

# Recreating collective meaning: An unravelling of the Collaborative Economy through the sensibility of culture

By  
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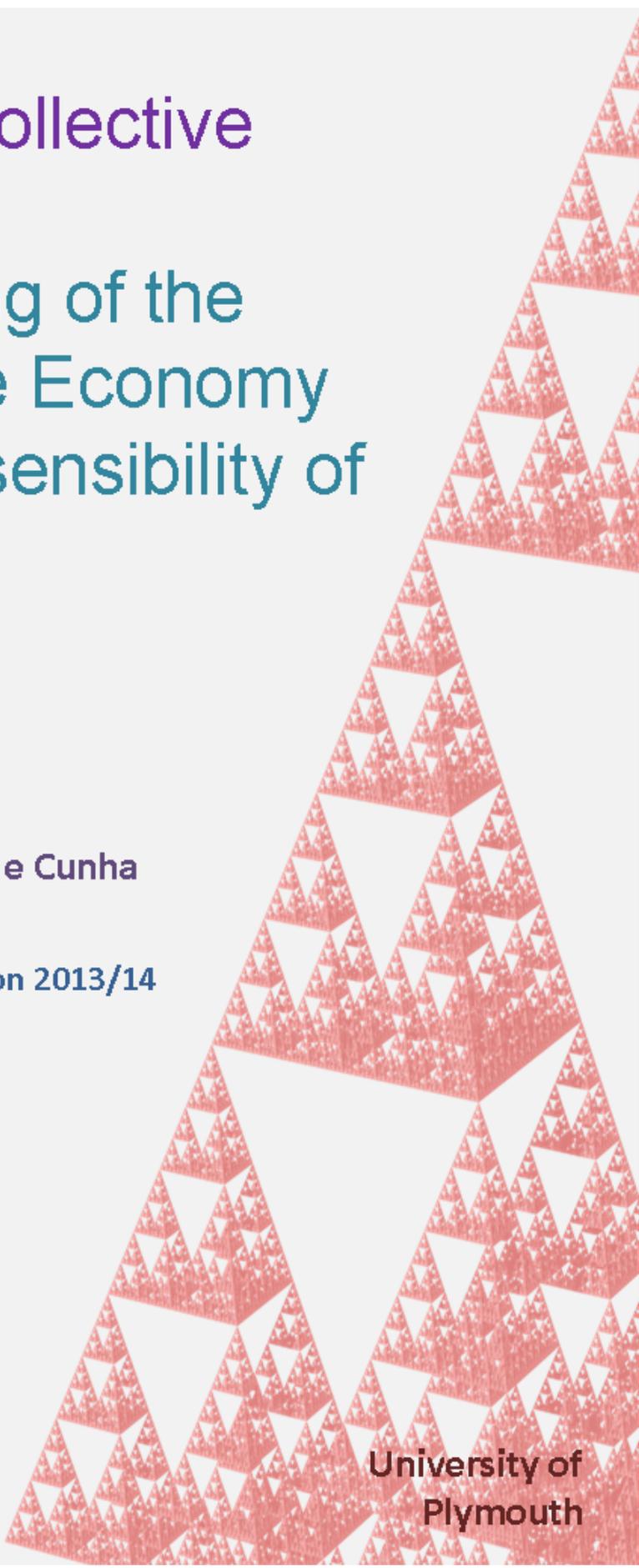
Dissertation  
MA Economics for Transition 2013/14

Supervisor:  
Jonathan Dawson

*Transformative Learning for Sustainable Living*

**Schumacher  
College**

**University of  
Plymouth**



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## **Abstract**

This dissertation has one main inquiry as its compass: in what degree the emergence of Collaborative Economy is catalysing a deep cultural reform towards the Common(s)? From this, a careful investigation opens the doors of this economic phenomenon through the cultural perspective. Therefore, whilst keeping the common(s) as the beacon of reference, this work is an attempt to explore Collaborative Economy's shadows and lights and how it is affected and is affecting people's values, beliefs and meanings.

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This journey at Schumacher College has been a very special moment of my life. I am grateful for each smile, each silence, each freshly homemade bread, each cookie with a lovely note, each conversation, each heart, each mind... I don't know anymore what I was expecting from this year, but I am sure that I couldn't imagine this. I am so grateful for all the confusions, insights, discoveries and renovations that Schumacher has inspired me. And all this could not happen without all the love and care we developed and received from the staff, teachers and volunteers. Thank you very much, I have never seen any institution like this before and it is truly a sky for transformation.

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Thanks LIFE!

# 1. Introduction

Dwelling on the following words will invite us - myself and you - to explore our curiosity and meet our reflection. I wish you to hold these words with openness and hope. My intention here is to become a harbour for my research into new possibilities for different life patterns and for you; it is about telling a different story, a different narrative, which we can tell together for the near future. Therefore, along the way, I have consciously received and accepted many voices about culture, Collaborative Economy, Common(s) and human relationship, which I have interpreted, analysed and now giving to the world. My hope is that you too – the reader - do the same with these next words: I hope some of them move you and help us to collaborate, enhancing the abundance of life and boosting new ideas and attitudes. I believe it is through togetherness that we will overcome many of the challenges we are facing nowadays. In fact, every individual on this planet is constantly sharing meanings, intentions, influences, ideas, values and creativity to become “WE”. I have learned to be aware that I am able to be here and now only through others. Indeed, this is what initially called my attention to develop this dissertation: each individual has a certain level of autonomy, but all living systems share a set of common properties and principles of organisation; some patterns that connect all of us in this intertwined network of life.

For a long time I was seeking what differentiates us, in order to understand singularities, but now, although I respect the particularities of each individual (or group), I have calibrated my lens for what we have in common and started to ask myself: what are the bonds that connect us?

So, as we will see in the following chapters, I have navigated through new scientific areas such as Complexity Thinking, Living Systems View, Enlivenment and Integral Theory, in order to adjust my lens' focus for a new understanding of life. To balance the current ego-centred and mechanistic worldview, these concepts have evolved from or with the ecological perspective which sees life based in a living fabric of relationships (or eco-systems).

Thus, through this lens we will reflect on the capacity of culture to echo meanings among people and embrace the rise of Collaborative Economy in the midst of a complex social transition being experienced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As Castells states, we are living “an emerging, alternative time, made of a hybrid between the now and the long now” (CASTELLS, 2012, p.223). I strongly believe we are living in fabulous times of significant rapid change, witnessing simultaneously the constant inherent potential that we can build a better future. So, I suggest you embrace the words of this paper towards rethinking the culture we enact every day.

“Community is a goal to achieve, but togetherness is the starting point and the source of empowerment” (CASTELLS, p.225). Starting from this idea, I have investigated the Collaborative Economy - its shadows and lights – from a cultural perspective, keeping the Commons as the beacon of reference.

Therefore I anchored this research in one main inquiry: **in what degree the emergence of Collaborative Economy is catalysing a deep cultural reform<sup>1</sup> towards the Common(s)?**

We will explore each one of these concepts’ meanings and find patterns to dance in this complexity, full of contradiction and paradoxes.

This inquiry is definitely not complete. With the time and space I have, this is where I am now. I strongly believe that this theme is in continuous progress in my life and this dissertation is just one shape that I found to study and reflect at this moment about how I want to work hereafter when I go back to Brazil.

## **Culture, Collaborative Economy and Commons**

Studying "culture" and “Collaborative Economy” as concepts is like being on shaky, unstable and slippery terrain. When I hold an idea that seems feasible, it escapes easily. It is very challenging trying to define it, but this doesn’t make the defiance less intriguing and interesting.

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Morin(2010) refers to a “thought reform” to explain that we need a profound change of values and beliefs, not just a simple deviation or revolution on the surface. According to him the challenge of all challenges is that the reform is non-programmatic but paradigmatic, concerning our ability to organize knowledge (MORIN, 2010, p.20) and I believe the term reform is inserted here to emphasize the restructuration or shift of the foundations from which we think and see life.

During this research I have found a tangle of epistemological attempts, but this is not what embraces my attention. My intention is not just to deliver definitions of the word “culture” (although, in the following chapters, I will present what it does mean for me), rather it is to have it as the magnifying glass to understand contemporary economic phenomena, particularly the "Collaborative Economy".

Probably this slippery characteristic is part of this phenomenon: sometimes I fall into denial of its connective profile due to the singularities of some unique examples: and sometimes it is so huge and evident (it is everywhere, every when) that I cannot embrace it. Thus, observing “culture” in its wholeness is a constant movement of contraction and expansion. I believe this is because this background of every social and psychical relationship – culture - is, indeed, full of paradoxes: it distinguishes and unites us at the same time; it is, simultaneously, the net weaver between people’s minds, values and behaviours and the essence of identity.

As Dan Hofer (in BOTSMAN, 2010, p. 178) stated, “the more we network and the more we understand each other, the better chance we have of this world being a better place”. We have a fabulous capacity to deal with our own problems when we discover ourselves as communities releasing inhibited and repressed potential for change and innovation.

Adam Smith’s idea that an individual pursuing his own self-interests promotes the good of society as a whole has been transformed into a race for individual benefit, consumer dependence, individualism and competitiveness. Today, virtually every aspect of our daily lives is connected in some way to commercial exchanges, letting the market define us. We have become slaves of the market system and the desire for “my new one”. Until now (basically) the “only” option to address our necessities is through purchasing of things and services, such as food, energy, care, health, etc. We depend exclusively on the monetary system, which is controlled by government and private banks. In order to survive in this system, we have become a mass of “workers” embedded in a collective imaginary of domination (the strongest survive), inequity, infinite growth and hyper-consumption, production and waste<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> “currently 80% of all products are one-way products and 99% of the material contents of goods will become waste within 6 weeks” (BOTSMAN, 2010, p.195).

Given that the word “economy” comes from the ancient Greek *oikos* (Eco) and *nomos* (-nomy), which means house management (or housekeeping), we are currently living a nightmare and acting as sleepwalkers. Moreover, this economic practice comes with severe environmental and social neglect, which brings a general, multiply faceted crisis in the world and a deep sense of alienation with the *self*, the other and the environment.

Amidst this chaotic “crisis of sense-making”<sup>3</sup> (WEBER, 2013, p.13) and the advance of the network society, new creative economic forms are emerging, among them the Collaborative Economy. According to Morin (2011, p.188), when a system is unable to solve its own vital problems, it disintegrates itself or, in its own disintegration, is able to metamorphose into a richer meta-system, able to deal with its problems. I like the idea of a cultural “metamorphosis”, like the caterpillar, which digests itself to create a new organism full of life: the butterfly. Every system has in itself forces of transformation and regeneration.

Usually we think on the necessity of political and economic power to overcome our problems but we forget of the power of common meanings in social networks to reach our goals. Collaboration has tremendous potential for gathering people and reinforcing local co-production and consumption shared in many different ways, with the potential to enhance community vitality and a certain freedom of the mainstream system.

Rachel Botsman (2013) defines Collaborative Economy as: “An economy built on distributed networks of connected individuals and communities versus centralized institutions, transforming how we can produce, consume, finance, and learn”. Collaborative Economy is challenging the way we see ownership, individual profit and collective capacity, and is showing an immense potential to shift our general intentions.

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<sup>3</sup> The way we see the world and hence deal with life is not making sense anymore. Our human operational system for basic needs, fulfilment and relationship is full of contradictions with devastating consequences as Andreas Weber brings in this remarkable paper: “Enlivenment: Towards a fundamental shift in the concepts of nature, culture and politics”. Our manufacturing production is bad for our own planet, our health system is based in profit, our food system is bad for us and nature, we have 85 people with the same amount of wealth as 3,5 billion and 19 million people suffering from depression (just!) in Europe. These are some examples of how our operational system is not making sense and is actually all fruit of a more subjective dimension: our mindset.

On the other hand, there is also a vernacular “system” used for centuries by many communities in the world to collectively manage common resources without the necessity of the middleman (i.e. governments and private sector): the Commons. This concept has been revisited lately by many vanguard thinkers and its contemporary version is emerging as the possibility to “provide benefits that corporations can’t provide such as healthy ecosystems, economic security, stronger communities and a participatory culture” (BOLLIER, in: WEBER, 2013, p.52).

### **Adjusting the focus on Collaborative Economy**

Although Collaborative Economy seems to have an important role in cultural change towards a more commons-based peer to peer culture, many shadows follow it.

I intend to open multiply faceted discussions here, with many divergent points of view in some particular grey areas around Collaborative Economy, like for example: lack of regulation and labour rights, profit-oriented initiatives and sustained social inequity.

It is important to be clear right away that Collaborative Economy has a wide variety of definitions, agents, intentions and initiatives which enrich the intrinsic plurality of this phenomenon while spreading the capacity of analysis. In addition, this concept is relatively young and far from maturity. Thus the attention in which this analysis takes place has to come from a different source, nourished by a complex thinking able to unpack each shadow. For the most part, critiques of Collaborative Economy come from a fragmented vision of the problem and deserve a closer look.

An anthropologist when observing an isolated culture faces an intense dilemma: while he/she is present in his/her own culture his/her interpretation is influenced by a set of established patterns, which creates an inability to understand certain things from this other culture. But when he/she decides to live in the field and be immersed in that strange culture in order to see it from a different viewpoint, his/her comprehension changes (indeed), however he/she cannot explain what he/she observed (and felt) based in his/her “original” patterns.

I feel as if something similar happens with Collaborative Economy and the Commons. We are trying to analyse it, but with the eyes of our current culture since we still are not able

to live fully this new economy. So while it is genuinely difficult to understand certain things, yet this dilemma demands marginal eyes for a transition in movement.

## 2. My Lens: unfolding a philosophical grounding

Firstly, I ask permission for a space of poetic licence.

Although I present this subject nourished with intense analytical view, I have taken the liberty of being an artist here as well. I believe that writing is an expression of creation and so it calls for art. In this way, we can read and appreciate the written word without an unnecessary and excessive seriousness, inviting us to stimulate our creativity whilst reading. A more poetic view can bring more aliveness in our reading, giving us scope for imagination and inspiration, instead of being passive “information consumers” – writing is not about delivering knowledge, rather it is the art of provoking knowing. This interplay is intrinsic and important to be cultivated. We have to carry both characteristics together to understand life; one is interdependent of the other: seriousness and playfulness, like art and science.

“Nietzsche once said that the highest goal would be *to view science from the viewpoint of an artist and art from the viewpoint of life*” (SCHARMER, 2009, p.108).

I thought it would be better if I start by tell you how I observe the world, with which references, on which basis my mind rests. I think every attempt to change life patterns needs a reform of foundations. These “lenses” that sit before my eyes now are really important to me and help me to adjust the way I interpret the world, hence this present inquiry as well.

“Economic thinking in the existing paradigm is not likely to generate sustainable solutions because it is reluctant to recognise any meaningful role for self-organised human purpose and meaning in socio-economical decision making. The purpose is always the same and always known in advance: unfettered economic growth. Therefore, even those who are desperately looking for change will typically overlook entirely feasible solutions and fail to catalyse systemic change because they are locked into a stunted worldview. Real solutions will

not emerge unless actors first reframe their vision in a different paradigm” (WEBER, 2013, p.47)

## A shift in knowledge

First of all, what is knowledge without partnership, information and generosity? There is no knowledge that pops up from nowhere, without the coexistence of multiple references and influences. What is the fundament of a caged knowledge? Isolated? All knowledge was born to be transmitted, not to die in ownership, thus it should be recognised as a collective endeavour – at least from the intersubjective dimension<sup>4</sup>. And when transmitted, what is the point of being unreadable, enclosed at its selfish sake or unfriendly to the other?

As Edgar Morin (2011, p. 42) proposes, it is necessary to overcome “pure rationality”. We need a dialogue between rationality and affection, where reason is mixed with affectivity and becomes an open rationality. It is also about a thinking on the “other”, bringing lightness and taking care of us.

According to him we need a complex rationality which faces contradictions and uncertainties without smothering or disintegrating. The only thing we know is that uncertainty is at the heart of reality, and we live in an ocean of uncertainty with islands and archipelagos of certainty (MORIN, 2011, p. 145).

All knowledge is complete with emptiness and openness. Without constant openness there is no space for autonomy, creation and innovation. In fact, emptiness enables fluidity for connections that emerge and also maintains the higher potential of every self. There are all the possibilities within nothing and all the music within each silence. Thus, the ability of being open to novelty is what will transform the relationship with ‘knowledge’; and possibly the relationship with ownership and freedom.

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<sup>4</sup> Intersubjectivity “conceptualizes the psychological relation between people. It is usually used in contrast to solipsistic individual experience, emphasizing our inherently social being” (...) “More subtly intersubjectivity can refer to the ‘common-sense’, shared meanings constructed by people in their interactions with each other and used as an everyday resource to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life”; (...) “is essential in the shaping of our ideas and relations” (in: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersubjectivity>).

