

## CHAPTER 7

# The Social Value of the Intellectual Commons: Commons-Based and Monetary Value Dialectics

### 7.1. Introduction

Having already examined the circuits of commons-based value in the previous chapter, the current chapter further proceeds with an analysis of the dialectics between commons-based and monetary values, as recorded in the study. It also deals with the comparison of value circulation between the offline and online communities of the sample. Its key finding is that commons-based value circuits are in constant contestation with monetary values both in offline and online communities of the intellectual commons. Furthermore, it gives a view of the actual forms that such contestation takes and their impact on the evolution of the intellectual commons. As a corollary, the current chapter on commons-based and monetary value dialectics reveals that communities of the intellectual commons formulate their own specific modes of value circulation and value pooling, which come into contentious interrelation with the corresponding mode of commodity and capital circulation and accumulation.

### 7.2. Commons-Based and Monetary Value Dialectics

Coding and analysis of collected data in relation to the dialectics between commons-based and monetary values revealed the following general picture of sampled communities, as set out in the Table 7.1.

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	Communities	Reliance on monetary exchange	Impact of monetary scarcity	Influence of monetary scarcity on commoning	Conflicts related to monetary exchange
<b>Offline contested</b>	Embros Theatre	Limited	Sharing among members/financial donations/unremunerated work/expropriation	Relative	Relative
	Athens Hackerspace	Limited	Sharing among members/donations/unremunerated work	Limited	Relative
<b>Online contested</b>	Libre Space Foundation	Relative	Unremunerated work/external funding	Relative	Limited
	Self-managed ERT	Limited	Sharing among members/financial donations/unremunerated work/resource expropriation	Extensive	Limited
<b>Offline co-opted</b>	Athens Impact Hub	Extensive	External funding/commodity market exchange	Relative	Limited
	CommonsLab	Extensive	Sharing among members/unremunerated work/external funding/commodity market exchange	Extensive	Extensive
<b>Online co-opted</b>	Sarantaporo.gr	Relative	Sharing among members/financial donations/external funding/unremunerated work	Extensive	Extensive
	P2P Lab	Relative	Sharing among members/external funding/unremunerated work	Relative	Limited

**Table 7.1:** The dialectic between commons-based and monetary value circulation.

Source: Author

Data analysis showed that, as a rule, co-opted communities are more dependent than contested communities on monetary value circulation for their reproduction. In particular, monetary flows penetrate co-opted deeper than contested communities, taking the form of commodity market exchange, external funding and financial donations. On the other hand, and in order to work around the mediation of money, contested communities depend more heavily on practices of sharing and are far more inventive in terms of other commons-based practices, such as the unremunerated productive activity of their members and resource expropriation, than co-opted communities. Workarounds again vary. All contested communities depend heavily on the productive activity of their members. Most communities also rely on voluntary contributions in kind, such as resources or member donations. Additionally, two of the sampled communities (the self-managed ERT and the Embros Theatre) expropriated and recuperated resources, such as water, electricity, communications and radio spectrum, in order to be able to redistribute common goods to society.

The foregoing analysis shows that both the contested and the co-opted communities of the sample receive pressure from monetary scarcity to varying degrees. To resolve monetary scarcity and achieve sustainability, co-opted communities resort in part to modes of external funding, commodity market exchange and, generally, monetary alongside commons-based value circulation. The pursuit of monetary remuneration as a means to ensure sustainability both within and beyond the limits of the community creates pressing dilemmas to these communities over the preservation of commons-based value practices or their partial transformation into exchange value. The degree of co-optation in each community depends both on the success of its model of sustainability and on its level of democratic consolidation. Co-opted communities that have been successful in becoming, even temporarily, financially sustainable through their chosen mode of interrelation with commodity markets, correspondingly ameliorate the extent of the pressure by monetary scarcity. In addition, when such communities have robust self-governing mechanisms in place that help them to hold on to underlying founding values and orientations, financial sustainability gives them space to expand commons-based value circuits and increase commons-based value redistribution to society. By contrast, co-opted communities that struggle hard to sustain themselves for periods longer than their capacities to endure gradually delimit commons-based value circuits and decrease commons-based value redistribution to society, as they fight for survival in commodity markets. Prolonged unsustainability increases value-laden tensions among members and has a negative impact on social, cultural and political value circulation and value pooling within the community. At this stage, communities either disband or enter a process of full co-optation within commodity markets, whereby their commons-based value circuits are displaced by monetary and commodity market exchange.

