

## CHAPTER 3

# Far from an Alternative: Intermediation Apparatuses

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In the face of economic crises, increased concentration in the cultural industries and the withdrawal of public support, crowdfunding platforms seem to offer new opportunities for funding and promoting culture (D'amato 2014). In 2013, Fleur Pellerin—former French junior minister in charge of the digital economy—visited the peer-to-peer personal lending startup Prêts d'Union. In her speech, she argued that crowdfunding is 'a simple and effective alternative which allows innovative businesses to perform better, and investing citizens to support the projects of creators and talented entrepreneurs which are close to their own hearts and which resonate with their own beliefs.' Once we get beyond such seductive speeches to young entrepreneurs—made in a 'crisis' context—these integrated platforms can be viewed as stakeholders in the 'alternative finance market'.

But in what way are those platforms disruptive? Are they really alternatives, and if so, what makes them alternative? Is it their approach to project funding, which contrasts with the caution and reluctance banks and institutions typically show? Are they an alternative to corporate finance? If so, how can this alternative also apply to culture? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by analyzing how crowdfunding platforms operate and what functions they actually perform. The key hypothesis is that they constitute *dispositifs* or

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apparatuses (Agamben, 2007) in the economic and social realm as well as on a political and legal level. In this regard, they contribute to the implementation of what Philippe Corcuff (1998) calls ‘action regimes’ of a predominantly normative (rather than alternative) type. Unlike the experimental, DIY-inspired fundraising modalities of early Internet sites, mainly in the field of music, the platforms which have arisen since 2010 are inherently conceived as new intermediary players within the fragmented cultural economy.

In the first section we will discuss the polysemic nature of the concept of the ‘alternative’ in order to expose the ambiguities of its usage regarding the case of crowdfunding platforms. Subsequently, we will expose how the different apparatuses tend to transform these platforms into central players typically following a logic of intermediation (Miège 2017). Lastly, we will question the notion of an ‘alternative’ from the viewpoint of project carriers. Although they may be experienced as alternative by project creators, in reality they are better understood as new intermediaries firmly integrated within the prevalent capitalistic logics of the cultural and creative industries.

### Defining the Alternative

The notion of alternative is commonly attached to forms and systems which seek to exist and define themselves at the margins or in opposition to the existing, dominant models. From a strictly etymological point of view, the term has two key meanings. Firstly, it refers to ‘that which acts in turn’ (as in alternative electrical current); secondly, as of the sixteenth century, to ‘that which replaces’. It is clearly the second meaning that qualifies numerous practices or systems, but this usage is complex given that it pertains to such a variety of contexts and situations. As we are reminded by John Downing’s analysis on radical media, ‘everything, at some point, is alternative to something else’ (Downing 2001: p. ix). Nonetheless, what characterises them beyond this diversity is the specific goals which they exist for: either these practices aim to critique, transform and abolish the system within which they appear, or they seek to accompany the system’s structural mutations in order to maintain its hegemony (in the Gramscian sense).

Much existing literature in the field of alternative media has shown how, in the first case, these forms aim at emancipation and wider participation, various degrees of radical transformation. According to Marisol Sandoval and Christian Fuchs (2010) these alternative, militant forms are articulated around two divergent conceptions, which they name subjective or objective, in reference to a formulation put forward by Anthony Giddens. The first defines the alternative according to the actions carried out and the location of these last. The central point is that participation generated allows expression for individuals and groups that are deprived of it in traditional media. Horizontal and collective

modes of control and organisation complete this, with DIY-inspired processes leading to more democratic forms of ‘management’. The second, objective, conception refers to work more concerned with contents, and with radical and critical media forms as such, envisaging these as a counter-force against existing institutions. It’s this dimension that is at play in artistic and cultural forms in the fields of music (Kruse 1993), film (Newman 2009) or literature, in the sense that they strive to transcend or abolish existing codes and norms, as well as mainstream economic or political logics, despite simultaneously running the risk of being reintegrated into a capitalist system that feeds on such alternatives. The case of the punk movement, as analysed by Dick Hebdige (1979), is a classic illustration of this phenomenon. And as Christian Fuchs (2010) also observes, despite their emancipatory goals, alternative media practices and contents must also avoid three major pitfalls: the fragmentation of the public sphere; their profitability and links with repressive political purposes; their tendency towards exclusivity.

This tension between two conceptions of the alternative can be seen at play in the literature regarding propositions and alternative economic models. On the one hand one observes a number of reflections and concepts pertaining to alternatives to globalized and centralised capitalist economies, covering closely related themes and suggesting new practices such as an end to speculation, the development of alternative currencies (Greco 2001), the importance of locally based, participatory practices and non-hierarchical labour relations. On a second level, one observes critical analyses of the capitalist system, illustrating the contradictory logics which it thrives upon (Hardt and Negri 2001, Boltanski and Chiapello 2018). In both cases the aim is to rebuild solidarities based upon both material and symbolic reappropriations, forms of ‘entrepreneurship of the multitude’—to quote Hardt and Negri’s (2017) somewhat optimistic formula discussed also by Fuchs (2017)—marked by practices of the ‘commons’, open co-operation (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014), as opposed to capitalist exploitation. They can also be set within the project a sustainable ecology (Löwy 2011) or that of ‘degrowth’ (Latouche 2014).