“I am nothing.  
I shall always be nothing.  
I can only want to be nothing.  
From this, I have in me all the dreams in the world.”  
(Fernando Pessoa)

In order to tackle complex problems it is necessary embrace uncertainties and unpredictability, interdependencies and inter-retroactions<sup>5</sup> with discontinuities, non-linearities, imbalances, bifurcations and chaotic behaviour (MORIN, 2011, p.60). This is the basis of Complexity Thinking, which opens a possibility to accept that: the unknown is always present, we are a network of inseparable patterns of relationship, we should be open for novelty and every thought is liable to contradictions and mistakes.

Instead of keeping thinking that the universe is a collection of objects, it is important to shift to the understand that in fact is much more like an abundance of subjects in relationship and interaction, where objects are alive and in constant cooperation (or as Gregory Bateson affirms, every organism on the planet can be recognized as “mind”, with self-organisation, intention for life and awareness, permanently involved in communication). Therefore, we need a science with deeper intentions, including wisdom and awareness of a larger whole, i.e. a meaningful science open to different kinds of knowing and not ego-oriented ambitions (“science for the sake of science”).

### **“We are holons within holons”**

According to Ken Wilber (2000), everything in reality is a whole that is part of other wholes indefinitely, which he defines as “*holons*”. For example molecules are composed of atoms; cells are composed of molecules; organs are composed of cells; animals are composed of cells and organs; animals are part of the planet Earth; which is part of solar system; and so on for ever into infinity...

There are no parts; there are no wholes, only whole/parts or “*holons*”. Every whole is greater than the sum of its parts (the communion of parts itself is an essential factor) and

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<sup>5</sup> Interdependence we can understand as the idea that nothing is isolated and everything depends on each other to come into being; inter-retroaction refers to the idea that stimulation and its back effects are shared by many, which can also be understood as *feedback*. We live in constant communication.

the whole determines the function of its parts (and vice versa). From this reason every part depends on the whole and every whole depends on its parts, and they are connected by a certain context – which explains how one part can be different depending on its situation, or the whole of which it is part. For example: a word can have different meanings depending on the sentence.

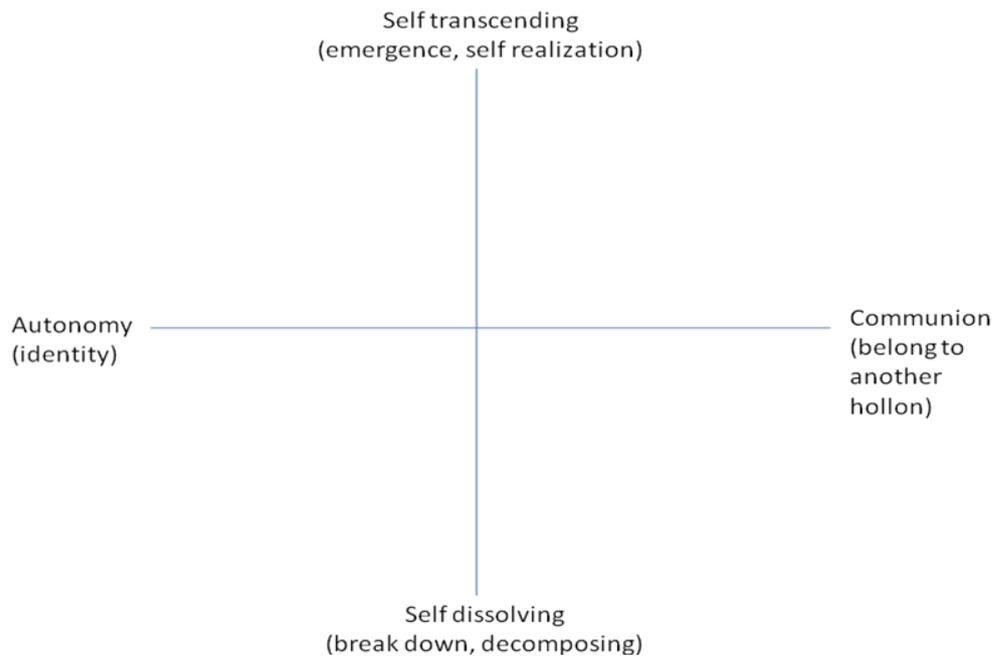
The philosopher of the Integral Theory also refers to the web of life consisting in 3 main intertwined domains, which every “*holon*” is subject to: *Physiosphere* (matter), *Biosphere* (life) and *Noosphere* (mind). In our journey we will be focused much more in the *Noosphere*.

According to the Integral theory each holon is inserted in a “hierarchical” order which he understands as “*holarchy*”. For Wilber hierarchies are not linear and are asymmetrical since they are composed of holons. In this sense holarchy is defined as: “sequential or stage-like unfolding of larger networks of increasing wholeness, with the larger or wider wholes being able to exert influence over the lower-order wholes” (WILBER, 2000, p.30).

So, above all “we are holons within holons”; “frameworks within frameworks”; and “context within contexts”.

Wilber (2000, p.43) presents in his book 20 tenets about the holons, from which I have extracted some that I believe are extremely relevant to this dissertation’s theme:

- a) Holons display four fundamental capacities: *self-preservation* (preserving their identity); *self-adaptation* (belonging to a communion); *self transcendence* (a capacity to transform into something novel and emergent – or evolution) and *self dissolution* (can breakdown and dissolve in the same vertical sequence that it built up).



**Figure 1: The Holon's four fundamental capacities**

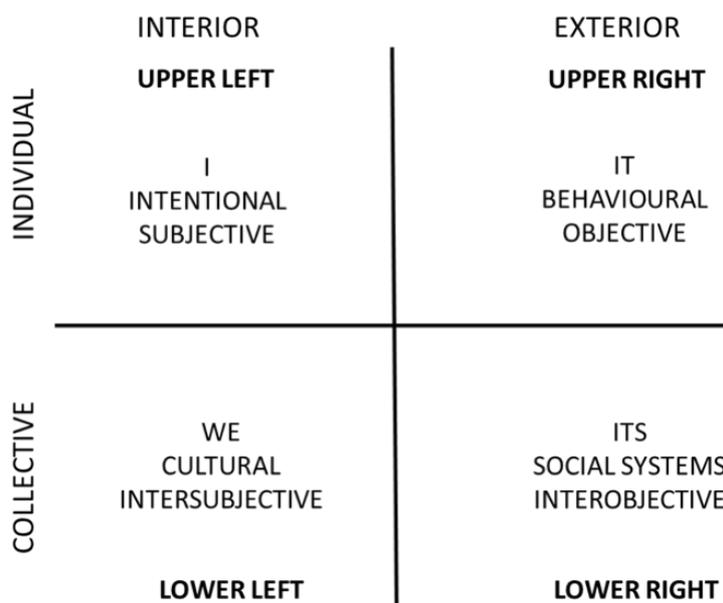
They are all integrated amongst each other, so every holon has these four capacities occurring simultaneously and all four live in constant tension between the edges of the respective axes. For example, too much agency (too much individuality) leads to a retaliation of communions and isolation, losing its capacity to survive (since holons are interdependent) and then dissolution. On the other hand, too much communion, means losing its integrity and dissolution as well.

I think this concept is really helpful as a background to study culture, commons, collaboration and social relationships. This balance between these edges is fundamental and we will see how in what follows. Our society has been governed by too much *agency*, and in the following chapters we will discuss this need for re-equilibrium.

b) Holons co-evolve. Every holon lives in interdependence with others and so they evolve together. There are no alone holons. Everything is linked by certain patterns of essential connections for life, which at the same time define its own individuality. Although these patterns are inseparable from each holon, its unique pattern makes its singular form.

c) Evolution has directionality: *increasing complexity and organisation/structuration* (always unfolds for a more complex type of system and higher level of organisation); *increasing differentiation/integration* (evolution requires both together – i.e. differentiation increases diversity and creativity, where holons are able to realise their identity; and integration creates oneness and connections); *increasing relative autonomy*<sup>6</sup> (this refers to a certain flexibility in the face of changing environmental conditions)

Another relevant concept developed by Wilber to understand life and its complexity is the four sequences of holism, or the four perspectives of a holon, or the four facets of a holon, or as he calls it: “the four quadrants” illustrated in the figure bellow.



**Figure 2: the four quadrants of holons**

In these quadrants Wilber represents a matrix of four dimensions of the holon, organizing them in individual (subjective) and collective (social and communal); and exterior (how they look like from outside) and the interior (how they look like from within).

Although all of them exist in integration with each other, I will focus more in the lower-half during this dissertation. My intention is not to explore Integral Theory here - for lack

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<sup>6</sup> “Autonomy of every holon “is subjected to larger forces and systems of which it is merely a component” – its environment, context, surroundings - (...), which is subjecting it to “host of limiting circumstances and conditions that can alter its expression” (WILBER, 2000, p.79)

of space – but to have it as significant background to my inquiry and to be part of a reframing of vision.

## Enlivenment

Following this road of new narratives for science, thinking and knowledge, Andreas Weber published a remarkable contribution in 2013. In his piece “Enlivenment: Towards a fundamental shift in the concepts of nature, culture and politics”, Weber proposed a shift in our basic science from the perpetuation of enlightenment to an ‘Enlivenment’ thinking. Quoting Weber (2013): “In a first approach, (enlivenment) means getting things, people and oneself to live again – to be more full of life, to become more alive”. It doesn’t exclude analytical rationality, but can “connect them with other modes of being, such as our psychological and metabolic relationships with the ‘more-than-human’ world, in both its animated and non-animated aspects” (WEBER, 2013). It is a proposed bridge between rationality, subjectivity and sensibility.

Enlivenment is contrary to Cartesian-Newtonian-Darwinist based science which is rooted in a rational and mechanistic view of life – a fragmented worldview separating matter from mind and the “more-than-human” dimension. It shifts the so-called Darwinist idea that living beings are battling against each other for their survival to, in fact, life as a complex interplay of individuals with conflicting and symbiotic<sup>7</sup> goals and meanings.

Weber brings a very interesting insight that arose from a more ecological approach, recognizing the mutual support of all beings in the Planet – the principle of *Interbeing*: “The individual is able to realise itself only if the whole can realise itself. (...) The deeper the connections in the system, the more creative niches it will afford for its individual members” (WEBER, 2013, p. 37). According to this principle, embodied selves come into being only through others. Freedom or autonomy is viable only when related to the whole; it requires constant negotiation with necessity: feasible only when allying individual intention and needs with the larger community – which requires both limits and continuous connection. For instance, I can’t ‘take’ too much from my environment when there is a risk of compromising others and the environment, upon which life

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<sup>7</sup> Symbiosis is essential to life’s support: it is a set of mutualistic and persistent interactions between beings.

depends. But at the same time my personality influences (and is influenced by) my environment. In the end I have a capacity of being autonomous inside certain conditions required for the maintenance of life and every organism is an expression of these conditions of existence. In this sense it is always “freedom-in-and-through-relation” (WEBER, 2013, p. 41).

On the other hand, the Chileans Maturana and Varela (1980) introduced the concept of “*autopoiesis*”, which implies that an organism is able to develop its own organisation autonomously – it means literally self(auto)-creation(*poesis*). However, they also state that this autonomy is the ability to interpret constant external influences integrated with the organisation of its internal parts.

An individual transparently expresses the conditions in which life takes place. Every human being (as every organism) is an expression of the conditions of existence, a materialisation (in the self) of the natural and cultural environment with his/her own interpretation, intention and meanings.

In contrast to an “objective” reason, Weber’s “*poetic objectivity*” complements the exterior analysis with a more subjective first-person perspective. It refers to how we can respect more what we feel and experience and acknowledge that knowing is produced from within – this means, a cell, me, you, a group, a community.

### **[Moment for reflection]**

Now... that we are wearing different lenses to observe life and ready for uncertainties, let us navigate along these new roads of Collaborative Economy. After this point we both (I and you) will start to take part in the creation of it. My ideas, nurtured by others, together with your autonomous interpretation of each page will give life to possibilities for new patterns in economic thinking. Feel free to use it, criticise it and transform it. Knowledge should be open and shared.

Take this time to breathe and reflect a little bit on the previous pages. They are important to keep in our pocket as we go and not so easy to digest.

On the following pages I will present the methodology, some important definitions (culture, Common(s) and Collaborative Economy), some results of interviews with

Collaborative Economy doers and critics of Collaborative Economy and finally, analysis of all of this. I hope you enjoy.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Typing the first letters on the blank screen of this computer revealed to me an incredible sense of belonging and relationship and an unexpected excitement that I feel from doing my research. It was very surprising to feel this quality of emotion in the instant that I opened the new, completely blank Word file. When I faced it, some kind of silence mixed with a sense of slow motion took hold of me, (like that silence before an explosion), inviting me to finally embrace the opportunity to exhale the potential energy incubated in the last months of research and discoveries. I felt as if I reached, in this exact moment, the state of “*presencing*” – which we will explore below - that I was continuously asking myself when, where and how it would emerge for me. This feeling was so powerful that it drove me to start everything from writing about the methodology chosen to navigate this piece. This also reveals that the core of the theory which my methodology is based on (Theory U from Otto Scharmer), “learning from the future as it emerges”, led me to start differently from how I was planning before; in that exact moment I was preparing myself to write the first lines of the Introduction, but something inside me presented a different pathway and invited me to not follow just a rational, linear process.

After coming across Theory U a few times during my journey in this Masters, I decided to explore it and use it as the foundation of this dissertation’s methodology.

This theory, developed by Otto Scharmer and the Presencing Institute (at MIT), is based on how we can shift our thinking structure and source of intention and attention from our deepest Self. This theory can be used in many different ways and I understand it as a ‘trellis’, or a framework, to deal with deep learning and transformational changing processes (from personal to collective and organizational dimensions). Far from a closed ‘step by step’ methodology, Theory U is based in Integral Thinking, phenomenology, dialogue and collaborative action research, so it avoids a linear method and instead has a number of principles.

The U shape (see figure 3) comes from the idea of a dip for reflection, instead of downloading past results and straight away performing a solution. In this case, I believe

that Theory U can be perfectly used both in individual journeys and cross-sector (multiple-stakeholder) actions.

Basically, it comes from the understanding that we need to open our mind, open our heart and open our will to “sensing and operate from one’s highest future potential” (SCHARMER, 2009, p.29).

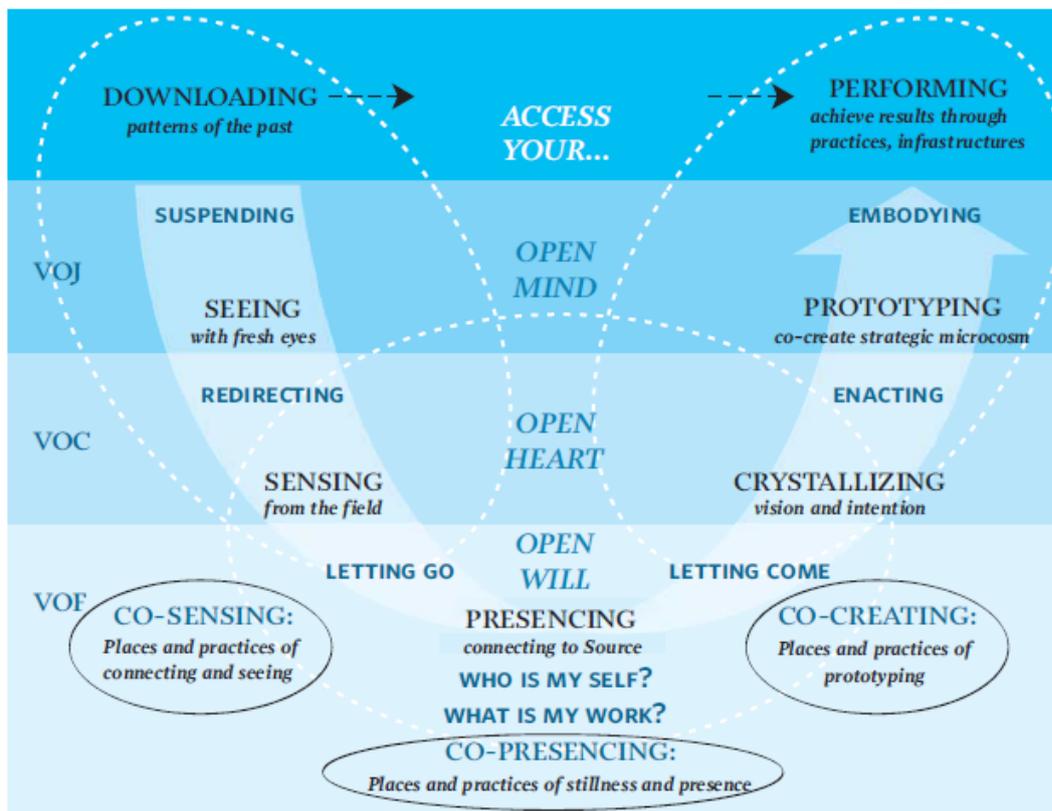


Figura 3: Theory U model

According to this theory, “letting go” is the first step at the *presencing* stage. To get there it is necessary to suspend *judgments* embedded in old patterns and to *redirect* the attention from the object and so feel included in the process; and to empathize - thus not acting with cynical distancing of the self from the situation. It is necessary to constantly open your mind to new ideas that can come up without being convicted of a certain truth.

