE), comprising the following layers:

- A cross-cutting body inside the city council to coordinate policies around transport, housing, tourism, and labour.
- BarCola, a working group involving representatives from the city council and the CCE sector for policy recommendations, assessment and cross-sectoral dialogue between the SSE and the commons.
- Decidim Barcelona, a hybrid participatory process combining in-person and digital input that has been developed for city residents to collaborate in municipal debate and decision making

Alongside this, in mid-March 2016 Barcelona hosted the Commons Collaborative Economies event (called ‘Procomuns’), centred on producing public policy proposals for the commons economy. The event, which drew a vast, diverse crowd from 30 countries, produced a joint statement and a series of policy recommendations targeted toward the Barcelona City Council, the European Commission, and other local governments.

The CCE policy framework for Barcelona has led to a Collaborative Economy Action Plan, with measures spanning from training and outreach to the promotion of circular economy programmes. Simultaneously, BeC is funding the *Ateneus de Fabricació*, a network of public *FabLabs* that strives to provide access to high-tech infrastructures and machinery and assist learning and the development of digital fabrication in every neighbourhood. Other types of interventions include policies for mobility and traffic control targeted at the reduction of pollution and the creation of citizen spaces.

BeC aspires to overcome national boundaries where possible, through the establishment of translocal coalitions, such as an international committee for cooperation and knowledge exchange with other cities, including Naples and Messina. It is also very active in international forums like the Global Network of Cities, Local and Regional Governments. Furthermore, decidim.barcelona has been used by other cities in Spain, while it is also promoted to cities internationally, exemplifying the potential of shared digital infrastructures in inter-city alliances.

The City of Bologna

Moving about 1000 km from Barcelona to the east, Bologna is a paradigmatic case for developing new institutional processes for public-commons

partnerships. It showcases new types of adaptive tools that allow citizens and other actors to get involved in collaborative design processes for the city.

In 2012, the City of Bologna initiated a political process focusing on urban resources and services with the aim to reshape the relationship between citizens and the local administration. Central to these policies has been the role of the Laboratory for the Governance of the City as a Commons (LabGov), which has brought together various stakeholders to develop collaborative projects, policies and regulations for the urban commons.

In February 2014, a regulatory framework titled ‘The Bologna Regulation on Civic Collaboration for the Urban Commons’ (hereafter ‘the Regulation’) has been adopted. The Regulation sets a framework for the collective management of public spaces, buildings and other infrastructure, and also considers issues like the improvement of the quality of city life and human flourishing. A vital tool of the Regulation is a collaboration pact that allows the city to establish agreements with residents and other actors, such as NGOs, local entrepreneurs, and institutions.

The Bologna Regulation is based on a change in the Italian constitution allowing engaged citizens to claim urban resources as commons and to declare an interest in their care and management. Typically, after an evaluation procedure, an ‘accord’ is signed with the city specifying how the city will support initiatives with an appropriate mix of resources and specifying joint public-commons management. Support may take various forms: from the provision of rules and guidelines for the maintenance of shared resources to the formulation of neighbourhood associations for the management of public spaces, as well as technical and financial assistance.

Since the adoption of the Regulation, 280 pacts for collaborative projects have been registered, from neighbourhood regeneration and social sharing projects to crowdfunding initiatives and digital commons platforms. Moreover, there have been several efforts targeted at disadvantaged communities, such as community-based reuse of infrastructures and resources.

Simultaneously, apart from the Regulation the City of Bologna has put forward other types of commons-oriented public policies. For instance, Incredibol is a successful project promoting creative and cultural activities in the broader region of Emilia-Romagna, which includes the creative use of abandoned or unutilized public assets. Also, Collaborare è Bologna is another project that develops collaborative planning processes for the governance of the urban commons through shared knowledge, technology, and resources.

The next step in the Bologna commons agenda is a program called ‘CO-Bologna’, which considers the expansion of urban commons design principles to other local public policies. These include areas like collaborative services, ventures and production spaces for the co-creation of solutions to urban problems.