As we observed in the previous chapter, the spread of Internet extends these debates and the tension between a development based on citizen controlled, alternative, collective sites and platforms, and online spaces run according to the capitalist logics of the culture and communication industries. In these debates, a majority of so-called ‘alternative’ platforms are given (or seek) this appellation in opposition to the mainstream, international market leaders (Facebook, Uber, Netflix, etc.). A recent contribution to this question (Thuillas and Wiart 2019) suggests three types of ‘alternative’ platforms: firstly the mutualist, assembling several existing cultural players which gather to develop a common project; secondly virtual ‘marketplaces’ allowing various independent players to join forces in order to increase their market share; thirdly those supported by public or para-public funding. The last case, only, allows a certain

degree of independence from the logic of financial returns. It can however be easily constrained by political logics favouring such and such a project, requiring legitimisation of local or national power structures. In all cases, these types of platforms are only partially concerned with the alternative logics discussed above, and appear most likely to contribute to the reinforcement of political and/or economic hegemony.

Crowdfunding platforms, in their overwhelming majority, appear to be characterised by these dominant logics. The term ‘alternative’, as used by the French Junior Minister in the speech quoted at the beginning of this chapter, has to be considered according to its second finality, i.e. without any explicit reference to forms of emancipation, to critical models, or to the transformation of the existing system. This usage of the term goes hand in hand with the praise of ‘innovations’ and ‘creativity’ which are specifically designed to extend capitalism’s lease, so as to speak. It belongs to a somewhat hazy ideology of participation which can indeed alternately be declined to the ‘gift economy’, the ‘collaborative economy’, the ‘gig economy’, the ‘peer economy’, etc. In practice what these various notions share is the commodification of daily activities which formerly were beyond the realm of market economy, either because of their inherently private nature, or because they remained until recently publicly supported (Scholz 2016).

As with the majority of platforms and with the ideologies that accompany their usages (Gillespie 2010), cultural crowdfunding platforms can be seen as positioned on the fringes of traditional cultural-industrial logics. To ensure their financial viability, platforms apparently adopt the so-called ‘long tail’ model (Anderson 2006): instead of developing and securing niche markets, they secure niche projects, in a ‘grey zone’ of the cultural industries, led by project creators and their communities. Unlike the logic of rarity-based artistic and cultural markets (Farchy, Sagot-Duvaroux et al. 1994), these platforms offer a huge number of projects, most of which are not aimed at an audience much beyond the ‘crowd’ of participants/backers. This is confirmed by the presence of heterogeneous projects, and by the fact that these are largely one-offs which appear on rapid rotation (financing over periods of 2 months, less than 180 days on average), asking for an average of €4,365 (source BPI France).<sup>1</sup> Their alternative features rely, moreover, in the forms of financial transaction that they offer, supposedly on the margins of mainstream finance. Several titles of NESTA annual reports are, from this point of view, quite eloquent: *The Rise of Future Finance: The UK Alternative Finance Benchmarking Report* (2013); *Understanding Alternative Finance: The UK Alternative Finance Industry Report* (2014).

Crowdfunding platforms undeniably reflect some of the values and ideas that one also can find in alternative discourses and projects: participation, horizontality, the strength of local, community-based projects, the autonomy of project creators—but consistently in forms which are compatible with capitalist economic logics. These forms of participation are therefore very much removed from, or even in contradiction with, concepts such as Participatory Economics

(or Parecon) developed by the American economist Robin Hahnel and writer activist Michael Albert (1991). These last proposed to wholly rethink the economy on the basis of socially shared needs and desires, both within the structures and values of labour, in a respectful relation to the environment, and in view of a social justice inspired by democratic decision-making procedures, and initiatives carried out during the twentieth century in various revolutionary contexts, from Soviet Russia to Latin America.

In other words, we can see that crowdfunding platforms are indeed apparatuses in the sense suggested by Giorgio Agamben (2009), who argued, following Michel Foucault, that the apparatus ‘has in some way the capacity to capture, guide, determine, control and implement the gestures, conducts, opinions and discourses of living beings’. In the following section we will consider what precise functions these apparatuses perform.

### Apparatuses Adapted to Market Strategies

Following the diversification and segmentation of the traditional cultural industries, and integrating other economic sectors through their emphasis on creativity (Garnham 2005; Tremblay 2008), cultural crowdfunding platforms (gift and reward-based models) now operate in competitive two-sided markets (Eisenmann et al. 2006; Rochet and Tirole 2006) and must develop their appeal and their selling points in order to survive according to capitalist modalities that are not specific to the digital sector. Aiming to better understand the economics of platforms and the issues involved in them, a study by DARES (Direction de l’Animation de la Recherche, des Études et des Statistiques) emphasized that ‘the economics of platforms does not constitute a radical new break; the model pursues, combines and multiplies dynamics already largely at work during the 1990s’ (2017: 10).