*Presencing* (presence + sensing) is about re-generating purpose, it means reconnecting with the deepest source of knowing, allowing the appearance of the future as it emerges through me; to put mind, heart and hands to work together using a variety of cognitive process like intuition, sensibility and knowledge. So going up the U is a process of *letting come* with the new intention, envisioning (*crystallizing*), acting spontaneously

(*prototyping/embodiment*) and then *performing* the new in practice. It is almost as in an instant of realization. After meeting our inner knowing (deepest source), we are instantly open for novelty and act from a different source.

In my case, I decided to start my dissertation with a long “Deep Listening” phase (which includes seeing and sensing) followed by an inner silence and a “Creating” process.

The Deep Listening was the time I dedicated to opening my ears, my eyes, my mind and my heart for this dissertation’s theme. I started focusing on understanding my own deep intentions with the chosen subject and digging towards my main inquiry, which is: “in what degree the emergence of Collaborative Economy is catalyzing a deep cultural reform towards the common(s)?”. The second phase was dedicated to listening to other people, in regard to who is close and distant from me. Therefore, I spent a long time delving into a literature review (which is my fundamental basis) and doing a series of interviews with people that I know directly or indirectly (i.e., maximum one level of indication). These interviews were based on the method Dialogue Interviews, from the Presencing Institute, which are intended “to create a generative conversation that allows for reflection, thinking together and some sparks of collective creativity to happen” (<https://www.presencing.com/tools/dialogue-interviews>).

These interviews were conducted in a semi-open system, for which I had previously prepared questions but did not necessarily use all of them or follow a pre-determined order. Each conversation flowed at its own pace, according to the interviewee’s rhythm – letting them open themselves to reach sensitive answers and the unfolding dynamic. I meditated or stayed in silence for 15-30 minutes before each interview in order to begin it with open mind and heart, connecting with subtle levels of conscience.

Both literature review and deep dialogue will be explored further in the following specific sections.

During this process of Deep Listening I allowed myself to create analysis and track thoughts emerging from this openness, posting notes physically on an empty wall, in a few notebooks and, also, in digital documents.

After this phase of Deep Listening and a few days of “creative silence” - connecting with myself by meditating, being in nature and with friends, I started to write (*creating* and *performing* this dissertation) and in an unexpected way I felt truly connected and moved instants before writing the first lines. I believe I achieved the *presencing* moment – unintentionally - when I faced the white “empty” screen of my computer. In that moment I felt in mind and body that I was about to start something important to me, finally bringing aliveness to this entire mental endeavour.

Therefore, I looked through this prism from different angles – from literature review, listening to other people involved with the subject and my own personal experiences. I.e. first, second and third person inquiry.

The whole process generated constant excitement and helped me to keep in an energetic flow and at the same time feel really present with it; i.e. being open to the unknown that could unfold, allowing emergent creativity and developing constant self-awareness. I believe it also helped me to think about my life in a different way for the near future.

## 4. Deep Listening

Inspired by Theory U methodology - adapted to this work, I started my research opening myself to my own questions, my burning inquiries and my curiosities. From this beginning I realised that first of all I had to listen!

Assuming there are many different ways of listening in a broader perspective (with your ears, intuitions, dreams, thoughts, etc), I chose the most possible and feasible alternatives that appeared for me. In a not necessarily linear way, this journey of *listening* took me from an outer to inner dimensions, as I will present. I called this process "*Deep Listening*".

Therefore, this process consists in three main formats: a literature review – listening from a 3<sup>rd</sup> person inquiry; *Deep Dialogue* – listening from a 2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry through conversations/interviews with Collaborative Economy doers; and personal experiences - listening from a 1<sup>st</sup> person inquiry.

The Deep Listening chapter is divided into three main sections: "important definitions", "deep dialogue" and "exploring the shadows". I also separated the personal experience into a different chapter.

### 4.1 Important definitions: taking the boat to the sea

Before we continue it is important to define some starting points. There are three main subjects in this dissertation - Culture, Commons and Collaborative Economy – that we will explore along the way. Thus, is important to build a common ground of what they mean.

After a long process of literature review of the main topics and organising its borders I came up with some results that represent the current stage of my research. I am aware that these definitions are dynamic and change over time (nowadays even faster) and that they have a variety of viewpoints. However, my intention with this chapter is not so much an epistemological battle as an attempt to demonstrate what I understand about them.

### 4.1.1 What is culture?

In recent years I have kept asking myself, what is behind human relationships? What make us think something? Desire something? Dislike others? And what make us so similar in so many ways (for example, jeans, t-shirts, rock 'n'roll and personal computers are almost everywhere in the world)? How come these kinds of things exist in such different places? I also realised how much we change when we are in different cultures, living in different systems. For example, after I came to England I could observe certain patterns of my life that I couldn't see when I was in my "original" culture. So, what does this "we" make with us?

I think these questions are very similar with Otto Scharmer's (2009, p.103) ontological questions:

- "What is the source of our collectively enacted social structures and processes?"
- "Who is becoming present and acting through us when we engage in deep social or collective process?"

Therefore, as we saw in the last chapter with Ken Wilber's "four quadrants", now we will discuss about the lower-left quadrant. This means investigating collective process happening in the interior dimension, i.e.: "shared interior meanings that constitute the worldview (or common worldspace) of collective or communal holons" (WILBER, 2000, p.131). It is important to clarify the difference between social systems and culture, where the first one refers to empirical, exterior and observable patterns in a society, while the second is more about intersubjective beliefs, values, attitudes and feelings. According to him culture, in contrast, provides common contexts, common meanings and shared depth. However, these two dimensions (even though we are separating here) "are in intimate interaction and correlation". For example, I can observe an indigenous tribe and its behaviour system, but I might not be able to understand what a certain ritual *means* for them – what they feel, believe and see about it.

One thing that is incredible to think about is that there are no individual thoughts. Everything we imagine is part of shared meanings, collective symbolic systems and memory of other previous references. All this individual thinking is, in fact, fruit of a collective

network that influences us constantly and also limits our possibilities (although we have a permanent capacity of creation). In this case, “I believe” this is a brilliant contribution from Ken Wilber, so I quote him again to help us:

“Thoughts arise in a *cultural background* that gives texture and meaning and context to my individual thoughts, (...) so, the cultural community serves as an *intrinsic background* to any individual thought. (...) I could never have developed thoughts in the first place without it”. (WILBER, 1996, p.81).

According to Manuel Castells (2012) and Niklas Luhmann (1990) the basic process of sharing meaning comes into being only through “*networks of communication*”, in which social life allows for exchange of information. Luhmann defines networks of communications as *social autopoiesis* where each communication creates new meanings, which means that it is constructed by a network of feedback loops amongst its peers and, therefore, is self-regulated, self-organised and self-generated by its own patterns of interaction.

On the other hand, although culture is in the world of intersubjectivity, it differs from other human characteristics such as psyche or soul because it is shared in the concrete world of actions where it is also materialized: behaviours, technology, forces of production, institutions, art, written codes, language, and so on.

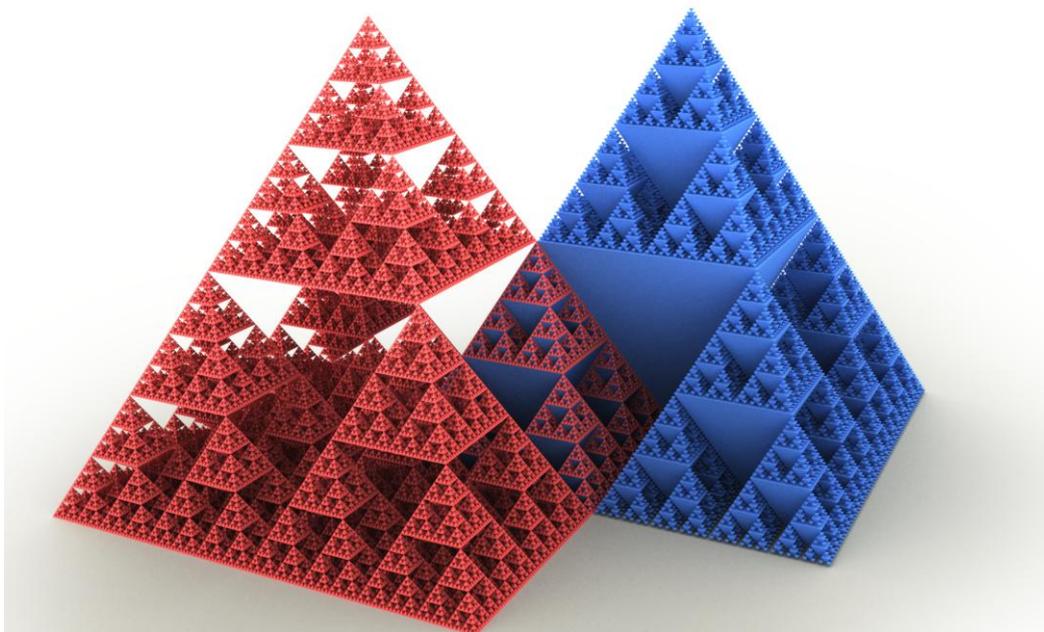
Culture is full of paradoxes, so that it behaves like an entity created by men and at the same time creates men; it comes from freedom and restricts it; it connects and distinguishes; it is global and local; it is wide and diverse.

“The special character of life is understood by means of meanings, values, purposes and ideals. (...) meaning is the comprehensive category through which life becomes understandable” (BAUMAN, 1999, p.220)

According to Zygmunt Bauman in his book “*Ensaio sobre o conceito de cultura*” (in English, “Culture as praxis”), culture persists only by its own and continual change, since every communication brings novelty and evolution in a living process – creativity and innovation are extremely important and essential for cultural

development. For this reason he presents the idea of culture as a *dynamic force*, i.e. in constant movement and change. In definition, culture can be seen as a “*matrix of possible permutations*” (by Levi-Strauss, in: BAUMAN, 1999, p.41), denying the existence of a cultural structure. In this sense, culture is a collective social construction (a complex, slow process) of a possible network of elements and each process is an evolution of probable events, with no fixed order. In this dance a vast number of possible fittings can happen in continuous new orders, recreating culture in motion.

We can see culture from different angles, each one changing what we are observing, shifting our perception of the same phenomenon, like the “Sierpinski’s Pyramid” (figure 4). This figure also demonstrates how we can see cultures inside cultures indefinitely, and each part containing the same patterns as the whole and also that “the whole (pyramids) is more than the sum of its parts (triangles)” (Aristotle). It is a beautiful representation of these complex connections.



**Figure 4: a pyramid base on Sierpinski triangle. (source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierpinski\\_triangle#Towers\\_of\\_Hanoi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierpinski_triangle#Towers_of_Hanoi))**

Culture is so dynamic and fractal<sup>8</sup> that it is hard to conceive its definition. Wojciech Burszta, for instance, talking about “cultures in movement” (in: BAUMAN, 1999, p. 76)

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<sup>8</sup> Like the Sierpinski triangle “A fractal is a natural phenomenon or a mathematical set that exhibits a repeating pattern that displays at every scale. (...) Fractals can also be nearly the same at different levels.

even suggests abandoning the “idea” of culture. Its probabilities of coexistence and randomness are so vast that, for him, “culture” cannot exist as such.

However I believe Burszta and Levi-Strauss could be hiding in their concepts some (self-generated) patterns of organisation that exist. Since culture is developed by exchange of meanings and values, some order occurs between people, to make sense as communality (otherwise there is no culture). Culture is created by creativity and norms (another paradox), i.e. it depends on order/norms to exist (created by its own agents, from symbolic and, sometimes, formal rules) but at the same time disorder is essential for creativity, and this is it how evolves – through order and disorder, pattern and chaos, preservation and innovation.

### **Transition: today and tomorrow**

On the one hand, cultural order needs a certain understanding of inclusion and exclusion; boundaries of what are in and out. Thus, there are some norms of patterns that define a culture’s characteristics (although dynamic, in movement, and fractal) and then give shape to it.

On other hand, the idea of culture as a system (thus, with boundaries) is becoming meaningless nowadays since we are witnessing an age of “porous borders” (BAUMAN, 1999, p.37) boosted by new media’s mediums – accelerating information travel and shortening distances. The idea of culture as practices, happening and being managed in ordered spaces (locally), is dissolving. Now, we live in a context where the “in” and “out” of cultures are vulnerable (fragile), where distance is minimised, and the connections between elements are configuring an “open system” (or “more open”), almost global as Morin suggested (2011, p.66).

According to Castells (2012, p.6) “there is one feature in common to all process of symbolic construction: they are largely dependent on the messages and frames created, formatted and difused in multimedia communication networks”. And he continues, “although each individual human mind constructs its own meaning by interpreting the

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(...) Fractals also include the idea of a detailed pattern that repeats itself” (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fractal>). A fractal contains patterns that unfolds in other forms continually.

communicate materials on its own terms, this mental process is conditioned by the communication environment". So, when this communication environment changes, the way that patterns of meanings (therefore relationships) are constructed transform as well.

Therefore, when we started to develop "*mass self communication*" systems (CASTELLS, 2012, p.6) – such as Internet, mobile devices and wireless –, our culture entered on another pathway, boosting interaction more than ever before seen. In this sense, *mass* means messages from many to many with a multiplicity of receivers and connecting endless networks. And *Self* is the idea of autonomous decisions by the sender, being self-directed and self-selected.

Castells (2012, p.230) believes that the "culture of autonomy"<sup>9</sup> is "the fundamental cultural matrix of contemporary societies", and this empowerment actually "appears closely connected to the practice of frequent networking of the Internet" (CASTELLS, 2012, p.233). These new forms of media would bring more capacity to access networks of communication; hence access to the principle resources of creation of meaning. If this is true, the Internet could be an essential membrane to (non-intentionally) stimulate the creation of a new social contract by its own metamorphosis.

However, whereas the Internet and other vehicles for high-speed communication facilitate and catalyse the network society (with more autonomy, freedom, access, etc), they dissolve "local intimacy" – the near order – of communities. Information is so fast, cheap and disposable that local bonds are getting weaker as also its capacity to retain information.

On the other hand, as Bauman states (BAUMAN, 1999, p.20), actually, autonomy is correlated to vulnerability and fragility and it demands less solid formation. It is not about being strong; rather it is about being open.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Castells (2012, p. 231) autonomy "refers to the capacity of a social actor to become a subject by defining its actions around projects constructed independently of the institutions of society, according to values and interest of the social actor".

Yorchai Benkler (2006, p.6), in his turn, says about autonomy: “(...) at a minimum we can say that individuals are less susceptible to manipulation by a legally defined class of others-the owners of communications infrastructure and media”.

In short, I see culture as the weaver of social fabric, existing through the co-creation by multiple actors in time and space of meanings, values, beliefs, worldviews, desires, behaviour patterns, truths and norms of conduct.

### 4.1.2 The Common(s)

“This “we” that we are, is not what we produce in common, it’s not what we create and organize as common, but it is that which allows us to exist” (NEGRI and REVEL, 2008)

The usual way we hear about “the commons” is in Garrett Hardin’s piece “The Tragedy of the Commons”<sup>10</sup>, from 1968. His essay is very well known and widely used to portray that when multiple individuals - acting independently and oriented by self-interest – share resources, then inevitably, it gets over-exploited and destroyed. The basic idea is that always someone greedier will ruin the entire collective harmony of resources used in common.

However Hardin limited himself to one single scenario and hence made some misguided assumptions. First of all, he assumed that people are not able to talk and resolve their conflicts or/and trust each other. Second, he postulated that people act only in immediate and rational self-interest. Thirdly, he was discussing about completely open access rather than a managed commons. He also claimed that people always want to maximize profits; however, this “greedy” behaviour may actually have begun after the creation of property during the “enclosures”<sup>11</sup> process, which destroyed the community

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<sup>10</sup> Available at: <http://cecs.wright.edu/~swang/cs409/Hardin.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “In English social and economic history, enclosure (established around the 16<sup>th</sup> century) is the process which ends traditional rights such as mowing meadows for hay, or grazing livestock on common land formerly held in the open field system. Once enclosed, these uses of the land become restricted to the owner, and it ceases to be land for commons” (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclosure>). This model

spirit of sharing resources. Finally, he also offered only two solutions: privatisation (the creation of property) or regulation (by the State and regulatory bodies).