By contrast, contested communities employ different means to resolve issues of resource scarcity. Such communities delimit their reliance on monetary exchange as a way of both reducing the extent of its influence on their reproduction and becoming more independent from commodity markets. Workarounds to monetary and resource scarcity in contested communities mainly refer to commons-based practices of sharing and pooling together resources among members, accepting micro-donations by members or third-party natural persons or other commons-oriented groups and collectivities in solidarity, resorting to resource expropriation and, last but not least, mobilising members' unremunerated productive activity. Nevertheless, their relative independence from commodity markets makes contested communities more dependent on the unremunerated productive activity of their members. Pressure from monetary scarcity thus shifts to the level of the individual. Both contested and co-opted communities have entered conflicts related to the role of monetary exchange to varying degrees and extents. The nature of such conflicts, however, differs among communities. Whereas conflicts in co-opted communities mainly rotate around the success or failure of their model of sustainability, conflicts in contested communities explicitly surface in reference to the degree of monetary penetration and intermediation in everyday community practices. In contested communities with shortcomings of self-governance, conflicts may again be implicitly connected with monetary scarcity. Such conflicts intensify after financially successful events and revolve around the collective management of the treasury. In many respects, the disregard of individual remuneration in contested communities has an implied connection with phenomena of non-transparent management and informal hierarchies on the part of members who contribute more to the community in terms of productive activity and free time.

In conclusion, the contested and co-opted communities in the sample resolved the dialectics between commons-based and monetary value in different manners. Co-opted communities are relatively more dependent on monetary circulation and more prone to displacement of their commons-based value circuits than contested communities. Contested communities are relatively more dependent on non-remunerated productive activity from their members and more prone to power conflicts in relation to monetary resources held in common, when such resources increase. Co-opted communities exit the value sphere of the intellectual commons when their value circuits become predominated by monetary values and commodity market exchange or when they collapse under the weight of irreconcilable contradictions between their principles and everyday practices. Contested communities become redundant when they lose the capacity to motivate their members to offer their productive activity in large quantities on a non-remunerated basis. Hence, it is not by chance that the more resilient and commons-oriented communities, either co-opted or contested, have proven to be those with robust and participatory political institutions of self-governance. In contemporary societies, dominated by capital and

commodity markets, the political circuit of commons-based values appears to determine contestation from co-optation.

### 7.3. The Comparison between Offline and Online Communities

Elaboration of data in terms of the offline/online distinction has yielded interesting key findings regarding the mediation of practices of commoning by contemporary information and communication technologies. In a nutshell, research has revealed that such technologies have the potential to strengthen and multiply elements of commons-based peer production, distribution and consumption in the communities of the sample, when utilised by commoners for such purposes.

In particular, the data coding of the economic circuit showed that the mediation of value circulation by money and commodity exchange appears to be significantly wider in the offline compared to the online communities of the sample. Accordingly, the data analysis of the dialectics between commons-based and monetary values revealed that the dependence of offline co-opted communities on monetary exchange and their reliance on commodity market exchange appears more extensive than in online co-opted communities. The augmented role of co-opted monetary and commodity exchange value circuits in offline communities has the side effect that these communities institute more fragile circuits of commons-based value, which tend to be suppressed and displaced by the former. Hence, this key finding supports the assumption that the use of contemporary information and communication technologies is connected with the influence of money and commodity exchange in intellectual commons communities in contextual causality. When such technologies do not directly promote practices of commoning, they at least delimit the influence of money and commodities in the value circuits of communities. Furthermore, coded data in the other three researched dimensions of social activity, i.e. *stricto sensu* social, cultural and political, show a lack of significant differences between the value circuits of offline/online communities. Indicatively, practices of sharing and mutual aid or networked forms of social value redistribution appear in both types of communities. This lack of difference runs counter to the commonsensical view that information and communication technologies weaken social bonds.

Taking into account these research outcomes in combination, the overall comparison between offline/online communities shows that the technological factor plays a significant role in the circulation of value within the intellectual commons. Information and communication technologies have certain capacities, which can be exploited by communities to amplify the circulation and pooling together of commons-based vis-à-vis monetary and commodified values. Nevertheless, as further examined below, such capacities can and will remain unfulfilled as long as forces of commonification do not circulate

and pool together additional social and political values, which establish strong shared ethics, communal identities and, most important, self-governing mechanisms, which will give them the level of politicisation to become a social power ‘for themselves’.

#### 7.4. Conclusion

The data analysis in the current chapter has revealed the dialectics between opposing forms of social value within value circuits, which dynamically determine the physiognomy of each sampled community. The core of this dialectic is the confrontation between commons-based values and the universal equivalent of value in our societies, i.e. monetary value. Such a confrontation permeates and frames the communities of the intellectual commons. According to this dialectic, the intellectual commons are suppressed by the dominant value system of commodity markets and its universal equivalent of value in the form of money upon the intellectual commons. Such pressure, which may even lead to the extinction of intellectual commons communities, comes into contradiction with the overall conclusion regarding their social value and potential. Even though such communities may as a rule not be as productive as corporations in terms of money circulation, profits, jobs and taxes, this does not make them unproductive in terms of social value. On the contrary, the communities of the intellectual commons contain and emanate a wealth of social values, which ought to be protected through legal means. The next chapter of the research offers relevant arguments and conclusions.