They have indeed developed on the model of the intermediary, as an interface between different players (Miège 2017), and an instrument of industrial convergence (the ‘ecosystem’). According to a report by the Conseil National du Numérique en France, a platform is:

a service fulfilling an intermediary function for access to information, content, or services, either published or supplied by a third party. Apart from its technical interfaces, it organizes and hierarchizes content in view of its presentation and interconnection with end users. To this common characteristic is sometimes added an ecosystemic dimension characterized by interrelations between convergent services.<sup>2</sup>

This double movement of interface and convergence plays a part in the extension and financialization of ‘amateur’ practices, the outsourcing of problem solving, and content production, while reducing the risks of investment by shifting them

to the user/consumer and/or community (Matthews 2015a; 2015b). Given these practices, the platforms develop a twofold discourse that reveals the ambiguity of their position. They present themselves to creators and backers as an ‘alternative’; simultaneously, they position themselves as partners rather than competitors to traditional industries. Sector professionals we spoke to believe that this globalized competitive ‘ecosystem’ is now ‘mature’. Cultural crowdfunding platforms can therefore be differentiated according to distinct strategies aimed at differentiated markets. We now set out these various modes of differentiation.<sup>3</sup>

### *1. Discussing the Typology of Platforms*

Let’s firstly recall the dominant typology. Donation based platforms allow contributors to fund a project in a purely ‘philanthropic’ fashion; reward-based platforms offer graduated gratifications according to the amount given; lending based platforms invite users to lend money in exchange for expected interest returns; lastly, equity based platforms allow users to invest in a project or a company by becoming a shareholder and therefore expecting dividends. This classification is widely shared by both economic and political players and attempts to differentiate various forms of exchange or investment. Although it underlines the extension of the fields in which crowdfunding is now operating, it is nonetheless problematic. Firstly, this classification erases structural distinctions that can exist within one single category. Secondly, it fails to address the specificities of each platform. For instance, in 2018, the French professional organisation ‘Financement Participatif France’ listed together 22 platforms hosting cultural or ‘solidarity’ projects which were either donation based or reward based. Lastly, this nomenclature fails to acknowledge the development of ‘internal’ platforms belonging to either private corporations or public institutions. This is the case of the ‘Tous Mécènes’ platform developed by the famous Musée du Louvre, which therefore cannot be accounted for with the commonly recognised typology. Therefore, we propose another classification, which corresponds more clearly to the activities and specificities of the various platforms studied, particularly in the field of the communication and culture industries.

### *2. Generalist Platforms*

The first type of platforms encountered are the media-fuelled generalist sites such as Indiegogo, Kickstarter or RocketHub in the USA, or Ulule and KissKiss-BankBank in France. They allow project creators to raise funds for a variety of cultural goods or services (music, book or other printed media publishing, fiction or documentary film, videogames, as well as technological projects, apps, etc.). These platforms generally involve funding projects over a short period of time (the ‘campaign’), but it is also possible for projects or persons to be funded

by ‘backers’ over a long or undetermined period—a route offered by Patreon in the USA and Tipee in France.

The generalist platforms have the biggest turnover, and capture the majority of value in terms of both number of projects submitted and amounts raised—Indiegogo and Kickstarter in the US, Ulule and KissKissBankBank in France. Kickstarter, the world leader, has raised \$4,090,777,676 across a total of 157,152 projects funded. The figures are lower in France: Ulule reports 26,261 projects funded out of 40,643 submitted, generating donations amounting to €129,564,662 since the platform’s launch. KissKissBankBank raised €93,488,678, with 33,175 projects proposed, 19,349 of which were successful.

Platforms	Number of submitted projects	Number of funded projects	Success rate %	Total amount collected by platform
Kickstarter (US)	432,016	157,152	36.37	\$ 4,090,777,676
Ulule (F)	40,643	26,261	64.61	€ 129,564,662
KissKissBankBank (F)	33,175	19,349	58.32	€ 93,488,678

**Source:** compiled from data made public by each platform, January 2019

The dominance of generalist platforms is due both to thematic categorizations (close, if not identical, to those of the cultural and creative industries: music, comics, publishing, films and documentaries, videogames, technology, cookery), and to their media coverage and trust they generate. This observation is corroborated by the statistics of the research we carried out with Internet users, project creators and backers. To the question ‘Can you cite any crowdfunding platforms?’ respondents to our study mostly named Ulule (27%), KissKissBankBank (22%), Leetchi (13%) and Kickstarter (9%).

More specifically, regarding the projects submitted on the majority of platforms, music appears to account for a significant proportion of revenues. The importance of music can be explained partly by the ties that this art form has with crowdfunding from the beginning, but also because of the correspondence between musical formats, as an experience good, with this type of apparatus (Bourreau and Gensollen 2006)—unlike other areas such as documentary or fiction film, whose products both require significantly larger budgets and often rely on diverse sources of funding. Lastly, this importance can be linked to the structure of the musical sector and the evolution of usages in the digital age (Leguern 2016). For instance, considering the figures of US platform Kickstarter, in June 2019, music isn’t generating the most projects but it remains the category where there are the most fully funded projects.

Projects on Kickstarter	Number of submitted projects	Number of fully funded projects	Success rate %
Music	59,879	29,707	49.90
Film and video	71,612	26,731	37.55
Games	45,907	17,652	38.94
Publishing	46,640	15,018	32.47
Theatre	11,907	7,077	59.94
Dance	4,129	2,546	61.86

Source: compiled from data made public by the platform, June 2019

In France, one observes different hierarchies according to each platform. On KissKissBankBank 5,988 musical projects were submitted, making it the most funded category with an average contribution of 54€ and a 72% success rate. On Ulule, although the musical category comes third (with 4,315 submitted projects and 16.6 million euros raised) behind social/citizenship projects and film (20.6 million; 6% and 72%). The gap between the number of projects submitted and the success rate can be explained by editorial and selective logics, as well as by the fact that some cultural categories rely on more specific and very implicated communities. As a corollary to the higher number of projects submitted, these generalist platforms attract a higher number of backers as compared to thematic and/or niche platforms (16,466,075 donors for Kickstarter, 1,665,223 ‘kissbankers’ for KissKissBankBank). They also generate projects that bring in amounts far higher than the initially requested sum.