According to Antonio Negri (NEGRI and REVEL, 2008), “*property*” began when an individual appropriated something from the commons (for example, a piece of land) and said “this is mine”, expropriating it from all others. From this point, the idea of ownership establishes an unequal struggle between those who have control and those who have not.

“The question of modern democracy: since private property generates inequality, is how to invent a political system where everything, belonging to everyone, nevertheless belongs to no one?” (NEGRI and REVEL, 2008).

In the second solution, the State takes ownership from what belongs to everyone but to no one, by use of political representation, delegation, force, regulation, legislation and management, i.e. there is creation of “*public resources*”. Hence there is a contradiction: these resources that “belong to no one”, actually belong to the State.

On the other hand, private appropriation is often guaranteed and legitimated by public appropriation and vice-versa.

Elinor Ostrom<sup>12</sup> once said the dualistic vision of “The Market” and “The State” is a very limited thought. The best idea, in her opinion, is allow diversity and to enable it to flourish through people’s self governance; in fact, people can address their own issues by themselves. In the concept of the commons there is no need for a middleman (public or private) for people to manage their resources and conflicts. In Elinor Ostrom’s masterpiece, “Governing the Commons”, she offers a few examples of how and why the commons works well in some situations and not in others. Unfortunately I don’t have time and space enough here to explore these examples, so this book is a great resource.

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of private property (by enclosures) endures until today and underlines the local community autonomy, becoming a disempower of local people.

<sup>12</sup> The first economist women to receive a Nobel Prize.

## The commons

The concept of the commons doesn't refer only to resources; the commons are resources plus a community plus that community's particular rules and norms for managing resources. According to David Bollier (2013), "the commons is mostly about building working systems for meeting everyday needs outside of the market and state", where it is collectively oriented by some core values: participation, inclusiveness, fairness, bottom-up control, community-based innovation, accountability. In this system, flat, decentralised and distributed power more horizontally is a form of addressing groups' issues directly. Thus, this format enables less dependence (or even none) on hierarchical private institutions, controlled by an elite minority, or a benevolent government. This way everyone has control and no one has control at the same time; all communalities are decided in the group, practised and solved by the group.

Traditionally, the commons is a general term that refers to resources *shared* and *governed* by a group of people - small group, community-level, global level, well-bounded, transboundary or without clear boundaries - subjected to particular social dilemmas (OSTROM and HESS 2006, p.5) that they have to address together and not through a central power. According to Rifkin (2014, p.16), this democratically managed pool of resources, used and managed collectively, inevitably requires decisions, sanctions, punishment, norms and protocols evolve into governing codes.

Or as Ostrom (2006, p.6) states, the self-organised commons requires strong collective action – voluntary efforts of 2 or more individuals with the same objective – combined with self-governing mechanisms – mutual and open consistent arrangements and supporting -, as well as a high degree of social capital<sup>13</sup> on the part of stakeholders.

In the beginning "the commons" was understood as physical resources – like for example, land, water, atmosphere, forest, streets, squares, tools, goods, etc -, but more and more other less tangible things have been added as commons as well, like knowledge, language, money, information, child care, care of the elderly, etc.

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<sup>13</sup> Social capital refers to the aggregate value of social networks (i.e. who you know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks for people to do things for each other (i.e. norms of reciprocity).

We also can see the commons through the lens of Ivan Illich and define it as the more sensitive and sensible space where people create and negotiate their own sense of things, “governed” in a more informal way – as Illich liked to say, the “vernacular domain”.

## Commoning

“I use the word (commoning) because I want a verb for the commons”

*Peter Linebaugh,*

(the first one to describe “commoning”)

I understand *commoning* as the everyday practice of managing a commons. This means that we (commoners) will all take care of one another and try to understand together that ownership is not an individual thing. Actually, it is about enacting a different story with real shared responsibilities for everything we have in common, unleashing the command of the Government or private sector in every corner of our life.

The concept of commoning also brings up the ideas contained in “Enlivenment”, for instance, when Weber talks about individual freedom and autonomy being completely correlated with the community’s freedom and autonomy, which we explored in previous chapters. For example:

“To organise a community between humans and/or non-human agents according to the principle of the commons means to increase individual freedom by enlarging the community’s freedom. Both expand together – and mutually through one another” (WEBER, 2013, p.40).

In fact, Andreas Weber is referring to a “Commons-based Economy” (WEBER, 2013, p.42) as the Enlivenment economy (or enlivened economy). He compares the commoning with the “natural commoning” systems (ecological patterns of nature’s “governance”), which in his opinion enact the same elements, such as *interbeing*, material resources linked to meaning and sense, reciprocity, no waste – resources trade as gifts to the other, decentralisation and no ownership.

Weber triggers the idea of a different relational understanding amongst us, based in mutual respect and more entanglement with life. “Unlike market economics, commoning is not only about producing and distributing resources, but about constructing meaningful relationships to a place, to the earth and to one another” (WEBER, 2013, p.47). The commons therefore is not only a name for an economic or ecological regime, but also a political way of re-organising relationships with all of life’s dimensions.

## Common( )

Although Antonio Negri draws positively on the Commons concept, he believes we need a review of “the commons” paradigm. Thus he uses *common* (without the S!) because “The Commons” refers to pre-capitalist shared spaces that were lost with the advent of private property. Therefore, *common* is not about a return to the past but a new development.

Common is a process and “we are this common: making, producing, participating, moving, sharing, circulating, enriching, inventing, restarting” (NEGRI and REVEL, 2008).

For him, the management of the common “no longer consists in defining a form of contract that makes it so that everything, belonging to all, nevertheless belongs to no one. No: everything, being produced by everyone, belongs to everyone” (NEGRI and REVEL, 2008). By production they understand a broader social production - not just economic – which involves production of material goods and also the production of communications, relationships, and forms of life – or the production of meanings and subjectivity, i.e. production of culture.

This is what the contemporary common by Negri and Hardt, is about: encounters of singularities in all sort of networks producing new forms of common and democratising political<sup>14</sup> participation.

The common in a broader way doesn’t belong to anyone, since we don’t really create it: the common is our earth, our fundament, it’s what we have under our feet: our nature, our identity; common doesn’t truly belong to us – to be is not to have (Hardt and Negri, 2009).

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<sup>14</sup> Understanding here the politics (with lowercase p), which means the everyday politics of relationships, voices and actions. Politics (with uppercase P) is the politics designated to the State.

In this context, Hardt and Negri (2009, p.306-311) develop a dialectical concept of reformist revolution in order to manifest the autonomy of the multitude<sup>15</sup> and to create a common-based society. The following claims can be outlined:

- Physical infrastructure: clean drinking water, basic life factors, sanitary conditions, electricity, access to affordable food, and other necessities to support life;
- Social and intellectual infrastructure: linguistic tools, affective tools for constructing relationships, tools for thinking;
- Physical layer: including access to wired and wireless communication networks such as the Internet;
- Open logical layer: for instance, open source, open codes and protocols;
- Open content layer: such as cultural, intellectual, and scientific works;
- Open scientific research;
- Funds to meet the technological requirements of advanced research: not located in for-profit organisations;
- Immaterial infrastructure: freedom of movement, freedom to migrate, freedom to stay in one place, freedom of space;
- Minimum guaranteed income on a national or global scale paid to everyone regardless of work;
- Basic minimum of life;
- Autonomy, freedom and control over time;
- Power to construct social relationships and create autonomous social institutions;

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<sup>15</sup> The multitude is a key concept in Negri's work by which he understands expression of the powerful movement of multiple singularities towards the construction of the Common. It is composed of multiple and innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity; different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labour; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. And In the multitude, social differences remain different.

- Participatory democracy at all levels of government to allow the multitude to learn social cooperation;
- Self-rule.

Like Negri and Hardt, Jeremy Rifkin also raises the importance of the Internet to leverage lateral peer production, universal access and social inclusion. According to him, the Internet “brought up the commons out of the shadows” and “is the technological “soul mate” of an emerging Collaborative Commons” (RIFKIN, 2014, p.18).

### [Moment of reflection]

But all of this (the common(s)), I would say, has to come from the collectively deep perception of what do we have in common and if we are still wearing our new lenses from the previous chapter (the one that I provoke and you created) we can see how far this possibly goes.

So let’s add the common(s) (as you wish) into our pocket and continue our journey...

From now on I will maintain the differentiation of “the commons” and “common”, but I believe that I will resonate more with the “common”.

### **4.1.3. So, what is Collaborative Economy?**

“I often go back to the first Post-It note I put on my wall a few years ago when I was trying to figure out the core meaning of this new economy. It has one word on it: humanness” (BOTSMAN, 2013).

In fact, the Internet is boosting a different way interacting, accessing and making available an immense amount of “multiple everything’s”. The Internet and other technologies (for example, wireless networks and smartphones) are enabling direct and vast communication in so many different ways and directions that it is changing the way we relate with each other and hence the way we do economy.

Jeremy Rifkin is one of the foremost leaders of what he called a Third Revolution thinking and the Internet of Things (IoT), based on the Internet and a networked renewable 'energy internet' – distributed local energy production connected by a smart grid. In this sense, he believes that the Internet is the major progressing innovation of our times increasing efficiency of exchange (of everything, from knowledge to energy), lower ecological impact production (for example, the reduced necessity of manufacturing certain things like books), highly intelligent management (by multiple connections in computer-based programming) and also collaboration. According to him, with this capacity for “hyperconnectivity” (by internet and in the near future nourished by sensors, smart software and digital Big Data<sup>16</sup>) we will get really close to “zero marginal costs” in the entire economy – some very simple examples: renting a spare room in my house brings me near zero cost; producing renewable energy on my house’s roof hardly increases cost.

However, right now we are embedded in a transition process, of which Collaborative Economy is one of the most promising stakes. In my opinion (and this is how I am using it for this work) Collaborative Economy is the “umbrella” term for multiple terms from the same family, such as Sharing Economy<sup>17</sup>, Collaborative Consumption<sup>18</sup> and Peer Economy<sup>19</sup>.

According to Rachel Botsman, Collaborative Economy is: “An economy built on distributed networks of connected individuals and communities versus centralized institutions,

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<sup>16</sup> The Big Data is a “cloudy” shared data base network of all information that is instantly feeding this “intelligence system”, which will be analyzed with advanced analytics, transformed into predictive algorithms, and programmed into automated systems, to improve thermodynamic efficiencies, dramatically increase productivity, and reduce the marginal cost of producing and delivering a full range of goods and services.

<sup>17</sup> “An economic model based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or non-monetary benefits. It is currently largely talked about in relation to P2P marketplaces but equal opportunity lies in the B2C models” (BOTSMAN, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> “An economic model based on sharing, swapping, trading, or renting products and services, enabling access over ownership. It is reinventing not just what we consume but how we consume” (BOTSMAN, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> “Person-to-person marketplaces that facilitate the sharing and direct trade of assets built on peer trust” (BOTSMAN, 2013)

transforming how we can produce, consume, finance, and learn”. For me, all of the others mentioned above are part of this economic system.

Collaborative Economy is a feasible manner to change the role we can play in our economy and society: from passive consumers to creators, collaborators, financiers, producers and providers (BOTSMAN, 2013). It is involved in many dimensions of our lives and has exploded all around the world (see figure 5 - “the Honey Comb” - a portrayal of the Collaborative Economy's range across different areas. For the most part, Collaborative Economy projects utilize Internet and digital apps to catalyse people’s access for sharing products’ design, production and distribution; goods and services; financing needs; and education.

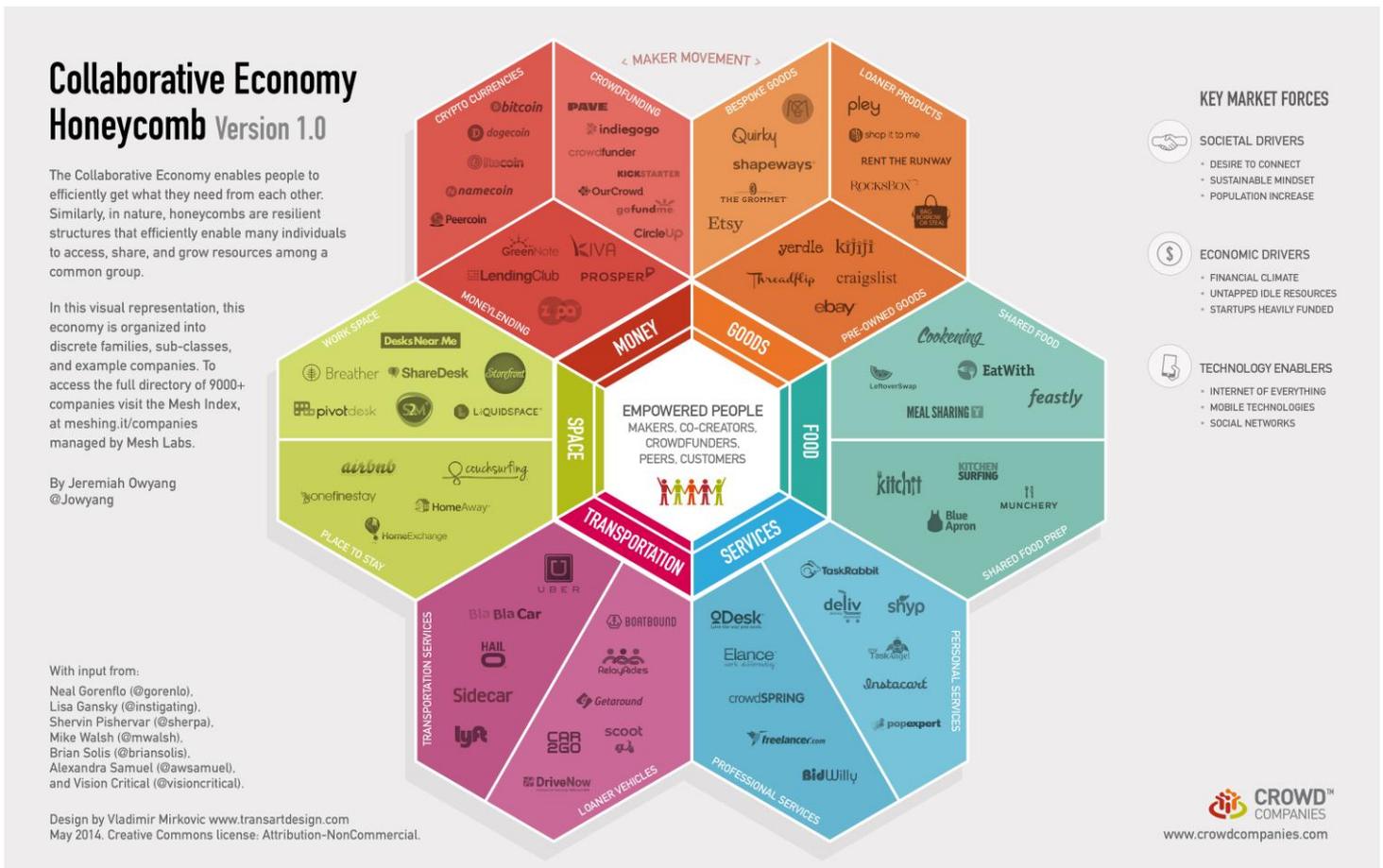


Figure 5: source: [https://www.flickr.com/photos/jeremiah\\_owyang/14116408232/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jeremiah_owyang/14116408232/); by the way, flickr.com is a massive image hosting website, where its 87 million users share all sort of images for free.

So we can illustrate with examples: if you need space to work you can check Share Desk to find out who has space available to share working spaces; if you need a place to stay

when travelling you can find a couch – sometimes a bed or a bedroom - (for free) in Couchsurfing at someone’s else house, or pay (usually less than a hotel) at Airbnb – a website that links people who have a space available with who needs a place for a few nights and there you can rent from a hut to a castle; you can also find goods you need and other people are giving away free at Freecycle; or maybe you can also access money from a crowdfunded project at Kickstarter; amongst thousands of other examples.

Collaborative Economy is supported by some basic principles (not formalised anywhere of course): economic decentralisation; social interaction; distributed property, “more access, less ownership”; rethinking the meaning of labour; peer-to-peer systems; trust; interdependency and transparency.

...and some underlies values: collaboration; people’s empowerment; openness; accessibility; community spirit; sustainability and humanitarian aspirations.

Since it is an open source, self-determined, self-organised and self-generated system, these values and principles can be applied at all levels. I also find a wide variety of intentions motivating people or organisations that are participating in this Collaborative Economy.