The City vision of Bologna as a collaborative city is bringing together a global network of other cities in the same direction. The successful course of the

projects in Bologna has encouraged more than 140 other Italian cities to follow. For instance, Torino is already planning to adopt the Regulation, while Milan, Rome, and Florence have expressed specific interest.

The regulation is radical in giving citizens the direct power to produce policy proposals and transform the city and its infrastructure, as an enabler for this. The key is the reversal of logic: the citizenry initiates and proposes, the city enables and supports. The model of public-commons partnerships reconfigures civic and public collaboration. It envisions a new form of municipal government that views the city as a collaborative social ecosystem, rather than an inventory of administered resources. Nevertheless criticism of the Bologna Regulation is often singling out a top-down approach that differentiates it from the case of Barcelona. However, this again only makes the two cases complementary, rather than mutually exclusive.

5.3.3. A Coherent Strategy for Urban Commons Transitions

The cases of urban commons reconfigurations provide useful lessons on how to transit from the current market-state and, respectively market-city institutions, to commons-centric ones. Such a strategy would comprise three phases.

The first phase is characterized by the emergence of commons-based seed forms of systems of provisioning in crucial areas, such as food, shelter, and energy. These provide viable solutions to systemic problems of the dominant political economy. They become stronger as they interconnect with each other, mobilize citizens and integrate within and across different domains. For instance, community-owned energy cooperatives can lead a strategy to promote renewable energy solutions, challenging the traditional activities based on fossil fuels. Similarly, a community-based kitchen can cover the vital needs of disadvantaged members of the society, in contrast to traditional food supply chains. Civic mobilization around such alternatives can create significant pressures for increasing social and eventually, political power.

The second phase centres around the development of the necessary regulatory and institutional frameworks that support these alternatives. Proper institutions and regulations can be crucial for commons-based alternatives so that they can shift from the margin to the centre of the system and be proposed as viable alternatives. For example, in the case of energy cooperatives, policies such as feed-in tariffs incentivize specific forms of energy over others and help alternative models to expand more broadly, by ensuring they are more appealing. Similarly, regulatory measures for profit-oriented ridesharing platforms can support local commons-based alternatives.

Finally, the third phase pertains to the normalization of commons-based practices. With proper institutional support, generative market forms can be developed around commons-based alternatives, allowing them to expand and shape the new logic in their respective systems and territories.

These three phases are concurrent and tightly interwoven. Also, a critical mass of initiatives needs to be operating before political action can be summoned and relevant institutions can be designed. Likewise, the economic dynamics that these frameworks enable are highly dependent on the existence of a stable and mature commons sphere. Ultimately, this approach is based solely on structural changes that take place within the political economy. An integrated strategy also needs to take particular notice of the relevant cultural and subjective changes that vary in every different context.

5.4. Subordinating the Capitalist Market

Under capitalism, the market mechanism is dominant and infects all the other modalities – everything tends to be commodified. Capitalism is an extractive, profit-maximizing relationship. It exploits workers and now extracts profits from the free labour of free and open-source software and open design workers or from communication on social media. It has a similar extractive relation with nature and the environment.

The market, however, would continue to exist in a commons-oriented society. The market would shift from being predominantly extractive to predominantly generative. First, this means that the market will serve the commons. CBPP participants are struggling to create a direct livelihood by merely contributing to the pool of digital commons. They must pass through either the state (payment by the state, for example in public universities and publicly-funded science, or subsidies for culture and non-profits) or the capitalist market. State support could take the form of a basic income, along with other already known models of support.

However, commoners must also create a new type of market entity that would allow them to contribute to the commons. As we explained above, commoners form entrepreneurial coalitions that create products and services for the market and serve as a conduit to generate income for the continued construction of the commons. What role could the capitalist market have in a commons transition?