However, both the platforms’ own figures and those of private bodies must be taken with a pinch of salt, as they are based on data that differs in terms of both space and time, making comparison difficult and perhaps impossible. Note also that only the major platforms even supply such figures. The data exhibited by these platforms serve as a communicational and promotional showcase, and testify to a demand for transparency on the part of users. But they remain difficult for the researcher to verify. This explains why we’ve had access to far more data from generalist platforms than regarding those which cater for a single specific artistic or cultural form.

### *3 Niche Platforms*

Faced with this newly competitive market, more specific thematic and niche platforms are developing, or trying to compete, in increasingly specialised cultural sectors. These include platforms like Blue Bees (which focuses on

ecological agriculture and food), Touscoprod for documentary and cinema, Sandawe for comics, the platform and label Microcultures for music, and Weezart, currently in beta form, which offers fair revenue distribution for artists. Platforms have also emerged which are specifically dedicated to sport, like Fosburit, or religion, like Credofunding. The number of submitted and funded projects are understandably much lower, as are the total amount collected, in comparison with generalist platforms.

Platforms	Number of submitted projects	Number of funded projects	Success rate %	Total amount collected by platform
Sandawe	n.c	175	n.c	€ 3,094,530
Fosburit	n.c	n.c	n.c	n.c
Credofunding	1,923	453	23.55	€ 4,488,147

**Source:** compiled from data made public by each platform, January 2019

With stricter and more assertive editorial selection, these platforms are (or try to be) rooted in particular communities. But within this competitive context, the lifespan of many is short, as was the case for the music platform Pro-8moi, Myartinvest, for buying art (now closed), or Touscoprod, which has been ‘integrated’ into Proarti.

#### *4 Local Platforms*

The third model is based upon the alternative value of locally situated initiatives and hence pertains to ‘local’ platforms. Since 2010 we have seen the promotion and creation of such platforms, whether general or niche. With the hope of reaching funders no longer uniquely on a family basis, local platforms have developed that are rooted in a particular region and host local projects. These include Kocoriko (Grenoble), Gweneg (Brittany), Kengo.BZH (Brittany), J’adopteunprojet (Poitou-Charentes), and Ma Belle Tribu, started by CASDEN Banque Populaire, which aims to support ‘outstanding citizen and community initiatives in the regions.’ Similar initiatives are underway in Quebec through platforms such as La Ruche and Haricot.

Certain general platforms have also taken the hint, investing in local development: Ulule, for instance, now runs ‘Ulule Tours’ in France and Quebec. Mixing cultural and community elements in this way, with the participation of public and private institutions, only confirms what was said above in regard to partnerships. For example, in 2014, the French rail company SNCF launched a project on Ulule. With the aim of safeguarding the artistic heritage of the station at Tours, SNCF Gares et Connexions partnered with the association

Platforms	Number of projects submitted	Number of funded projects	Success rate %	Total amount collected by platform
La Ruche	n.c	175	n.c	3,300,277 \$ Can (2,173,958 €)
Haricot	n.c	400	n.c	1,035,356 \$ Can (681,947 €)

Source: compiled from data made public by each platform, January 2019

‘Patrimoine-Environnement’, inviting users to back the renovation of eighteen ceramic tile paintings by the artist Eugène Martial. They raised €10,381, having requested only €8,000. Platforms help blur the lines between public and private institutions, and between the responsibilities distinctive to each. At work here is a communications strategy: the desire to create a community of users, but also and above all to outsource to users and to citizens the costs of the renovation of properties that belong to them.

### *5 Combined Platforms*

The fourth model involves a regime of private-public interrelation. On the private side, such platforms may function on the basis of public endowments,<sup>4</sup> for example, as is the case with Proarti, which promotes art and culture, or Dartagnans, which aims to disseminate and preserve French culture and heritage. In this case, they are supported by public initiatives ranging from certification by the Ministry of Culture to ‘aid’ given by regional and departmental authorities through local councils. The way in which they work varies, insofar as they can select which projects to support, can offer support to them outside of a strictly economic logic, and are thus able to consider the aesthetic dimension of the project.

### *6 Integrated Platforms*

The fifth and final model is that of the platform as a tool integrated into internal entrepreneurial strategies. Following a market logic, ‘corporate’ platforms are now being set up to improve relations between businesses and their clients. On the model of the advertising platform Eyeka, these have now become a tool developed, managed and used in corporate strategies. Oscillating between the logics of crowdsourcing and crowdfunding, the platform becomes a tool for businesses which integrates pre-existing strategies. As Grosman and Brandes (2015) explain, using the example of IBM, ‘corporate’ crowdfunding enables

internal collaboration and the synergising of different activities of the business and its staff, but it also enables bonding, competition and interaction between ‘co-workers’.

Finally, regardless of the models developed and the strategies deployed, startup platforms have the same dependencies as the projects they help develop. Project creators depend on the investment of their community and, similarly, platforms depend on their own investors. In order to grow and develop they must carry out regular, substantial fundraising, public and private, as already analyzed in the framework of the so-called ‘collaborative’ web (Bouquillion and Matthews 2010). As a result there are uncertainties as to their future, but there is also growing competition, leading to the takeover and/or demise of platforms—as illustrated by the closure of MyMajorCompany in 2016.