It was definitely born in an entrepreneurship (and business-market) environment and is characterised by highly innovative and creative initiatives. This phenomenon is clearly coming from bottom-up action with grassroots spirit and no-political or ideological aspirations, although now it is entering the political arena, as for example, the Pirate Party<sup>20</sup> and the Seoul Sharing City<sup>21</sup> program. Seoul is a great example of how Collaborative Economy is arriving at the political level. Mayor Won-Soon Park, a political independent who spent 30 years as a human rights activist, is now committed to Sharing Economy implementation and hence is facilitating thousands of projects and regulatory systems, with the aim of becoming a Sharing City of 10 million people.

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<sup>20</sup> Pirate Parties, originally created in Sweden in 2006, support civil rights, direct democracy and participation in government, reform of copyright and patent law, free sharing of knowledge (open content), information privacy, transparency, freedom of information and network neutrality

<sup>21</sup> Check this article for more information: <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2014-06-11/a-new-wave-of-economic-innovation-in-seoul>

Since it is rising from an entrepreneurial spirit, the idea of profit is involved, but I would say that it does not have the same greedy thirst of money as in 'business as usual' capitalism. Although not always! We will discuss this later. So these organisations show a wide spectrum of intentions: from leaderless to owned' structures; from for-profit companies to non-profit, to "basic" profit<sup>22</sup>, to "for-benefit"<sup>23</sup>; from no money directly involved to monetary transactions (renting, buying, paying for services, etc); and from "community building" intention to individual benefit.

This idea of Collaborative Economy is still very fresh but it does have a past. For example in the 1950's a different service was born from the idea of people "sharing" a same good with less necessity of ownership: e.g. the laundrette. In these spaces people can use wash-and-dry-machines by themselves, paying a relatively small amount of money without the necessity of having a washing machine. But the Collaborative Economy spirit was really leveraged with technological innovations like Linux (1991), Ebay (1995), Napster (1999) and Wikipedia (2001). Linux was the first free and open source software<sup>24</sup> development; Ebay is a multinational which provides consumer-to-consumer sales services via the Internet; Napster was the first system of peer-to-peer file sharing (music); and Wikipedia is a web-based encyclopaedia rooted in open contributions of content – with 470 million visitors monthly, 76.000 active contributors working on more than 31 million articles in 285 languages.

In fact, Collaborative Economy was spurred and motivated by a few drivers like:

- Technological innovation: e.g. Rifkin's third revolution;
- Cultural shift: coming from a network society and the rethinking of how we address our needs (production, ownership, consumption, the "new", labour, etc);

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<sup>22</sup> For me this is when an organisation earns profit but not in accumulation and "greedy" way. It is oriented to basic needs.

<sup>23</sup> Organisations that allow and support things to happen but are not exactly performing the actual action and they are oriented by the social benefits. Example: Wikipedia.

<sup>24</sup> "That is, anyone is freely licensed to use, copy, study, and change the software in any way, and the source code is openly shared so that people are encouraged to voluntarily improve the design of the software. This is in contrast to proprietary software, where the software is under restrictive copyright and the source code is usually hidden from the users" (source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_and\\_open\\_source\\_software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_and_open_source_software)).

- Economic realities: i.e. economic crises (mostly the 2008 crisis), unemployment, GDP's limitations as a good measure of the economy, a chaotic level of inequity<sup>25</sup>, etc;
- Environmental concerns: as Kate Raworth (2012) and Rockström *et al* (2009) demonstrates, we are consuming our planet above our limits and already transgressing some 'Planetary Boundaries';
- A representativeness' crises: People are feeling a lack of belonging in their work environment, the economic system and/or lack of representation by political leaders and their values – pursuing autonomy by the collective;
- "Sense-making crises": this generation is looking for values that make a different meaning for them through the process of identification with other networks.

"The myth of growth has failed us. It has failed the 1 billion people who still attempt to live on half the price of a cup of coffee each day. It has failed the fragile ecological systems on which we depend for survival. It has failed, spectacularly, in its own terms, to provide economic stability and secure people's livelihoods". (JACKSON, T. 2009, p.15)

In this sense, Rifkin (2014, p.19) stated we are shifting from an exchange value to a shared value and I also like the idea that sharing is not the same thing as access; rather it is enacting or making something available to another (AIGRAIN, 2014)<sup>26</sup>. This changes the perspective angle from a "consumerism" point of view to a "gift" point of view.

According to Rachel Botsman (2010, p.xv), Collaborative Economy is redefining, through technology and peer communities, the ideas of sharing, bartering, lending, trading,

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<sup>25</sup> For example: 85 richest people hold the same amount of wealth as the 50% poorest of world population (equivalent to 3,5 billion people) and the 1% richest people in the planet have 65 times the wealth of the 50% poorest (WEARDEN, 2014)

<sup>26</sup> This book, by the way, was published in print and online through the online OAPEN library ([www.oapen.org](http://www.oapen.org)). OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) is a collaborative initiative to develop and implement a sustainable Open Access publication model for academic books in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The OAPEN Library aims to improve the visibility and usability of high quality academic research by aggregating peer reviewed Open Access publications from across Europe.

renting, gifting and swapping. She acknowledges three *transaction models*: Business-to-consumer, peer-to-peer (P2P) and business-to-business;

and also three distinct *systems*<sup>27</sup> (BOTSMAN, 2013):

1. *Redistribution markets*: social networks that enable free exchange of unwanted or underused goods by redistributing to somewhere/someone who needs it – i.e. bartering, swapping, borrowing, etc. This system has the potential to challenge the traditional relationship between producer, retailer and consumer and disrupt the doctrines of “buy more” and “buy new”. E.g.: Freecycle, ebay, etc.

2. *Collaborative Lifestyles*: Share and exchange of less-tangible assets such as time, space, skills and money. E.g.: Airbnb, Zopa<sup>28</sup>, couchsurfing, TaskRabbit<sup>29</sup>, etc. Although it helps to cut the “institutionalised” middleman (for example: companies, banks, etc) and offering an alternative, it demands high degree of trust.

3. *Product Service Systems*: Enable multiple products to be accessed by many without the necessity to own outright. These goods and services can be owned by companies (e.g.: Car Sharing, Laundrette, Barclay’s Bike London, etc), privately owned to be shared or rented peer-to-peer (e.g.: TheHireHub<sup>30</sup>), or to extend the lifecycle of a product (e.g.: Interface Carpet<sup>31</sup>, Patagonia<sup>32</sup>, etc). This system brings the clear possibility to reduce

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<sup>27</sup> She is referring mainly to Colaborative Consumption, but I think is applicable to Colaborative Economy in general as well.

<sup>28</sup> Zopa is the UK's leading peer-to-peer money lending service.

<sup>29</sup> TaskRabbit is an online and mobile marketplace that allows users to outsource small jobs and tasks to others in their community

<sup>30</sup> “The Hire Hub is a community marketplace for hiring almost anything between members. Rather than having to buy the thing you need, you can now hire it from a fellow member” (source: <http://www.killerstartups.com/ecommerce/thehirehub-co-uk-why-buy-when-you-can-borrow/>).

<sup>31</sup> This company rent the carpet for costumers and every carpet comes from 100% recycled fiber from their own product in an example of circular economy.

<sup>32</sup> Patagonia is a leader outdoor gear company certified as a B-Corp. Moreover, its program The Common Threads Recycling Program allows customers to bring back any Patagonia clothing to recycle and then the fabric is processed and turned into a new Patagonia product. Besides that, they also encourage, through a partnership with ebay, Yerdle and others, in their website the exchange and sharing of Patagonia products between costumers (P2P), and also advertise for less consumption (<http://wornwear.patagonia.com/>).

waste and use of natural resources, and helps to diminish burdens of ownership (such as maintenance, repair, taxes, insurances, etc).

All of them have the capacity of bringing idle things and spaces into economic flow again – enabling less dumping and more resignification.

In this sense, collaboration has a strong potential for gathering people and reinforcing local (co)production and consumption shared in many different ways, which can bring many benefits such as: reducing social-environmental impacts; giving more opportunities to people to access goods, services, factors of production and income; increasing community vitality; and enhancing “freedom” from the mainstream system; amongst others.

On the one hand, Collaborative Economy is an agent for a power shifting paradigm from big centralised institutions to distributed networks of individuals and communities. This is a blue window to reframe the role we can play in our society. If before we were sentenced to be a mass of workers and consumers – choosing between the offers of the industrial sector, now this pattern can be more diluted in networks of collaboration. Now we can definitely ask ourselves if we *need* a job, for example; while in fact, what we *need* is to satisfy our needs and flourish in life. If money was practically the only way to meet our needs, now new opportunities are arising. And also if banks and the government were the controllers of money, now they are sharing this cut with other novelties (like peer-to-peer funding, lending, borrowing, etc). We definitely have to produce for the sake of life, but not necessarily with the objective of earning money. These are very rich insights and which we will come back to in the following chapters.

This power shifting according to Yochai Benkler (in his TED Talk<sup>33</sup>, by the way a fabulous tool for sharing knowledge, and even more in his quite amazing book “The Wealth of Networks”) is coming from a breakthrough in the way we produce and exchange knowledge and information, which is based on no formal power, no formal management hierarchies and no market strategies. He coined the term “Commons-based peer production” referring to a decentralised production using social networks and personal

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<sup>33</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/yochai\\_benkler\\_on\\_the\\_new\\_open\\_source\\_economics#t-22813](http://www.ted.com/talks/yochai_benkler_on_the_new_open_source_economics#t-22813)

(self-oriented and self-regulated) motivation to the benefit of the common (understanding here as Negri's definition of *common*). In this kind of system there is no price or command to motivate and coordinate participation. He gives examples like Wikipedia, Linux, and NASA's Clickworker Project<sup>34</sup> to show that people are motivated by other meanings to contribute to something bigger than their individual benefit and so, with this large amount of connected people, it becomes easier to produce with less cost,, less burdensomely and more efficiently.

“The twenty-first century of Collaborative Consumption we will be defined by reputation, by community, by what we can access and how we share and we give away” (Rachel Botsman, 2010, p.xx)

Tomás de Lara in his OuiShare 2014's talk refers to a shift from an “ego-centric economy” to a “carrying economy” and from ownership to “trust-ship” system. The goal for a Collaborative Economy is really to take care of us and the planet in oneness, thus we will intertwine our bonds of trust between strangers. Rachel Botsman, in turn, believes this will come from the transparency, decentralisation and reputation-based “systems” of P2P platforms. Reputation in this regard is already being seen as capital – referred to by Botsman as “Reputational Capital”, or even a currency. This idea is based on the social reward we receive when we “are good” to others, have a “proper” behaviour, do a “good” performance, are recognised by our character and so on (whatever this “good” means). Thus, if I have a good reputation in the social networks people will trust more in me and I will have more “credit”. This, for example, can come from a good review or feedback in these P2P web platforms – for example, once I have performed/used something, my performance will immediately be evaluated, and then my “rate” will be accessible to everyone else in that particular community (e.g.: platform users). Therefore, *reputation* might become a non-monetary currency rooted in personal historic behaviour, and self-evaluated by the community (without requiring a central regulator!). One day

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<sup>34</sup> It was Project from NASA inviting normal people to mark Mars' crates on satellite's images. Thousands of volunteers joined the project by web for at least a few minutes and produced more information than hundreds of scientists.

these different reputation systems will have the potential to be interconnected and offer a cross-fertilisation of information between platforms.

In theory, Collaborative Economy is dislodging the role of the middleman in many senses, like the market (e.g.: banks) and the government (e.g.: organs of inspection), by matching people's needs and availability with self-organisation. According to Rifkin, we are approaching the possibility of becoming "*prosumers*" – when consumers are participating in the production process. For instance, multiple programmers can participate in open software development for their common use.

Usually in 'redistribution markets' a *culture of indirect reciprocity* emerges when you provide goods and services without any explicit agreement for immediate or future reward – practising the Gift Economy, (e.g.: Freecycle and skill-sharing), working on a "I help you, someone else helps me" basis. These decentralised systems are predominantly self-organised by their stakeholders and require minimum infrastructure; in many cases they are a simple website with simple commands and a small back office team.

In my opinion, Michel Bauwens - together with Yochai Benkler and Jeremy Rifkin - is the foremost thinker of a Collaborative Economy towards the commons. His theory is largely based on a "*P2P Civic Economy*" founded on *open knowledge* and *open commons*. *Open knowledge* combines *open contributory communities*, *ethical entrepreneurial coalitions* able to create livelihoods for the commoners – from companies that are creating values in/to/of the commons without closing or destroying it - and *for-benefit associations* that can enable and empower the infrastructure of cooperation (BAUWENS, 2013).

Bauwens is also a pioneer of State partnership, what he calls *public-commons-based partnership* and a '*commonification*' of the public sector. He is in fact introducing these kinds of systems in South American countries, such as Ecuador, at the policy level. In his opinion this kind of process requires a society governed by *open commons* – open education, commons science, open source machine production, seed-sharing and an open industrial sector. A good example is provision of school books: every year families have to buy new books embedded in massive centralised production; which could change to open source production that enables simple updates and distribution in a less costly and more effective way.

Jeremy Rifkin, on the other hand, coined the term Collaborative Commons. He is in fact combining the Collaborative Economy with the Commons to create a new economic paradigm based on the “Third Revolution”, the Internet of Things and the Zero Marginal Cost Society.

It is clear that Collaborative Economy has many benefits and great potential to change our cultural paradigm. It does also have its critics and there are grey areas, as we will see in the next chapter.

## **4.2. Exploring the shadows**

So, in this chapter we will move our Sierpinski pyramid (see page 28) to shift the angle of perspective. In a real 3D sculpture of the Sierpinski pyramid it is possible to find an angle where you cannot see the central holes of it using a pinch of optical illusion and observe the pyramid as a perfectly matched solid triangular-based form. However if you rotate it to any side, you start to see holes you weren't seeing before. So that's what we are going to do.

This chapter is dedicated to listening to the most common critiques of Collaborative Economy and investigating its shadows, bottlenecks and challenges. Listed below are the main critiques I have found in my research.

### **Disintegration of employment, work and regulation**

A very common critique of Collaborative Economy is concerned with contributions for unemployment and deregulation of labour rights. In many cases, some projects are causing the replacement of regular, paid jobs by temporary workers, amateurs, lower paid (or sometimes unpaid) people and often people who are less qualified. This is the case, for example, of Lyft - a P2P ridesharing company- which is provoking displacement of traditional taxi companies (or cooperatives) by competing in the same “function” – urban private transport.

Firstly, they are not even qualified as “workers”. These people are trapped in “legal grey areas”, i.e. on the border between non-market and market spheres; personal and commercial initiatives. For example, a lift to a friend cannot be regulated or measured as an economic activity. However, if I started to charge for this, there could be a problem. So, right now there are no regulations for the most part of Collaborative Economy activities: they are all in the margins of the system.

The problem is that disruption of commercial barriers and traditional regulation, means many people are not properly licensed (usually amateurs), have no legal liability, are not paying taxes, are not guaranteed by the State (health and safety for example), are not insured, and yet are entering the marketplace. This opens up for discussion issues around quality of service, vulnerability of both user and consumer and unfair competition with other agents of the market – such as the taxi drivers that pay taxes, licence fees etc to provide the same service. People are opening their houses, providing their cars and lending goods with a very low security level, and there is no guarantee provided by the companies facilitating these activities, for example platforms like Uber<sup>35</sup> and Airbnb. Moreover, these services that are being offered by people without experience or training, like drivers or hosts, are not prepared as taxi drivers or hotels, hence in theory (!) they may provide lower quality services. Airbnb for example, nowadays offers a much larger number of rooms available than the Hilton international chain, in 192 countries. So, competition with these kinds of platforms is getting fiercer, and many hotels are laying people off due to their losses.

However, for me the main concern related to this critique is that people are losing labour rights and benefits, which have resulted from long years of social struggle against neo-liberal work deregulation. This kind of temporary work, or micro-entrepreneurship, offers none of those hard-won benefits, like, for example: maternity leave, paid vacation, healthcare, pension funds, health and safety, quality of product certification, unemployment insurance, and many others. In this sense, there are many risks. Also, these temporary workers usually receive lower wages, little gratification, and are working in less-than-ideal-conditions.

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<sup>35</sup> Another ridesharing company. [www.uber.com](http://www.uber.com).

Other regulation issues are appearing in apartment-sharing services as well. These companies enable users to rent their apartment (or part of it) anywhere and in any condition, since it is the users' responsibility to deal with their own issues. However, this is leading to problems like zoning regulations and other rules governing temporary rentals in which the property owner or occupier is not present. This means that, your neighbours – who decided to live in a fully residential area, for example – have the right to prevent you from establishing commercial transactions in your apartment. In this sense, he/she has the right of non-disturbance. Another example is that in many countries, such as Holland, you are not allowed to rent your apartment for less than one month.

Another potential consequence for the apartment-sharing market is that landlords are using their apartments to squeeze income in temporary rentals (more profitable than long term contracts) and this is raising the price for housing in many cities in the world.