We argue for commons-based reciprocity licensing, which has been called ‘copyfair’ as a play on the copyright and copyleft. (For a discussion of reciprocity concerning licensing see Vieira and De Filippi, 2014). Copyfair allows commons-contributing entities to use the commons material for free, but non-contributory for-profit market entities have to pay for a license for the right to commercialize certain commons materials. In this approach, the free sharing of knowledge is preserved (the universal availability of digital commons) but commercialization is made conditional on reciprocity. The Peer Production License, proposed by Kleiner (2010), exemplifies this line of argument.

So, reciprocity is created between the sphere of the capitalist market and the sphere of the commons. This simultaneously allows for the entities participating

in the ecosystems of commons-oriented entrepreneurial coalitions to pool their immaterial – and even material in the long run – resources and benefit in tandem.

5.5. Organizing at the Local and Global Level

Our central political recommendation is that progressive coalitions at urban, regional and nation-state level should develop policies that increase capacity for the autonomy of citizens and the new economic forces aligned around the commons. Merely initiating left-Keynesian state policies will not be sufficient and will probably be met with stiff transnational opposition from the financial oligarchy. These pro-commons policies should be focused not just on local autonomy, but also on the creation of transnational and translocal capacities, interlinking the efforts of their citizens to the global commons-oriented entrepreneurial networks that are in development.

We suggest that progressive coalitions should focus on post-capitalist construction first and foremost. Except in rare locales, current progressive movements are wedded to the old industrial Keynesian models. But as they discover the limits of this strategy, openings towards commons-supportive policies may emerge. What follows from the above analysis is that the current commons-oriented forces must also focus on the creation of translocal and transnational capacities.

So, what could we do? There is a rapid increase in the number of civic and cooperative initiatives outside of the state and corporate world. Most of these initiatives are locally oriented, and that is necessary. We know that today there are movements that operate beyond the local and use global networks to organize themselves. A good example may be the Transition Town movement, and how it uses networks to empower local groups.

Indeed, it has been shown that the city context appears more mature for a commons transition. City administrations can shape the conditions for generative models of production and exchange that increase local autonomy and simultaneously create translocal capacities. Coalitions of cities can support global for-benefit institutions through public-commons partnerships to develop and maintain vital infrastructures and common protocols enabling urban systems of provisioning.

Commons repositories of knowledge, software, and designs can be shared among cities to empower local sharing platforms that commonify urban services, related to systems like food, mobility and lodging. Local adaptations of commons-based platforms, like Fairbnb (Amsterdam) and MuniRide (Ghent), may serve as a field of knowledge exchange and sharing experiences to mutualize physical spaces and services.

However, this is not enough. We propose the creation of translocal and transnational structures that would aim to have global effects and change the power

balance on the planet. The only way to achieve systemic change at the planetary level is to build counter-power, that is alternative global governance. The transnational capitalist class must feel that its power is curtailed, not just by nation-states that may organize themselves internationally, but by transnational forces representing the global commoners and their livelihood organizations.

We favour commons-oriented entrepreneurial coalitions that strengthen commons and their contributory communities and create an economy for them. These generative, translocal, and transnationally operating coalitions already exist. Amongst the best known are Enspiral (initially based in New Zealand); Sensorica (initially based in Montreal, Canada); Las Indias (mostly based in Spain but with many Hispanic members from Latin America); and Ethos VO (based in the UK). We believe this new type of translocal organization is the seed form of future global coalitions of generative entrepreneurs.

In this context, commons-oriented entrepreneurial coalitions could locally be represented by regional Chambers of Commons, first proposed by David Ronfeldt as a way to emulate the Chamber of Commerce¹⁴. Moreover, again at the local level, the pro-commons associations could be represented in Assemblies of the Commons. The Assembly of the Commons could help empowering civic power around the commons¹⁵. It could bring together all those who contribute and maintain common goods and serve as a forum to exchange experiences and bring commonality into diversity. For example, the Assembly of the Commons could organize events around commons topics; support those social and political forces that bring forward an agenda for the commons; promote and engage in public-commons partnerships. It would be fraternally connected to the Chamber of the Commons, as well as to other assemblies. In this way, they all together could operate at a larger scale and form regional, national, transnational federations.