### The ‘Ecosystem’ as a Stimulus for Extensive Partnerships

The third point follows from the logics of intermediation created in this way. It particularly involves the search for partnerships that will allow these platforms to be integrated into the existing economic ‘ecosystem’, making them new intermediaries—which somewhat tempers, while not entirely invalidating, the idea of the alternative. If the notion of the ‘ecosystem’ resonates with both environmental issues and the core questions posed by the ‘commons’ movement, it is implemented in a wholly different perspective here. The ‘ecosystem’ we hear so much about must be understood in terms of a double movement of synergetic partnerships and competition driven and regulated by the market economy. The new world market, made up of a myriad of small- and medium-sized economic players linked by digital communications networks, supposedly depends on the systematization of peer-to-peer approaches in the economic domain, as well as on a hypothetical fusion between the spheres of production and consumption, as described in *The World is Flat* (Friedman 2005) and *Wikinomics* (Tapscott and Williams 2006).

The partnerships forged can be of different types, sometimes private, sometimes public, and sometimes by way of white-labelling. They may change over time. In France, from its very beginning the platform MyMajorCompany was associated with the music label Warner, which handled its publishing and distribution. In 2010 it chose to diversify its activities by moving into literary publishing, and forged an alliance with the publisher XO. In 2011, wanting to enter the comics sector, it formed a partnership with the Belgian group Media Participations, owner of Dupuis, Dargaud and Le Lombard publishing houses, and in parallel it formed other partnerships with companies as diverse as the insurer AXA, the interiors store Habitat and the music streaming site Spotify. In 2018, KissKissBankBank announced partnerships with numerous public and private players, including La Banque Postale, the newspaper *Le Parisien*, a number of Chambers of Trade and Industry, and MK2 cinemas. Ulule’s partnerships are

less visible, and seem instead to work by inviting local companies and collectives to function as white label products, and through targeted and branded campaigns. The UK's number one cultural project platform, Crowdfunder (a spin-off of the equity platform Crowdcube) boasts numerous such partnerships with a range of companies including M&S, Santander, Virgin Business, AXA, JCDecaux), as well as universities and local authorities across the country.

In all cases, the partnerships rely on players from the traditional cultural and creative industries, on local and regional authorities, as well as on associations and charity groups, hence providing a reservoir of fresh creative labour and renewing the oligopoly/fringes model—while at the same time blurring the distinction between public and private players, which is treated as unimportant in the new 'ecosystem'. In the digital era, the principal factor in an economic player's expansion is supposedly no longer its ability to optimize transaction costs internally, but its propensity to conduct and organize transactions on an 'open market' (Tapscott and Williams 2006: 56).

Despite the 'publicizing' of these partnerships, which promotes an image of synergy and dynamism, platforms are more discreet about their ultimate goals. Referring to Gillespie (2010), Bullich (2015) says about YouTube that platforms have an interest in playing on semantic ambiguity, revealing only those aspects of their work that present them in the best light and leaving the strategic, operational and economic dimensions in the shadow. This is done to maintain an image that is neutral and sympathetic to Internet users, and which can win over investors and partners. These platforms create an 'alternative' image that promotes innovation and creativity, freed from the yoke of industrial logics and their implacable financial concerns, in favour of an elsewhere that is freely chosen and over which one has full control, and where financing is a matter of choice, of sharing ideas and of love at first sight. On KissKissBankBank, partnerships advertise themselves under the philosophy of 'Do It Yourself' and co-creation. The partners are instead called 'mentors,' and only their logos are shown. Other platforms like Indiegogo promote the concept of 'DIWO' (Do It With Others)—a gesture at the ideology of collective intelligence mentioned earlier.

Finally, if platforms are considered to be, or even legitimated as, 'alternatives' to bank lending institutions that are reluctant to invest in innovative cultural projects, they nevertheless have close links with those very institutions. There has been some degree of overlap since their creation, because banking partners and online payment services like PayPal handle transactions, claiming a percentage on each one (which varies depending on platform and payment method). For instance, Ulule has a partnership with BNP Paribas: 'Convinced that crowdfunding and bank financing complement each other, Ulule offers to refer you to BNP Paribas for all complementary needs relating to your entrepreneurial project financed on Ulule.'<sup>5</sup> KissKissBankBank initially had a partnership with La Banque Postale, which went on to acquire the platform in 2017. Far from being 'alternatives,' these apparatuses now present themselves

as tools which complement existing sources of credit. Indeed, banks may agree to finance projects once they have attained the required threshold. Success in crowdfunding, supported by a community of ‘backers,’ becomes a means of preliminary screening that reduces the risk of lending.

### Apparatuses for Political and Legislative Action

Private-public relations are strengthened by political involvement and the development of the legislative frameworks necessary for these platforms to expand and diversify their domains of activity. In the United States, Obama’s 2012 Jobs Act provided for regulated financial exchanges through these platforms, but also allowed them to extend the domain of their activities, for example allowing them to offer equity or investment in companies (Cunningham 2012).

Since 2013, numerous European countries have also adopted legislation aimed both at regulating these funding methods and allowing their potential expansion to other economic sectors (Dushnitsky et al. 2016).

In France, the extension of these forms of financing to domains beyond culture only became possible with the political support of subsequent ministers for sustainable development, economy and finance, including Montebourg, Moscovici and Macron. Marine Joaun’s thesis (2017) demonstrates just how effective lobbying can be, particularly in deciding which platforms are authorised.