Therefore, I think there is a substantial difference between giving a lift once in a while, making it part of your route and just receiving money to help with fuel etc, and people working “full-time”, using the ride-sharing platform to provide their main income.

### **Ownership structure, for-profit organisations and a lack of a model**

It is important to realise that while this new economy emerges, we are living both worlds simultaneously: a more collaborative system and the traditional capitalist. So, most of the initiatives are profit-oriented privately owned companies. The problem that I see is not related to the issue of profit (although this is one of the core values of the mainstream economic culture we want to change), rather the large amount of profit earned by some companies like Airbnb, Uber and TaskRabbit, from exploiting other people's desperation. While a company like Airbnb values its business at US\$10 billion, people are risking their life, belongings and other rights. Airbnb, for example, charges 16% in each transaction, and Uber 20%.

“For the most part, the people participating in Collaborative Consumption are not Pollyannaish do-gooders and still very much believe in the principles of capitalist markets and self-interest” (BOTSCHAN, 2010, p.71). In this sense, some areas of Collaborative Economy are clearly driven by traditional mainstream neo-liberalism, which in my view

demonstrates a certain contradiction with the “belief in the commons” principle that Botsman praises in the page 91 of the same book.

Sometimes I feel there is a danger of being seduced by the fallacy of free-market’s complete deregulation; as if this would bring more freedom. Unfortunately, I can see remnants of this belief and the “business as usual” model in the Collaborative Economy.

Another intriguing fact, usually seen as criticism of Collaborative Economy is the posture “held harmless and indemnified”. For example, Airbnb’s (and others’) policy of “use our service at your own risk”. I.e., many of these private companies charge a service fee while stating that responsibility for the service is shared only and entirely between who offers and who demands. Of course, after a hostess found her apartment trashed and her valuables stolen after a rental, and the website was sued, they added a guarantee and insurance against property and furniture damage for hosts. This also raises the alert as to how far “disruption of the middleman” goes in the Collaborative Economy. Are these platforms not facilitating and, in a certain way, managing transactions? Does this not amount to a kind of middleman?

There is also other complain that a few companies are using people for their own benefit. Like for example, some crowdsourcing or open-source software, which has been developed by many people (many times unpaid volunteers) and now companies are getting indirect profit from it, like commercial use of other correlated software, or in advertisement, etc.

Last but not least, another shadow is related to the ownership structure of some Collaborative Economy companies, which in many cases have multiple capitalist shareholders such as huge Venture Capital funds. For example: “GM Ventures, the investment arm of America’s biggest carmaker, was among the investors who put \$13m into RelayRides in 2011. ZipCar, a pay-by-the-hour car-rental firm that maintains its own fleet of vehicles, led a \$14m investment in Wheelz, a peer-rental firm, in 2012. ZipCar was in turn acquired by Avis, a conventional car-rental firm, in January 2013 for \$491m, giving Avis a stake in Wheelz” (The Economist, 2013). Because of their current ownership structure, many of these enterprises (like Airbnb, Lyft, Uber, and TaskRabbit) could be bought out by ever larger and more centralized companies that won’t necessarily care

about sustainability, social good, collaboration, new economy, or even the well-being of people using their services.

### **Cultural values, inequity and social mobility**

So, who is producing in the Collaborative Economy? Do I need to have assets (like an apartment, equipment, a car), skills (that people want), and extra time? Is it just for “micro-entrepreneurs”? Is a platform or website necessary to operate? Do I need a smartphone to participate? How do people with fewer opportunities – formal education, developed skills, income, etc – participate fully?

These questions suggest me to that Collaborative Economy, actually, is not being harnessed by everyone. There is still a lot of inequity between practitioners and it does not seem that these issues are being addressed. Apparently, it is for “workers” with “extra time,” who are willing to work for very low wages to do tasks and errands that the wealthy (read, gainfully employed) no longer want to be bothered with. It mostly consists of people who have excess disposable income hiring those who do not. This situation led Jon Evans (2013) to coin the term “servant economy” – where a mass of workers with low social mobility serves a minority with purchasing power, in contrast to aspirations of the “sharing economy”.

On the other hand, people are becoming ‘mini-capitalist’ (ORSI, 2013), renting out their home, car or whatever they can squeeze income out of, showing certain levels of desperation. Could this be leading to a “new kind of consumerism”, where people are still consuming for the sake of consuming (but now in collaboration, swapping, bartering, using stylish apps, etc)? Are we really changing values and relationships with all this or is this just a new facet of the same behaviour of consumerism, supplanting more and more stuff, with higher levels of exchange, materialistic, ephemeral, and self-interested? Could Collaborative Economy, actually, just be enhancing access and not presenting a new understanding of economy as a whole?

I believe many people suspect it.

In fact, there is a risk that Collaborative Economy could be encouraging us to maximise every spare capacity of our lives (or “idling capacity”) and explore markets everywhere,

every when, of everything and everyone - any old clothes, unused equipment, any trips taken with free space in our vehicle, a couch not slept on, a garage not filled with junk — and turn it to account by finding a stranger to give, sell, or rent it to.

### **A new economic “model” (?)**

If this is coming to be the new dominant model for organising economic life, I believe there is a risk of returning to the same mindset of centralising our culture in one pattern. We should try to imagine how we can make it constantly open for novelty and not close it as a kind of solution. I am afraid a model can create walls.

For example, sometimes I feel Rachel Botsman and Jeremy Rifkin (amongst others) are trying to “sell” an idea while painting it in a perfect frame. This doesn’t help produce a continuous view of the whole and an open mind, heart and will.

### **Internet’s Darker Side**

Although – as we have seen so far – the internet multiplies the capacity for horizontal, fast and autonomous and self-configurable communication, and enables a huge capacity for collaboration and collective action (CASTELLS, 2012); other processes of control and domination of information, ownership over users’ privacy and excesses of information are occurring concomitantly. Zygmunt Bauman (1999, p.36), for example, opens the discussion about an excess of cheap, “forgettable” and fast communication that suffocates our daily lives, diminishing our capacity of absorption and dissolving the “local intimacy” – leaving the individual less grounded. So at the same time that the Internet brings more access, it could also be overloading with an excess quantity of communication (see figure 1: Holon's four fundamental capacities, p.16) rather than qualitative information.

At a certain level this could represent a sensation of invasiveness; our life being overtaken by herd behaviour and a messy collective identity, with almost no agency or privacy.

Moreover, there is another complicated situation boosted by the Internet. Social networks controlled by private companies (like Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc), own your private information. So, what do they do with all that quantity of

information? They sell it. Part of Facebook's success, for example, is allowing other sites to tap into that well of information by accessing its application programming interface, or API. That gives others companies plenty of data they can use to predict individuals' future behaviour with at least some degree of certainty (using it for "directed advertisement strategies", for example – using your personal data and history to create "personal advertisements"), or feeding "filter bubbles"<sup>36</sup> – a term coined by Eli Pariser, whereby "a website algorithm selectively guesses what information a user would like to see based on information about the user (such as location, past click behaviour and search history) and, as a result, users become separated from information that disagrees with their viewpoints, effectively isolating them in their own cultural or ideological bubbles" (in: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filter\\_bubble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filter_bubble)).

This kind of control and manipulation of personal information is also a critical aspect of this "Sharing Culture", in which the lack of different structure models allows this overutilization of hyperconnectivity for profit.

### **"Reputation banks account"**

One of the main forms to build trust for collaboration and possibly bypass the monetary system is "reputation systems", as I explained in the previous chapter. Usually these reputation schemes are created based in "gamification", as a scoring system or positive-negative feedback charts, just like a traditional credit score.

However, this is double-edged sword, while this is rooted in constant evaluation of how people behave on the Internet. In this sense, there is certain kind of control over how your behaviour is measured, reported and managed - and who is controlling that?

These future "reputation bank accounts" would permit or deny access to the social product - where identity is always at stake - making consumption behaviour everyone else's business like never before.

ThredUp.com - where people can buy and sell children's clothes and toys, for instance, has a rating points-based system based on earning positive or negative reviews from

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<sup>36</sup> For more information check the review of Eli Pariser's book "The Filter Bubble: what internet is hiding from you" in: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703421204576327414266287254>

other parents about the quality and style of the goods they sell. These points become a “ranking system”, where people with few points are barred from seeing or interacting with people who have lots of points. The more users earn points, the more they are introduced to higher-rated sellers, and the more access they get to top-quality stuff. There are other simpler examples: in Airbnb, people will accept your stay based on previous reviews from other users and/or your Facebook profile.

Now, imagine this reputation system interconnected with each of these Internet-based interactions. This 24/7 social judgement can be very “tricky”: on the one hand it allows a different way of measuring trustworthiness beyond monetary credit, but on the other hand it could become very invasive and perverse, multiplying constant behavioural assessment and cultural conflict. I believe it carries the risk of exposing people to even more pressure and psychological harm, for example, fear, lack of self-esteem, self-judgement, rejection, the “myth of success”, etc. The myth of false “perfection” that could be “requested” for a better credit in this case could be very odd and even malign. People are vulnerable, fragile and inconsistent as well.

In this sense, this kind of evaluating system helps to change the basis from “having” (money and things) to “being” (behaviour), but it doesn’t contribute to the paradigm shift in terms of quality and values. It is still oriented by competition, meritocracy, ranking, individual benefit, vanity and repression.

### **4.3. Deep Dialogue**

There is no collaboration without communication; and although there exist many ways of accessing information, there is nothing like a good conversation. Inspired by the Presencing Institute’s method of “Dialogue Interviews”, these conversations were conducted in individual semi-open interview format, for which I had previously prepared some questions based on a short research about each person.

I decided to limit the range of who I would interview to only direct contact – or maximum a direct indication from one of them. This means that I knew almost all of them

beforehand. Therefore the members of this “small sample” (8 people) belong to “my community”. Perhaps, for this reason, 100% of them are Brazilians and most of the conversations happened over the Internet (using Skype).

The target was to interview Collaborative Economy doers i.e. people that are really engaged in some project, action, initiative, attempt, etc related to Collaborative Economy. Those I spoke to are in different stages of their projects, coming from different backgrounds, living in different parts of Brazil and with similar stories.

I learned a lot with these conversations, which averaged 1h and 30 minutes long: about their stories, their challenges, their visions, new ideas, mutual insights and possibilities. Due to lack of space and time I will just summarize the conversations with some important notes and leave information for further research.

#### **I spoke to:**

Bernardo Ferracioli: Co-founder of *Matéria Brasil* – a multiple-function company focused on design, technical consultancy, a “products making-lab” and knowledge sharing – and *GOMA* – a Co-working space, or as they prefer to say, an “ecosystem of companies”.

Camila Carvalho: developer of *Tem Açúcar* – a sharing platform for lending, donation and swapping of goods between neighbours.

Guilherme Lito: a multiple entrepreneur. Co-founder of *Arca Urbana* – a co-working space, a collaborative store and café, farm and ecovillage, and “fair investment fund” project; member of *Brownie do Luiz* – a chocolate brownie industry; and a new economy Consultant.

Daniel Larusso: a collaborative entrepreneur and co-founder of *Nós.vc* – a collaborative learning platform – and *Estaleiro Liberdade* – an entrepreneurship school.

Ursulla Araújo and Vinicius de Paula Machado (interviewed together): both co-founders of *Carioteca* - a Lab to foment collaborative process – and *GOMA*

Eduardo Cuducos: designer; currently writing a PHD in Sociology at University of Essex (about crowdfunding); entrepreneur, member of *Mutuo* – Collaborative Consumption

platform, *Nós.vc* and also co-developer of a platform to facilitate ideological debates; software programmer and bread baker.

Sharlie Oliveira: member of *Curto Café* – a collaborative-based café.

### **Communalities**

I thought it would be interesting to start by presenting what they have in common and what characteristics they share, a few simple differences and then what I could sketch as a similar profile.

It is quite interesting that they all come from very simple beginnings, telling humane and personal stories. Their initiatives started from their own journeys searching for a more meaningful life. Their projects' stories do not involve complex business plans, with IPO or any massive business strategy. Their projects do not come from market opportunities but much more from spontaneous movements in their lives, special encounters and life perceptions. In fact, their main goal appears to have little to do with becoming rich.

All of them passed a moment when they felt deeply uncomfortable with mainstream culture; feeling a mix of loneliness, disquiet, anxiety and meaninglessness. So, all, at some point, were searching for a more human, meaningful, empathic and sensitive work to challenge cultural values and patterns and change perception in their daily lives. All of them had had or were beginning to have moments of deep reflection and were feeling a call for inner and deep transformation. Usually this call disrupted old patterns, especially with regard to work.

They all show a high level of entrepreneurship and innovative spirit, in multiple, different areas, they are all very proactive, typical of the Millenium Generation – indeed, they are all between 25 and 35 years old. I could recognize and they also declared an uncommon dedication to work, deeply merged with their personal lives. In fact, some of them do not even say the word “work” – when speaking of *Curto Café* Sharlie uses terms such as “attending”, “taking care”.

They already show a change of values in how they understand the meaning of work, which changes the whole idea of human relationship in economic life, which in

consequence affects personal life and hence culture. This, in fact, demonstrates the capacity of Collaborative Economy as an agent of deep cultural change.

It's clear that they are experimenting in different work relationships, but not in a naive or inconsequential way. Actually they are very conscious that experimentation is essential to the process, in other words, they are pursuing a "conscious experimentation".

In this sense, they are all operating horizontal work relationships with a lower level of hierarchy (in some cases none). As they explained – unanimously - this way of working allows more "familiarity" (like family/friends relationships). For example, Bernardo feels that this way of working is "more real"; coming from the creation of affective ties with people you work with. On the other hand, according to them, this also becomes deeply, emotionally demanding and challenging, since this kind of relationships brings other sorts of conflicts (not so common in the work space) that we are not so used to dealing with in this kind of environment. This process, brought another level of transparency (for example, at GOMA everybody knows how much each individual earns), enhanced openness and consequently, according to him, happiness.

These 10 projects vary from for-profit, non-profit to (almost) no-money involved.

One of the most interesting aspects of these projects, is that they are combining many different Collaborative Economy characteristics in the same idea and that all these different values are "structured in their DNA". This reinforces how integrated they are with transformative principles. They are not just utilising them.

On the other hand, I would say that most of the 8 people come from a higher income social class and higher level of education (above the average of Brazil), which brings us back to the discussion already presented in the chapter "Exploring the Shadows": in general, the participation in Collaborative Economy is still restricted to a certain social niche.

### Knowing the projects

- *Carioteca*:

"Collaborative Economy is about an awakening of the nervous system of society for Integral Consciousness" (Vinicius)

Carioteca is focused on process management to transform the collective intelligence in strategy, action plans and sharing. According to them, Carioteca is a Lab to foment collaborative forms of *modus operandi*: (for example) networked entrepreneurship, cooperation and facilitation in different sectors.

They always operate in networks (with their “companies’ ecosystem”), never alone, and there is an objective to create a fertile soil for multiplication of collective experiences from other groups through a cultural transition.

- *GOMA*:

“to make a non hierarchical work the best way is to know your pair, become friends, and create an affective relationship... and this transforms work, transforms life... you make friends”. (Bernardo)

GOMA is a non-profit association of 26 companies and 87 members, what means that every income is reinvested for the collective benefit.

GOMA is a co-working<sup>37</sup> space, with a horizontal and collaborative management system, co-ownership and “circular leadership”<sup>38</sup>. It is oriented by a distributed process, decentralized and has a political “live-learning” dynamic, i.e. “learning-by-doing”. According to them, they are “building the plane in flight”; they learn as new experiences and new challenges appear).

GOMA is complementary to these 26 companies, which means they share the space, they have weekly general meetings and certain group activities, but everyone has total independence in their projects. Although they have their own work, most projects

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<sup>37</sup> Spaces with free-lancers and different initiatives together building an ecosystem where people share experiences but retaining their autonomy and are not controlled by a big company or a central power. It is possible because people together are sharing costs etc (instead of each company having a single space), (BOTSMAN, 2010, p.168).

<sup>38</sup> They have Working Groups (with a volunteered “leader” as a “focal point”, named just for communication with the whole) in a circumstantial leadership system. This means that it is open; there is no institutional or, top-down decision-making or similar; it is not based in technical or political capacity; leadership for each different program, working group and activity is based in self-declaration – “one has to feel the call and take the initiative” (Ursulla).

have created and/or are managed in symbiosis with other companies of the “ecosystem”.

Their challenge at this moment is to develop new technologies that are compatible with their political-management proposal and their work value intentions.

There is also space for external short courses, parties and a small café inside.

- *Matéria Brasil:*

This is a for-profit company, focused on design, technical consultancy for sustainability, “products making-Lab”, and knowledge sharing. Nowadays, 90% of their projects are made in partnership with other companies or someone else. They are members and co-founders of GOMA – practically the pioneers of it.