Also, global federations of commons-oriented entrepreneurial coalitions could be created. This initiative would aim at connecting already existing entrepreneurial coalitions so that they can learn from each other, but also at developing a collective voice. We see that as a global equivalent of the proposal for the Chamber of the Commons.

These developments of commons-specific social institutions could emerge in parallel with more traditional political expressions of commons mentalities. We have already seen the emergence of political parties, the Pirate Parties, which are expressions of the file-sharing communities that were repressed through copyright legislation, which led to their politicization. The 15-M movement in Spanish cities gave birth to the *en Comú* coalition in Barcelona, which raised to power and makes specific references to the commons, e.g. the development of a commons-oriented economy.

In addition to these specific and more direct expressions of commons-oriented political forces, we claim that the acceptance of a commons agenda could be the basis for new progressive coalitions with already existing political forces. With the Pirates reflecting digital culture, the Greens the political

expression of the natural commons and the new emerging left parties representing a new (post-)industrialism, we foresee the emergence of majoritarian coalitions in which the commons would be a binding element.

We must build ‘counter-hegemonic’ power at the global level. This continuous meshworking at all levels is what will build the base upon which to create systemic change: the power to change, at the level where the destructive force of global capital and its predation of the planet and its people can be countered.

This has been done before. According to Kojin Karatani (2014), the reason our current market society came about is that Europe was never able to consolidate centralized power, allowing independent cities where merchants could exist and expand their power. This social force became dominant after the fall of absolute monarchs. So market forces had already a long history behind them before social and political revolutions made the market form dominant. Capitalism won because pro-capitalist forces already existed.

However, commoners do exist. We use digital commons and rely on physical commons. Commoners should follow the same multi-modal strategy and prefiguratively build their power and influence at all levels. Of course, just as labourers did, for this we have to develop a consciousness that we are commoners. Anyone participating and co-constructing shared resources without exploiting them is a commoner. It is a question of how people see the ‘relative weight’ of the commons modality in their lives as well as whether commons become part of their social imaginary of a desired future.

Because the world is multimodal, it does not make sense, and it is impossible, to create a ‘totalizing’ commons world. We, could however, aim for a commons-centric society where market forces and state functions are ‘disciplined’ at the service of the commons. Like capital did before us (Karatani, 2014), we must build our strength within a multimodal world.

5.6. Summary of our Proposals

Here is a summary of our proposals for a multimodal transvestment strategy as well as for organizing locally and globally.

The first step is to fight against the extractive activities of profit-maximizing entities directed at the commons and its allied economic entities. Commoners should use transvestment strategies that would transfer value from the capitalist market modality to the commons modality. We thus propose that:

- Commoners mutualize digital (e.g. knowledge commons, software, and design) and even physical resources (e.g. shared manufacturing machines). We need pooling wherever it is possible.
- Commoners establish their economic entities and create livelihoods for productive communities. We need open cooperatives.

- These economic entities use commons-based reciprocity licensing to protect against value capture by capitalist enterprises. We need copyfair.
- Open cooperatives are organized in participatory business ecosystems that generate incomes for their communities. We need commons-oriented entrepreneurial coalitions.

This leads us to the second step that is to build a counter-power at the city, regional and global level. We thus advocate for:

- The creation of local institutions that give voice to commons-oriented enterprises that build commons and create livelihoods for commoners. We need Chambers of the Commons.
- The creation of local or affinity-based associations of citizens and commoners, bringing together all those who contribute, maintain or are interested in common goods, material or immaterial. We need Assemblies of the Commons.
- The creation of a global association that connects the already existing commons-oriented enterprises, so that they can learn from each other and develop a collective voice. We need Commons-oriented Entrepreneurial Associations.
- The creation of global and local coalitions between political parties (e.g. Pirate Parties, Greens, New Left) in which the commons is the binding element. We need a Common(s) Discussion Agenda.