The ruling published in the *Journal Officiel* of 31 May 2014, which regulates platforms and authorizes exemptions from financial monopoly regulations, has officially recognised two specialized types of platforms:

- Loan platforms which finance diverse (often ‘community-based’ or ‘entrepreneurial’) projects via free or paid-for credit, collectively agreed by contributors-lenders.
- Investment platforms which primarily specialize in funding ‘entrepreneurial’ projects by issuing equity or debt securities, and whose reward for contributors-subscribers is a share in the potential profits of the project.

Finally, the importance of political backing can also be seen in France’s promotion of heritage and cultural production by introducing special measures for crowdfunded projects. The most important of these are tax reductions for individuals and companies if their project is non-profit (with charitable status) or heritage-related.

Although digital activities potentially offer these platforms international visibility, we should note that, in reality, they are subject to national laws and regulations. The first platforms, representatives of the devolved modalities of the web, aimed at an international scale—the web being, in the minds of its creators, a network without borders. And yet, beyond all the talk, this internationalist dimension still depends on international and bilateral agreements between the

countries concerned, as well as individual states' fiscal policies (VAT, income tax, copyright, consumers' rights). And no matter the country, project creators are legally subject to tax. Although legislation is often vague and not always strictly applied, the sums obtained when funding is successful can be considered revenue. As shown in the recommendations of the report 'Crowdfunding Schemes in Europe' (Rothler and Wenzlaff 2011), approaches in Europe still depend on the legislation of each member state, and remain to be harmonized.

It is therefore easy to understand the efforts made by these platforms and a number of private and/or public initiatives to inform legislators and the public, and so create national and international synergies in order to internationalize and globalize the 'ecosystem.' This is the case, for example, with the research carried out in the framework of the European Union funded CrowdFunding4Culture (<http://www.crowdfunding4culture.eu>), piloted by the private consultancy Idea Consult. The aim of this was to propose the development and, above all, the harmonization of these platforms at a European level. Similar initiatives have also been set up in the countries of the 'South.' In Africa, for example, the South African based ACfA (African Crowdfunding Association), created in 2015, aims to unify the activities of the continent's platforms and to remove the legislative barriers preventing monetary exchanges in or among other African countries.

The relationship between crowdfunding and politics depends on the use made of it by parties, unions and certain politicians. Use of these platforms or apparatuses typically brings up debates around their place in the participative democracy movement. We will discuss two distinct examples. The first—often cited by the high priests of cyberspace and other apologists for digital progress as a reference case for the 'revolutions' made possible by digital technologies—is the use of such funding in Obama's first presidential campaign. In 2008, Obama appealed to the generosity of his supporters to partly fund his campaign, raising \$150 million. But this was only a tiny part of the total, and exponential, cost of the campaign. In this first case, crowdfunding served more as a showcase and a communications operation, rather than having any significant impact on the 'democratic experience.' A second example, closer to home, took place in March 2018. On the initiative of the sociologist Jean-Marc Salmon, supported by twenty or so artists and intellectuals, an appeal for donations was launched on the 'money pot' site Leetchi to set up a strike fund to support the continuation of the movement against SNCF reforms. By 18 May 2018, 28,907 donors had given €1,132,001. This second example highlights all the ambiguities of the apparatus. Although it enabled financial support for political opposition, it also contributed indirectly to the development of the very same liberal economic logics that workers were fighting against.

### Platforms as Technical Apparatuses

As we have stated above, the element that characterizes this type of platform is the establishment of a technical apparatus, in the sense defined by the

philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2009). Crowdfunding platforms are above all a matter of coding. They are carefully planned out before going live, giving users access to services and to a particular organization of information. Without revisiting the large quantity of debate and research on the relations between techniques and uses, one should recall that coding intervenes upstream of content and the participation of project creators and backers. Platforms for cultural finance determine the framework for their automated services, from registering on the site to participating as a project creator, a contributor of ideas and knowledge or a backer. In doing so, the platforms establish how they will function (Flichy 2008): they must be ergonomic, intuitive and easy to use. It can be very damaging, for instance, if it takes too many clicks to reach the required information or to make a payment, as this discourages backers from finalizing their donation. The platforms also aggregate and exploit user data (partly visible on the statistics pages the platforms provide) and develop dedicated APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) which allow the platform, for example, to run as white label products on other businesses' sites.

Algorithmic automation is also at work in content promotion on the site—for instance, which projects are featured will vary depending on the viewer's tastes and location. As apparatuses, these platforms make information and content visible while selecting material according to prior editorial decisions. By promoting certain projects on their homepage or personalizing what they show users depending on their actions on the site, they contribute to the hierarchization of information and reinforce competition between projects.

Like any apparatus, platforms legally establish and normalize administrative procedures (General Terms and Conditions of Use) and the relations between players who will subsequently interact according to a logic of 'co-innovation'. The sociologist Emile Gayoso (2015) remarks that: co-innovation platforms work on both sides at once (innovation, management and marketing) and in this sense give us a privileged vantage point on the re-embedding of business within society which, as managerial injunction but also as structural necessity, has taken shape in the Western world following the crisis of the 70s, with the growth of the 'networked business' and of 'management by project' (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999), and finds in the Internet a powerful catalyst.