- *MUTUO:*

This is a Collaborative Consumption digital platform (Internet-based), where people get together to share the ownership, use and management of a certain good with mutual need. E.g.: camping gear, tools, vacuum cleaners, etc.

- *Nós.vc:*

This is a digital platform (Internet-based) to facilitate encounters for collaborative learning. So someone opens an invitation for an encounter (e.g. a dance class or business meeting), saying how many people are needed, when and how much it costs (it can be free, as well). Therefore, the encounter is crowd-funded and if it achieves the required amount it happens. “From virtual to real”.

- *Estaleiro Liberdade*

“The school for who wants to reconnect with your dream and to entrepreneurship”

(Larusso)

Estaleiro Liberdade is a transformative school for entrepreneurship through self-knowledge. It provides space for a learning process (like an incubator) for development of freedom and autonomy spread in cycles at least 2 months, i.e. In each cycle of 2 months there is a window, when people can leave the process if they want or need.

- *Tem Açucar:*

This is a project still in development, of a digital platform (Internet-based) to facilitate neighbour exchange of goods by donation, swapping or lending without money being involved. The idea is to develop a different way of relocating material resources in a more fluid P2P way, with less dependence on the monetary and traditional work system, enhancing a sense of belonging and being supported by community.

According to Camila “*Tem Açucar* addresses the necessity of connection, community bonding and sense of belonging, trust and security”. In her view this could diminish consumerism, which comes from the sense of loss experienced because of individualism and fear of scarcity and unsafeness.

“Me - If the website decreases desire/consume and increases connectivity it will hence  
diminish its own necessity, right?”

Camila - It’s ok! Great! Job’s done, next idea that needs my energy! The desire is that  
the site doesn’t need to exist in the future”

- *Arca Urbana*

This is project (still in development) of a combination of multiple intentions in different spaces. Arca Urbana is simultaneously a Co-working space with at least 5 companies sharing the space together; a collaborative and fair trade café and store – which are based in collaborative pricing<sup>39</sup>; and a farm outside the city – which is 10% an ecovillage and the other 90% dedicated to permaculture. This farm will connect with Arca Urbana in the city, other collaborative networks and food industries like Brownie do Luiz

- *Brownie do Luiz:*

This is a small scale food industry that sells chocolate brownies. However they are engaged in transformative working relationships like, for example, participative

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<sup>39</sup> Where costumers pay how much they want or feeling is fair.

governance, holacracy<sup>40</sup>, conscious consumption, re-use of packaging and many more. Every recipe is completely “open-source”, i.e. posted on their website. They also have a policy that the maximum wage difference in the whole company is only threefold and most employees are actually shareholders.

- *Curto Café*

“Me - Do you think you are revolutionary?”

Sharlie - No, I am just doing something important”

This café in the busy downtown of Rio de Janeiro is running in a completely different way. First of all they have a no-pricing policy or collaborative pricing. It is one of the clearest examples of a “Prosumer”. For instance, there is no teller (people pay by themselves and how much they want – customers put the money and take change in an open glass bowl); in less busy times customers can even make their coffee, and along the way, customers help in many other things like cleaning etc. Thus it is a semi-self-managed place: there is no door and no lock, so no time to open or close. Some customers come earlier in the morning and make their coffee, clean everything, pay and the “owners” are not even there – there are no owners. They also have a transparency policy where there are blackboards with all the costs they have every month (from rent to coffee) and an up-to-date follow up of everyday income posted in a graphic. There are 4 partners and they have one single bank account, where they individually withdraw cash as they need with no control of how much each of them takes.

I think Sharlie and Curto Café are way above the average of Collaborative Economy projects I’ve seen so far. Their lives are merged in this Collaborative Culture with no need for digital platforms, technologies etc. They have advanced further in the direction of trusting others and through that, in my opinion, to the commons – they

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<sup>40</sup> Holacracy is a social technology or system of organizational governance in which authority and decision-making are distributed throughout a fractal hocracy of self-organizing teams rather than being vested at the top of a hierarchy (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holacracy>).

provide a self-managed resource, with clear and shared responsibilities and with transparent intentions.

### Questions (?)

At the end of each interview I asked a last question. But instead of asking for answers,, I invited them to ask an important question for themselves in the future. And this is the result:

“What did I learn?”

“Will I be able to adapt to the cultural changes of this society in constant reorganisation?”

“In what way can I integrate the everyday fullness and the scale of action?”

“And if it doesn’t work?”

“What do I do for a better world?”

“How can I be the changing protagonist that I want to see in the world?”

“What is the purpose of trying to integrate increasingly a more collaborative life as a way of self-knowledge?”

## 5. Personal Experiences

Although I am just beginning to experiment with the Collaborative Economy and its possibilities, I have had some experiences that are worthwhile to relate here.

### My crowdfunding campaign

In order to make my dream of study at Schumacher College come true I faced a big challenge right away: money. It was a big financial challenge to study in England at an expensive private school. Firstly, because of the high costs related to tuition fees (for non-Europeans it is even more expensive), visa, flight tickets and living in Europe, and secondly because the currency rate is four times higher.

I came up with a basket of solutions and one of them was a Crowdfunding project. The idea was to fund 10% of my costs to enable the multiplication of what I learned here about sustainability and "New Economy" in Brazil. This was equivalent to R\$ 10,000 (or around GB\$3,000). One reflection: I believe that I decided this amount based on fear, distrust, shame and self-criticism. Fear of not working, not receiving more than that and distrust of the process (such as "people will not give me money, just friends, family"). I was also a bit ashamed to go to the web asking for money with my face exposed in a video and unknowing of people's reactions ("what will people think?").

My proposal was to echo the learning in the form of a sort of perks: a blog (built especially for this project); encounters – "collaborative lunches"; Skype talks; a copy of this dissertation; a list of suggestions for books, videos, articles etc; lessons/classes on sustainability and "New Economy"; consulting projects; workshops; and contributions in social projects. Each of them depending on how much the person was collaborating.

I used a digital platform for crowdfunding, called *Benfeitoria*, which is the only crowdfunding platform that does not charge commission.

In the instant before I pressed the button to post the video of the campaign at Facebook and start the promoting process and launching it to the world, I was very nervous. However, 6 minutes later (and this was already 3am) a friend liked the post and 5 minutes later commented "the first 1% is done!" The next day, people's reactions were surprisingly amazing, with many comments and hundreds of people sharing, people

calling me and not just congratulating me and appreciating the initiative but also saying thank you.

I really didn't expect that reaction. When people met me anywhere although they were truly touched with the action of courage and the fact that I was investing my life to rethink a better world, something also triggered a window of fresh air to open for them. At that point I felt I was contributing to people's hope that other structures are really possible, simply through the example that I brought of a another possibility of financing your dreams; something new for many of them, novelty... new meanings. This reaction filled me with meaning as well, acknowledging people's capacity to help each other.

In the end, I got 125% of my target, totalling R\$12,500 (or around GB\$3,500). In fact, I was prepared to collect something around R\$5,000, and that would be already great. However 82 people collaborated in total, of whom I knew just 50% of them from before.

This crowdfunding campaign opened for me an ocean of different perspectives to a new economy, finance and the commons. When I saw that I could perform a project with a little help from different people just through good communication and feedback (the perks), I see how actually even the financial capital can be understood as a common. It doesn't belong to anyone; it belongs to everyone. In fact, as language (for example), money is a media to communicate. With the "numbers" (as language) that I collected from others I am able to perform my dream because the College also understands what this "numbers" (called money by modernity) means, and so on. So, those "numbers" contain a transmission of meaning and are not a quality itself.

Following the same analogy, if I speak a foreign language that you don't know, you might listen to the sounds of my voice (as a resource) but not understanding what I am talking about (communication). Therefore, the difference here is the intention in this quantity of "numbers" – i.e. who collaborated knew exactly for what that money was going to - and through the same channel (opened simply by this relationship's construction) I will return - what they already know - to the common good. And these "transactions" are possible because we shared meanings, and that's what common is about: collectively "stewarded" resources full of meaning. In contrast, when I am earning a normal wage from a company for example, this money has no intention (it has a cause – my services, but no intention)

and I can use it anywhere. Therefore, because money is a medium and has no meaning itself, this salary is actually meaningless. Our mainstream economic system is based in meaningless “communication”. The crowdfunding, by contrast, can bring a “number” that is produced by the collective to the collective.

Until now, I had great conversations by Skype with people from very different parts of Brazil and I have written (and posted video-interviews with people that I have met here) on the blog. And I know that when I go back to Brazil I will have things to do.

### **Skills Sharing**

Since the beginning of the journey I have been regularly teaching Capoeira (twice a week) for the Schumacher College community. But, I am not receiving money and there is no direct payment involved. Here, we spontaneously self-organised a skills-sharing practice where people contribute to the common with their skills. We had classes of French, Yoga, Shiatsu, Spanish, guitar, piano, tango, amongst others; we had a friend running a weekly “5 rhythms’ dance” session; another friend was offering massage; another one heiki; for a few months we had a collectively led “mystery school”; and so on. At no point was money involved.

Although sometimes I had to internally deal with self-questioning about balance, such as “am I giving too much? or not enough?”, normally the feeling was great. I was doing and giving something that I love and receiving great things in return from the common.

### **Sharing goods with your neighbour**

We have friends living in three houses close to each other. There are some domestic facilities that we are not using all the time, or as Rachel Botsman calls them, in “idling capacity”. Thus, these three houses are still sharing a vacuum cleaner and a washing machine. Specially for use of the washing machine we had to establish (together of course) some rules, since some specifics are involved, such as energy and water bills, washing powder, noise and accessibility (it is installed in one house, so how were other users to access it). We decided to have a donation pot for powder, energy and water bills, and as for accessibility it is simply necessary to organise with anyone of the house to be

present. Use of the vacuum cleaner was easy: when someone needs they knock on the door and get it.

### **Others experiences**

Until now I never had a bad experience with this kind of Collaborative Economy.

I also usually use bicycle-sharing schemes in different cities in the world (cheap, fun, healthy and handy). Although usually there is a huge company supporting it (like banks) with their brand stamped on each bike and then you are giving free advertisement for them (actually you are paying for it), it is an efficient, democratic, collaborative and alternative urban transport.

Another example of Collaborative Economy I have experienced was with Airbnb three times in the UK, and it was great. I've had very good deals in beautiful houses (perfect conditions) with very gentle and helpful hosts making me, and my family (complete strangers) really welcome. I met generous and friendly families, stayed in much cozier environments than hotels and actually with better quality. For this reason, I was happy to write good reviews of them on the website and they did for me also.

## 6. Dialoguing with all this

I want to come back to page 28 and pick up the Sierpiński Pyramid again. This representation of a complex formation is perfect as an analogy to illustrate the way we can approach the main inquiry of this dissertation.

In this sense we can tackle the Pyramid from different perspectives, for example:

- The pyramid, represents the whole (or the holon of higher level): in this analogy it is my main inquiry;
- Smaller parts (e.g. faces of the Pyramid) or holons of lower level represent some “clusters” of smaller parts to address particularities of major themes: like for example culture, common(s) and Collaborative Economy (the main topics);
- Parts inside parts (like the “Sierpiński triangle”) - or “holons within holons” -, addressing themes inside themes: for example, “work relationships in the Collaborative Economy”.

However, all the “holons” are interconnected and interdependent and even though we can observe just lower levels, the whole is inscribed in each part as well and each holon share the same pattern of organisation; so, inseparable.

Therefore, observing the Pyramid from different angles give us different perspectives for analysis, as we have already been exploring. So, we can see our “Lenses” as the focuses of observation (remember, when you look at a 3D object you can interchange the focus shifting the plan of observation) – you can zoom in, zoom out, focus on the holes, faces or edges, etc.

So, we have looked at the “Pyramid” from different angles and tackled it from different points of views in previous chapters. Now, we will interplay with many of its angles, parts and whole to see interconnections (for example, as seen from above – see figure 6). This means, we will see more interconnections between the common, culture and Collaborative Economy and some particularities; which are results from the stage of “creation” after the “deep listening” and “*presencing*”. If we see these main topics as the

highlighted sections of the figure, this is how our analysis could look – but, remember, it is still a 3D shape.

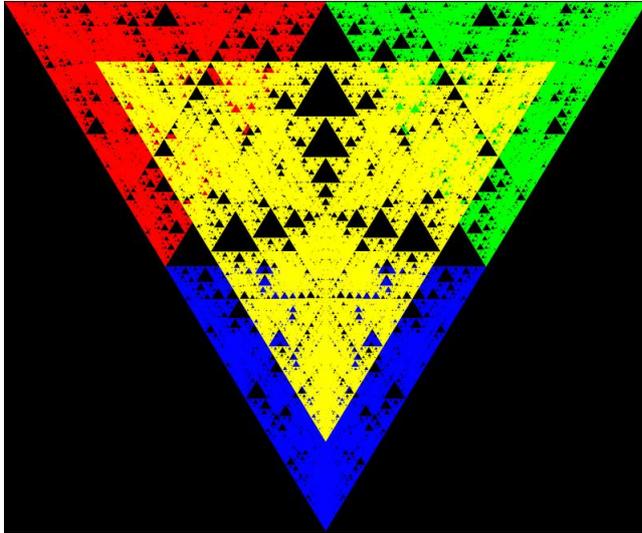


Figure 6: "A Sierpiński triangle-based pyramid as seen from above (4 main sections highlighted). Note the self-similarity in this 2-dimensional projected view, so that the resulting triangle could be a 2D fractal in itself" (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

## A shift of values

As I have evidenced so far, most of the critiques and negative assumptions about Collaborative Economy usually come from a similar *source*: a fragmented, dualistic, cause-effect and conservative mindset. Following this, complaints tend to come from businesses entrapped in the system, regulators and other conservative sectors. As we previously found with Morin, Bauman, and others, this kind of reaction is understandable since any beliefs, values and meanings that make us understand the world are shared and co-created within the culture we enact. This means that to go through a paradigm shift requires a deep change, which has to come in conjunction with collective structure – our surroundings. Therefore, changing values is a hard task, simply because usually we don't *see* an alternative; still "not in my radar"– and for this reason an alternative simply "*doesn't exist*", and hence doesn't make any sense. We need to *see to believe and belief to see*. Just as I had to change my lens to understand what Collaborative Economy and commons mean, I also had to change my lens to accept where these critiques were

coming from. Turning the Pyramid is really important to see different points of view (“put myself in someone else's shoes”) and dialogue with different perspectives.

I was asking myself at some point, how could we shift for a wider cultural opening, in which the process of “*collaborativity*” (as the practice of collaboration) passes necessarily through a change in values and intentions? A more collaborative culture (practice and habits) is also a process of inner opening to other opinions as well, i.e. coming with more inquiries, less definitions; becoming more explorative, less argumentative; trying to be more inviting rather than convincing.

I perceived that for Collaborative Economy to make sense as such, a more careful process of setting intentions from its practitioners is required. This means that, since Collaborative Economy is in this blurred process of “transition”, it is in fact living both “worlds” simultaneously (a collaborative and a “traditional mainstream”). For example, if the intention of collaborative projects is based in making loads of profit and accumulation, then it is in fact anchored in a traditional economy-culture mindset but using new narratives and this, in consequence, provokes genuine confusions amongst those who judge it, use it and regulate it.

In this sense, setting the intentions is really important to clarify communication and, therefore, stimulate different patterns of relationship through new meanings. Collaborative Economy is, indeed, making a lot of progress for more collaboration towards the common, contributing to new patterns and behaviours of consumption, production, stewardship and ownership - for example, when it is enabling the creation (spontaneously and no central decision involved) of some mechanisms that have the capacity to generate self-managed resources -, however, there are still some issues to unpack. We will see.

### **The challenge of a global scale**

According to E.F. Schumacher “people can only be themselves in small groups”. So, how do we live in an “(almost) global network society” with hyper-connectivity? How are we going to deal with a “fenceless culture”?

On one hand, the (re)signification of social bonds – promoted by the “communication revolution” – is dissolving the idea of community within tight borders and, perhaps, is becoming much more related to flows and distribution. For example, my “community” is shaped not only by my family and neighbourhood, but also by friends from Schumacher College, from Rio de Janeiro, from Capoeira, from Social Networks, and etc.

However, the intensity of communication is so high that it is creating a risk of people and communities losing contact with reality and identity. As Wilber explained in the “Holons’ structure”, it is necessary to balance the relation between agency and communion in order to avoid self-dissolution. In this sense, we have to be very careful with each other in this “excessive networking”. My anticipated conclusion, meanwhile, is that Collaborative Economy has to be embedded in a collaboration of care, as the background of its intentions, creating meaningful relationships and then commons.