5.7. A Last Word

Capitalism has demonstrated a capacity to overcome its challenges. However, it is not an ahistorical system that will magically persist. First and foremost, capitalism has been based on capital accumulation and infinite growth. But it is impossible to imagine perpetual growth in a finite environment: capitalism will not be able to offer a fundamental solution to the ecological crisis that it creates (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2014).

This book suggests that a commons transition may address the multifaceted crisis the world is facing. In a first period, the commons should be seen as a challenge to capitalism and as a function of struggle and a balancing of forces. Is the surplus value generated by commons extracted or enclosed? Does it take the form of a social compromise? Alternatively, can it be a terrain of struggle, in which the commoners develop their strategies to gain strength within capitalism, to augment the surplus available to their activities and to create social and political power for a subsequent re-arrangement of power, leading to systemic change?

While it is likely that the next wave of capitalism will problematically integrate green and commons-based aspects, it is unlikely to be able to do this in

the long term, due to its growth fixation and other destructive imperatives. Not knowing this future, which is under construction and subject to power relationships, we can therefore only work with scenarios. However, each of these scenarios includes the necessity to strengthen the autonomy and the place of the commons in a future social order.

Our approach is complementary to the work of Nick Dyer-Witheford (2015) that mostly provides an analysis of classic working-class exploitation within the capitalist system and largely ignores (apart from a few elements) struggle through the construction of seed forms. We do not focus on capitalist exploitation and resistance within the capitalist mode of production but on the construction of post-capitalist seed forms and how to advance them.

On top of that, our approach is also related to both Paul Mason's (2015) and Jeremy Rifkin's (2014) analysis of post-capitalist dynamics. However, both Mason and Rifkin lack much focus on the social and political contradictions of the transition, are strongly techno-deterministic in their orientation, and crucially, don't include any real detail about the transition itself. By contrast, our approach accepts only a mild form of technological determinism and stresses struggle through the construction of alternatives by focusing on realistic institutional design between the commons and the spheres of the market and the state.

Techno-deterministic approaches often celebrate post-scarcity visions of the future. These views reflect a particular understanding of technology that actually intensifies the problems that are sought to be solved through it. New technologies are frequently portrayed only as finished goods, disregarding the economic relations embedded in their development, which conceals the fact that these technologies exist at the expense of other humans and local environments elsewhere.

Similarly, issues of scarcity cannot simply be engineered away by more efficient production methods. What is broadly discussed as the 'Jevons' Paradox' (Alcott, 2005) illustrates that efficiency improvements can lead to an absolute increase in the use of raw materials and energy, due to lower prices per unit and a subsequent increase in demand. On a global scale, such efficiency is best understood as a rearrangement of resource expenditures, where efficiency improvements at one end of the world increase expenditure at the other end.

Acknowledging those multifaceted issues, this book is not based on utopian desires, but on constant analysis of the emerging seed forms and their successes and failures. Through this, a realistic picture emerges of transition strategies that strengthen the commons sphere in a hostile environment.

We thus propose an integrative strategy for a broad societal transition that differs from the classic left narratives of previous centuries. Why could this strategy be effective?

Firstly, it is consistent with the historical record that shows that political revolutions did not precede profound reconfigurations of social power, but completed them. The development of a new movement or class and its practices precedes concluding social revolutions that made their power and modalities

dominant. There is a convergence of data that supports the prefigurative existence of a growing number of commoners¹⁶, who could form the basis of a historical subject at the forefront of this transition.

Moreover, essential to this development are the changing cultural expectations of millennial and post-millennial generations, and their requirements for meaningful engagements and work, which are scarcely met by the current regime. The precarization of work under neoliberalism drives the search for alternatives and the cultural force of P2P self-organizing and corresponding mentalities fuels the growth of commons-oriented networks and communities.

Also, CBPP is a model that could create a context of genuinely sustainable production. It is almost impossible to imagine a shift to sustainable circular economy practices under the current proprietary regime. The thermodynamic efficiencies needed for sustainable production could be found in the regular applications of principles inherent in the commons-centric economy¹⁷.