### **Platforms for Artists and Creation?**

'Free your creativity', declares the participative platform KissKissBankBank. Kickstarter's homepage is emblazoned with the words 'Discover creative projects'. Patreon offers to help you 'regain your creative freedom', while the British platform PledgeMusic has described itself as 'a unique marketplace where fans and artists connect'. Given such slogans, it is no wonder the media,

politicians, as well as many other social actors, appear to be infatuated with crowdfunding. These words, and the platforms which produce them, are symptomatic of current discourse on the digital economy, inviting ‘creatives’ to participate, to mobilize communities and to revitalize project funding and, more globally, culture itself.

The confusion between the terms ‘creation,’ ‘creativity’ and ‘projects’ are symptomatic of the creative industries (Tremblay 2010; Hesmondhalgh 2008) and their attempts to create value by evacuating the aesthetic and artistic issues distinctive to artistic creation, instead emphasizing individual creativity as an end in itself. Crowdfunding platforms posit themselves as new cultural intermediaries, opening the way to new possibilities for ‘supporting creation.’ The issue here is the valorization of ‘making’ without the need for any kind of ‘knowing,’ and the celebration of creativity to the detriment of any aesthetic or theoretical considerations.

In music, literature and cinema, the discourses circulated by project creators reinforce this positioning, both through the attention they pay to these logics and the way they represent them. We see an example of this with the following author, who submitted a book project to a French platform:

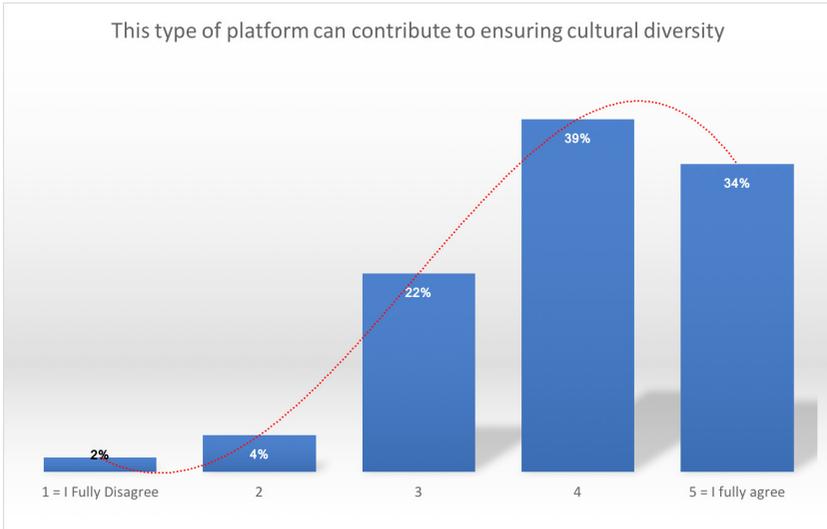
At first I sent my manuscript to publishing houses, but with hindsight I can see that was never going to work. They looked at the style first of all, and it’s true, it wasn’t good enough. I tried again with a second manuscript, and this time I got more notes. But still they told me that it didn’t fit into their current publication priorities. A friend told me about this platform, and I tried signing up. I don’t know much about it, but I said to myself, why not. (T, 27 years old, book project)

Another user proposed an album:

I saw it [financial participation] as a funding method which meant you could get a project going which just wouldn’t happen by traditional routes. I saw it as a form of funding in advance. (T, 25 years old, music project)

Most of those we spoke to saw these platforms in this way, as potential means to finance and complete their projects, with various possible alterations depending on the pledges received.

Honestly, I didn’t think it was going to work. I didn’t think people would be willing to give like that. I told myself I’d give it a try, and I reached my goal in a week! [The target was €2,000.] If I’d have known, I’d have asked for €10,000! [...] In actual fact, I got more than that. It’ll be enough for me to make more projects, a bigger book, a larger print run. (F, 32 years old, book project)



**Figure 3:** Source: ANR Collab 2017.

Our qualitative study (including both citizens who had participated in or financed a project, and those who had not) further supported the idea that crowdfunding platforms help ensure cultural diversity.

Projects on these platforms are not dependent on the restrictive, pyramidal selection logics of cultural industries. At first sight, they therefore seem less subject to economic or aesthetic demands, and free from the pressure of institutional sponsors and backers. Remember that most of those who pledge money to a project have a direct link of some sort to the project creator, either as family or friends, and usually do not monitor the production and development of the project carefully. This absence of control is counterbalanced by the ‘exclusive’ rewards which backers receive, and which are dependent on the amount they pledge. Our research shows that the projects proposed—and the desires of the creators themselves—typically do not aim at novelty or aesthetic experimentation, but rather the success of the campaign and the satisfaction of a personal pleasure, the symbolic achievement of ‘having done it’ (Flichy 2010). Note that the issues are somewhat different for project creators who are not entirely amateur. The alternative on offer is to fund a project without getting involved in commercial, professional and contractual logics—instead, one can take an alternative, DIY approach. This last point is essential, for this is how project creators can guarantee control of the object financed, as well as associated rights:

I wanted to make something good. Why bring it out as a CD? Personally, I never buy CDs, unless I buy them after a concert I enjoyed. That’s the

kind of spirit I started the project with, not in the spirit of a distributor like Harmonia Mundi or Naive who was going to distribute it ... I did it for myself, to have something to distribute to people who come to see me and sometimes ask if they can buy a CD. (V, musical project creator, 35 years old)

As in the financing stages of traditional cultural or audio-visual projects, the alternative seems to be not so much an alternative approach to 'creation' or diffusion. Instead, it is as an intermediate phase in which one seeks financial support, including making a personal and financial investment, and this may succeed or fail.