In a certain way, distance has been shortened so much by means of communication that it has started to become irrelevant<sup>41</sup> and it might reach the point in which it is almost worthless “spatialising” the common. Not because it is “global”, but actually because of its increased probabilities of transboundary. In fact, since the idea of shared resources doesn’t necessarily need to be within the community’s boundaries anymore, the common doesn’t belong to a defined spatial scale as well. The whole idea of ownership is encountering new meanings through a diversity of creative possibilities for sharing.

At least Collaborative Economy is helping to create more openness. Slowly people are unleashing patterns of “mine” and starting to share more, until the point where we will have more common-based resources (tangible and intangible) than in private or public ownership.

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<sup>41</sup> Excluding environmental impacts like CO2 emissions by transport (of people and goods). I am talking here about many other resources less tangible, like, for example, open knowledge – which enables exchange of information reducing even the necessity of transport since the open source principle stimulate local production with shared knowledge; or education online as well.

## Creating emptiness; allowing openness

As Illich demonstrates in his famous article “Silence is a commons”, “the enclosures” was the beginning of people’s disempowerment, even in the more sensitive dimensions. As illustrated by him silence ended with the invention of the loudspeaker:

“So, the encroachment of the loudspeaker has destroyed that silence which so far had given each man and woman his or her proper and equal voice. Unless you have access to a loudspeaker, you now are silenced”

As he continues, every corner, everywhere, every when, became a property. Even the streets became properties and were taken from people’s power. We have been heaped by a condition of public and private ownerships, which is abridging the “emptiness”.

In fact, this element is responsible for the generation of connection; without emptiness, without space between individuals, there is no connection, in consequence there is no fluidity or movement, and then no co-creation. In fact, I dare to say that when we have more emptiness, more peer-to-peer self-organised networks will arise.

These collaborative platforms, like NÓS.vc or Mutuo, have a potential to enable emptiness when they facilitate the possibility for self-organised activities (or “the possibility to possibilities”). By opening the emptiness they are inviting openness and new things to happen, and when this is done they step back for the self-creation (like “*autopoiesis*”) to emerge. Although, of course, it requires a sense of responsibility for the offer and not just “use our service at your own risk”. In Collaborative Economy everybody has the responsibility, because it’s not about competition or “making more from it”, it is about cooperation.

Yochai Benkler (2006, p.10), in “The Wealth of Networks”, explores the idea of enhanced autonomy in a networked information economy as a substantial factor for collective improvement. In this sense, an enhanced autonomy comes from a constantly opening

communication and also by enabling individuals to perceive a broader range of possibilities (autonomy or empowerment are not something to be given), which in its turn creates more spaces of exchange.

According to him, this networked information environment makes culture more transparent and malleable; an inviting space for collective autonomy and self-creation. It is more open for multiple agents, flexible and mouldable for transformation and creativity.

### **The (no) model**

Collaborative Economy should not be a new economic model. In fact, in the beginning I didn't like the term NEW Economy, because it was looking like those very cheap and manipulative marketing strategies when they change the "cookie of chocolate with vanilla" to a "new formula" named "cookie of vanilla with chocolate" to sell more, or like "new" mobiles every 3 months. But then I realised that New Economy could be understood as constantly new, open for novelty, no fixed model, accepting and respectful of innovation and creativity.

And if we have a "*model*" of "no model"? or a *model* which includes models? A *model* opened for change, according to new inputs and created to enable more models, as a fractal *model*.

This will demand a deep change of values from the models' holders, i.e. political ownership. These values come from a different source, a different culture, shifting from competition to cooperation; from individual greed to common good; from fear to trust; from ego to eco; from copyright to copyleft or ShareAlike; finding different forms of self appreciation and wealth. This is because models' holders (like the government for example) apply it under the aegis of law enforcement and violence, using the culture of fear to guarantee its unwavering power; or in the case of private property, it is applied by market prices and managerial commands as motivational drivers.

In fact, for example, it is necessary to review the political-structural model in which most of Collaborative Economy is based. The majority is still for-profit companies (like we saw

in the chapter “Exploring the shadows”), i.e. forcibly embedded in a structure that does not match its values in many cases. It is like a foot size 42 using shoes size 38.

Therefore one question is: how can we create a framework for ownership structures that guarantees the responsibility of its members, but is regulated by its users in every way; not by any external body? But of course, still contains as a basic principle the constant opening for changing.

## **In transition**

Collaborative Economy is not matured because of every issue that we have seen here as, for example, regulation, safety, work relationships, culture, lack of model, etc.

But, on the other hand, the parameters which we are using to assess it as “not ready” may mean we are not using appropriated lenses; simply because they are based on values that reflect the traditional model. I.e. it has been compared with the foundations and success values from the current mainstream model.

As Collaborative Economy, Collaborative Commons, commons-based peer production, and P2P Systems come from networked society embedded in different values and possibilities of mobility, this “transition” will not stop. This culture is very malleable, liquid, mouldable and creative, and is continuously in (fast) transformation, unable to be suppressed. This collaborative culture is pulled by people, its initiatives (which in a certain way are “freer” to happen), actions and practices (that produce and are the product of the value change).

This is also why it is so interesting to observe those systems from the cultural perspective: I am looking for something much more powerful than economic rational “models”; I am assessing values, beliefs, meanings, behaviours and patterns of conduct. Therefore, although they are dynamic and change as well, they inhabit much deeper layers.

Maybe this New Economy (in which those systems are integrated) is, like I said, permanently in change, in transition; or maybe, not even a transition, but going in parallel; or maybe the mainstream and New Economy are both in transition and will converge at some point; or maybe all of them will disintegrate for an even larger future plurality. We don't know.

I still don't know if Collaborative Economy is, indeed, an evolution of a networked neo-liberalism or if it's part of a deep reform. But, undeniably is a cultural revitalisation. The agents have changed, the scenario has changed, the flows are different and there are new values emerged.

As Michel Bauwens stated: "we do this without inventing or imposing utopias, but by extending the working prototypes from the commoners and peer producers themselves" (BAUWENS, 2014).

### **Frictional regulation**

Although Collaborative Economy is boosting the generation of new dynamics in the economic system and also opening lots of opportunities for people getting more interdependent and less dependent on central forces (like government, big companies, etc. – those who normally own the factors of production<sup>42</sup>) it will meet friction from regulations and traditional business. However, this is a very important factor. It is a clear sign that Collaborative Economy is really affecting economy. In this sense, Collaborative Economy is leveraging the discussion for change of economic regulation as never before. The current agents of a Collaborative Economy, mainly the big ones with more market share like Airbnb and Uber – which already have several legal problems – are, in fact, being pioneers and clearing the regulation landscape (SUNDARARAJAN, 2014).

The friction is due mainly to challenging the mainstream mindset and, of course, the backlash is predictable. Our society is so attached to formal regulations, rules and norms to organise life that sometimes we forget what they are made for. In my view, it is extremely important to have rules to manage the common, however in some point of history it became the most used power instrument to maintain the *status quo* and control people, and then build deprivation and disempowerment.

So, with the advent of "mass self-communication" this control by regulation became more penetrable and possible to "bypass". These difficult to control Internet-based actions and the network society by formal power are, in fact, enhancing autonomy by enabling new possibilities. One of them is the Collaborative Economy. For this reason a

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<sup>42</sup> "Factors of production" are inputs to the production process. Labour, capital and land are the basics.

majority of projects is (consciously) on the margins of the law and located in the so called “grey areas”. Sometimes the intention is not even to break the law, but just perform their will. In doing that, the Collaborative Economy users and practitioners are confronting “the system” in the symbolic realm. And by acting on the margin it is pushing the boundaries of our culture, thus meeting simultaneously resistance and novelty – for example, governments prohibiting some initiatives<sup>43</sup> and at the same time new organisational structures emerging.

Some people might say that the emergent P2P organisational forms can make some power institutions lose their relevance (like job creation, finance, childcare, etc). In this way, some parts of “the market” and “the government” are symbolically losing their monopoly of providing things for the realisation of life. According to this, “P2P culture” is definitely contributing to a movement towards the common.

### **Reframing work relationships**

One of the most common critiques of Collaborative Economy comes from the fact that (apparently, I didn’t confront the numbers) a “massive” number of jobs have been destroyed because of it. Critics have also related it to bad work conditions, deregulation, lost of benefits, a mass of temporary workers, etc (as we already stressed in the chapter “Exploring the shadows”).

However, in this chapter we are turning and exploring the “Sierpiński Pyramid” and seeing the inquiry from different angles, challenging the shape. So, actually I believe that at least Collaborative Economy is opening the possibility for a very important discussion – long untouched - about the redefinition of “work”. In this sense, one question came up for me: is employment the best way to distribute/reproduce wealth?

From hereafter, I understand a “job” as just one way of making income. In contrast, Collaborative Economy is presenting many other ways, which in turn brings us to another point of the discussion: deregulation of work. As usual, every critique of Collaborative Economy is carrying layers of the same mainstream mindset. For example, in this case it is

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<sup>43</sup> Like Airbnb in New York (see [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/21/airbnb-illegal-in-nyc\\_n\\_3314155.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/21/airbnb-illegal-in-nyc_n_3314155.html)) and Uber in Berlin (see <http://www.slashgear.com/berlin-bans-uber-up-to-60k-fine-per-prohibited-pick-up-14341228/>)

common to critics questioning the lost of social benefits employees have (fruit of many social and political battles for many years against exploitation) when working as temporary or micro-entrepreneur. I agree; it is a big problem to address. Mainly because it just shifts one dependence to another: we can become slave of our working-hours in order to survive as well. For example, if you get sick, pregnant or have other problems in performing your work you have no direct support; and also no paid vacation – which is an important health issue.

However, let's move the Pyramid... Many of those "social benefits" delegated by companies under legal order, in fact, only appease many evils created by burdensome working hours. We have to critically analyse the idea of "benefits", and investigate what it brings in terms of health, freedom, peace etc. Indeed, in the average kind of "mainstream work" mothers receive, for example, 6 months of maternity leave (which in my opinion is completely absurd! And the father just a few weeks), health plans (since you work so much you don't have time to take care of yourself and have to go to a bad health system<sup>44</sup>, take expensive drugs that are actually bad for your health – and all of this to give billions to major pharmaceutical companies and feed the "economy of health"), paid vacation (since you work so much and don't have time to have enough fun or peace during the entire year and then you get 1 month to spend all the money you have somewhere), etc. We could extend this list but it is enough to get a picture of the "why benefits". Then a natural question is, do we need to work in this kind of job to receive these "meagre benefits".

On the other hand, in a commons-based community work, is merged with personal life and the benefits are "planted" and "picked", simultaneously, in and by the community – and also everyone supports each other.

But, as I heard in the interviews, in Collaborative Economy entrepreneurs get so involved with their work that they also don't have so much time to build their community vitality and quality of life out of the work-space. However, communities can be built anywhere and in these spaces (like for example GOMA) there is, according to many of the

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<sup>44</sup> I have many critiques about the western medicine, its fragmented, profit-oriented, inhuman, unhappy and etc, that doesn't worth to be discussed here now.

interviewees, a lot of affection, sensibility, meaning, support etc; as they say, it has a family and friendship spirit. Perhaps this could be configured as a new phenomenon: *“commonification of work”*.

Another issue, correlated to work relationships in Collaborative Economy, is the idea that this system eliminates the need for a middleman (big companies, market and government, for example). However, Michel Bauwens discusses if, in fact, these kind of collaborative platforms are actually acting as middleman. In fact they are facilitating transactions (and some of them exploiting people’s assets and getting huge profits from it), but I am not sure yet in what degree they represent a middleman.

The last point in this sub-section is a very interesting and important debate: how do we recreate the value loop between creation, distribution and income in a P2P Civic Economy (BAUWENS, 2014)? and how do we create new models to transport assets and capital crossing social boundaries (SUNDARAAJAN, 2014)?

I believe these are key issues for this “commons-based Collaborative Economy”, and they address the same issue of how Collaborative Economy can become more democratic, with profits, income and revenues returning to the common. In fact, users are already sharing assets, distributing, co-creating, co-managing, co-learning etc, but the redistribution (looping) of profit and income to users is still blurred. In this way, this is a challenge for Collaborative Economy towards the common.

### **The imperfection of our reputation**

Besides many critiques about the reputation-based system presented in the other chapter “Exploring the shadows”; here we will see it from another angle.

Like our Facebook profile, in this virtual world we have a chance to post just about our “good-side” and then make a “good” image of ourselves; our “perfect” world. However, we are full of contradictions:

Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am  
large, I contain multitudes.

(Walt Whitman)

We err, we commit crimes, we have addictions, we have defects, and so on. But in fact, these are as human as love. Thus, this dualistic view of good and bad, sin and forgiveness, are very simplistic and subjective assumptions of our human behaviour, entrapping hidden monsters.

Therefore, I am worried that this reputation system can represent something even worse than financial deprivation, including a repression of false morality.

In this sense, how could we include people's vulnerabilities and fragilities in this "reputation's system", demystifying the model of perfection and just good-doers? The ranking system with top rates for the best is still trapped in meritocracy and competition as well, and I don't believe it helps people to accept each other with care and understanding. So, how can flexibility and understanding of our "dark"/ "bad"/ "not so good" sides be moderated and absorbed by the system – so we are not judged by our personal difficulties but acknowledged?

## **7. Docking our journey back, last thoughts and continuity**

Travelling through this story of Collaborative Economy and the commons was very rewarding and inspiring. I feel that was a process of discovering a new world, while I was carefully unpacking this intense inquiry and, in the end, found immensity. It was astonished seeing the capacity of this new economic phenomenon and at the same time its unfolding contradictions, challenges and obscurities.

I believe that I scratched the surface of something bigger than my previous expectations but, also, was able to peel layers and layers of multiple facets as it emerged. It was a continuous process of digging each characteristic and assessing all its possibilities. This process brought up a hidden complexity over a relatively young - on the rise – idea, which makes me realise that I have a lot more to dedicate myself.

I finish it with no closed conclusion and, actually, with many questions for a new start. Doors were opened during this journey and I will keep them opened with me. This research showed me so much that I see a great potential for Collaborative Economy, but now, with more mature eyes, less naive and less enchanted. It is definitely a work in continuity and this present work allowed me to be nurtured with a wider vision and more consistency.

It was very important observing the Collaborative Economy emergence from the cultural perspective. I feel as this angle has given me another level of depth, in which my intention has not been anchored in bring solutions for a new world or demonstrate economic efficiency; rather was a possibility to evaluate if the background of these actions are based in transformative values, beliefs and meanings.

After all I understood that technology, products or business systems are less important if the intentions behind it are not embedded with different values. Even our analysis and critiques about it have to come from a different source of knowledge, intentions, values and meanings. It is about a choice of keep enacting the mainstream perspective or breaking our cultural patterns and evolving for a completely new paradigm. If we keep acting and observing this new economic format with the same bases (the same lenses), it will not work out.

What I mean is that Collaborative Economy can be an opportunistic evolution of capitalism (like, for instance, increasing people's vulnerability by excessive deregulation and using people's desperation to achieve selfish profit) or the beginning of a turning point where individuals are more open to share and live in collective – managing their resources together and co-evolving with their shared social dilemmas. Everything depends on the source of intentions and attention from each participant's attitude and each initiative. For a while I am sure both will coexist in a hybrid scenario.

Therefore, I believe Collaborative Economy is part of a deep cultural change in process, which is happening right now, and hence we don't know yet if it's leading to a reform (or a metamorphosis) in its deeper structures or not. Indeed, Collaborative Economy is provoking changes and new possible social patterns as we saw, i.e. at least clearly demonstrates that there are other ways we can address our needs – without depending so much on middlemen - and that economic transactions based in collaboration are possible with a potential unfolding in different shapes of work and community relationships.

Since we now live in a much more connected world and the common is facing a phase of “fenceless” boundaries, this lack of roots is requiring we take care of us. The idea of well defined communities seems to be dissolving and, for this reason, I believe our main challenge will be making the Collaborative Economy a way of collaborating care and affection, beyond the increased access to goods and services. This would, in fact, be a significant cultural shift. The massive scale of connectivity and the idea of a disruption with regulations and the middlemen mean that we will need a stronger mutual support, which demands a deep cultural reform – or on the other hand will boost it – towards a paradigm of the common.

Finally, another key factor we explored in this conception is the acceptance of uncertainty and the unknown. If we want to facilitate a new paradigm we need to be open for change and allow the creation of emptiness, where there is no imposed model (not even a *Commons-based model*), but ongoing collective dynamic decisions. There is no solutions as well as the common is about being and not having. If it's not meant to be, it should not happen. Being truthful is not containing truths; is about being meaningful with our actions and respectful with our difficulties. I didn't intent to bring any kind of truth here,

rather stimulate our curiosity in how we can create a better world together, more equal, fair and interdependent.

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