Finally, the crises of the left itself, which are now relegated to the management of the crisis of neoliberalism itself, points to the vital need of renewing the strategic thinking of the forces that aim for human emancipation and a sustainable life-world.

We believe that a strategy for a multi-modal commons-centric transition offers a positive way out of the current crisis, and a way to respond to the new demands of the commons-influenced generations. The commoners are already here; so are the commons and the prefigurative forms of a new value regime.

PROPOSALS FOR A COMMONS TRANSITION

The first step is to fight against the extractive activities of profit-maximizing entities towards the commons and its allied economic entities. Commoners should use transvestment strategies that would transfer value from the capitalist market modality to the commons modality.



WE NEED POOLING WHEREVER IT IS POSSIBLE.



WE NEED OPEN COOPERATIVES.



WE NEED COPYFAIR.



**WE NEED COMMONS-ORIENTED
ENTREPRENEURIAL COALITIONS.**

This leads us to the second step that is to build a counter-power at city, regional and global levels. New institutions are needed.



WE NEED CHAMBERS OF THE COMMONS (LOCAL).



WE NEED ASSEMBLIES OF THE COMMONS (LOCAL).



**WE NEED COMMONS-ORIENTED
ENTREPRENEURIAL ASSOCIATIONS (GLOBAL).**



**WE NEED A COMMON(S) DISCUSSION AGENDA
(GLOBAL).**

OPEN COOPERATIVISM

a strategy for generative economies

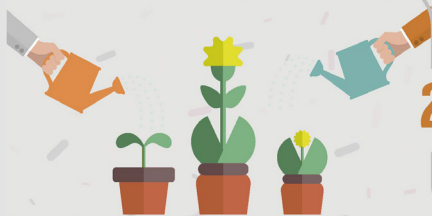
Centralized network data platforms form a powerful new 'digital feudalism', threatening the gains of the labor movement and accelerating precarity by influencing deregulation.

To counter this, **Open Cooperativism** combines Commons/P2P approaches with the cooperative movement, creating **agile, resilient economic entities** that co-create commons and provide livelihoods.

4

PATTERNS OF OPEN COOPS:

- 1. FOCUS ON THE COMMON GOOD:**
Production is guided by social and environmental values.



- 2. MULTI-CONSTITUENT:**
All contributors affected by the Open Coop's value chain share ownership and control of its structure.

- 3. ACTIVELY CREATING COMMONS:**
Open Coops co-create and care for digital (code, design, documentation) and physical (infrastructure, deliberation spaces, machinery, etc.) commons.



- 4. TRANSNATIONAL SCOPE:**
Physical production is kept local, but Open Coops also share knowledge and resources at the global level.

WAYS OPEN COOPS CAN REIMAGINE OUR ECONOMIES:

1.

OPEN ABUNDANCE:

Closed business models are based on artificial scarcity. Open Coops recognise the natural abundance found in digitally shareable knowledge and shares it transnationally.



2.

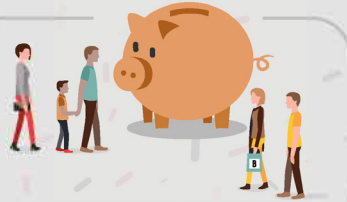
DIVERSE CONTRIBUTIONS:

Instead of enforcing the division of labour or specialization, Open Coops provide the tools for dynamic and flexible participation.

3.

FAIR DISTRIBUTION:

CopyFair licensing strengthens the commons economy through full sharing economic solidarity within the Commons sphere.



4.

OPEN DESIGNS:

Open Source Commons manufacturing is geared towards modularity, durability, customization and human needs, not profit.



5.

REDUCED WASTE:

Open Coops are fully transparent about their production, mutually coordinating for maximum adaptability and real conditions.



6.

MUTUAL PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURES:

Co-ownership and co-governance can help create a true Sharing Economy with more efficient use of resources such as shared data or manufacturing facilities.



Open cooperativism, combined with distributed 'Design Global-Manufacture Local' production can free commoners to create **fulfilling, generative economies** instead of remaining on the treadmill of working in an extractive, destructive system.