Well, it's good that we asked for too much. For one, we didn't manage to get as much as we wanted, but then there were people who contacted us afterwards because of it. People who came to it a bit late. So even though it failed, we tried, and now it also means that we're better known. (Musician, 45 years old)

Certain skills beyond the 'creative' talents specific to the project itself are needed for a successful crowdfunding campaign. Prescribed by the platforms (see chapter 3) and largely self-taught, these are basically marketing and communications skills. In terms of project management, they primarily involve creating and activating the network, generating a sense of, and creating and managing a community (Matthews, Rouzé and Vachet 2014; see digital appendixes, chapter 5). While crowdfunding is often presented as an alternative to the restrictive logics of the cultural industries, in this respect it seems more like a publicity and communications tool which drives other types of promotion.

This dimension of communications and publicity is well illustrated by museums. In turning to these modes of financing, museums aim to increase the visibility of their projects, and to build loyal communities around them. For instance, the Centre des Monuments Nationaux used the platform MyMajor-Company to collect funds for the restoration of a number of historical monuments, including Mont St. Michel. Ulule has hosted projects by the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de la Marine. In the United States, the Smithsonian, MoMA, and the Marina Abramovic Institute have all used Kickstarter campaigns to restore or finance projects on various scales.

In France, as part of its policy for digital modernization baptized 'the digital Louvre', the Louvre has created an internal platform, 'Tous Mécènes', to publicize its restoration projects and to create a community of patrons to take on activities that were formerly the province of groups like the 'friends of the museum' (Mairesse 2016). Note that these campaigns should be understood more broadly, in the context of a network of injunctions that go beyond the question of funding innovations alone. In the heritage sector, for example, in 2007 Joëlle Le Marec conceptualized the modernist injunction to the museum

to 'get moving' (Le Marec 2007, 169) and to be digitally up to date as a structural logic at work transversally across institutions, their services and their projects. Far from being an alternative, the use of such platforms is above all strategic. The opinions of members of staff may differ, and they might not always see such initiatives in a positive light.

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, we would like to return to the significance and role of these platforms in the development of culture. Although they allow some projects to meet their goals, or partial funding for more ambitious ones, many other projects are held back by the forms of competition involved and do not have such opportunities. This clearly calls into question their capacity to foster cultural diversity. The projects that will flourish are those that already boast a large community with sufficient financial resources, whose tastes and cultural and social practices depend on their class allegiances (the impact of cultural capital, Bourdieu 1979) as well as their age range (generational impact) and their geographical location (Hugues and Peterson 1983). Our research shows that, apart from the class logic in play, and the inequalities in the distribution of backers and project creators across the country (see the conclusion to the preceding chapter), 'innovative technological projects' generate more interest and attract funding decisions, to the detriment of other cultural categories.

The same logic also favours projects which comply with pre-existing tastes and fashions, to the detriment of projects whose aesthetics, format, or concerns are remote from common preoccupations, or on the fringes of traditional or mainstream cultural expressions. This question is rendered still more acute by the ambiguity of the partnerships between private and public players, who support projects in line with their communications and marketing strategies and their own economic logics. Far from being alternatives to the logics and strategies of the cultural and creative industries, these platforms follow the logic of the capitalist ecosystem: stimulating competition between projects, and contributing to competitive hierarchizations of projects which are correlated with the necessity of rendering them visible, a process reinforced by inegalitarian forms of access and sharing (size of community, social origins, etc.). Finally, as we saw above in the case of the 2018 appeal to fund the rail workers' strike in France, it raises questions around the systematic integration of any alternative or protest movement, a mechanism necessary to the survival of the capitalist economy (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018).

Far from being alternatives, today's platforms are newly integrated links in the cultural sector. By way of the ecosystems they work to create and/or strengthen, they produce complementarities between different players in various economic and institutional sectors, and also seek to federate others. A competitive logic

nevertheless endures in this ‘collaborative’ market, contributing to the growth of rivalry between platforms but also, and above all, between projects and between project creators—far from a logic of equitable participation or of the commons. They therefore contribute to what Lash and Lury (2007) have called the culturization of the economy, by placing the ‘experience’ of the consumer/citizen (defending a project, raising funds for it, participating in its success) as well as the ‘local’ dimension (a strategic element of what some economists call the ‘purple’ economy) at the heart of a system supposedly dependent on innovation and brand-based capitalization.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> [https://tousnosprojets.bpifrance.fr/Observatoire/\(type\)/don](https://tousnosprojets.bpifrance.fr/Observatoire/(type)/don) Accessed April 1st 2019.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ambition numérique: pour une politique française et européenne de la transition numérique [Digital Ambition: for a French and European Policy of Digital Transition]*, report of the Conseil National du Numérique, 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> One should stress however that these different models and strategies are not fully exclusive, as some platforms borrow from one or another model.
- <sup>4</sup> In France, the *fonds de dotation* is one such endowment, dedicated to works or missions of ‘general interest’ or to assisting other non-profit organizations to accomplish such missions. The base amount needed to set up a *fonds de dotation* has been set at €15,000 by law.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://nl.ulule.com/bnpparibas/#/> Accessed November 18th 2018.

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