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Commons-based peer production and artistic expression: Two cases from Greece

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Vasilis Kostakis

Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia;
P2P Lab, Ioannina, Greece

Wolfgang Drechsler

Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia

Abstract

This essay narrates, from a creator-observation perspective, the production of two works of fiction, a book of short stories and a play, based on the principles and technologies of Commons-based peer production. This is potentially interesting from both the Commons-based peer production and the literary perspective. Even though both seem well-matched by their prima facie lack of profit orientation, Commons-based peer production case studies rarely deal with fiction, and regarding plays, artistic creativity is still mostly associated with one, maybe two authors. After tracing and analysing the Commons-based peer production phenomenon, the case studies show concretely the fate of the specific projects as well as how, nowadays, people can get involved in collaborative artistic projects inspired and catalysed by Commons-oriented principles and technologies.

Keywords

Arts, collaboration, commons, distributed creativity, literature, peer production, social web

Corresponding author:

Vasilis Kostakis, Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Akadeemia Street 3, 12618 Tallinn, Estonia.

Email: kostakis.b@gmail.com

Introduction

It has been a common assumption during the last decade or two that the world has been shifting towards information- and network-based structures, with information production in the fore (Castells, 2000, 2003). During the installation period of the current techno-economic paradigm, based on and led by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Perez, 2002), two parallel shifts have taken place: not only did the most economically advanced societies move towards information-based forms of economy, but the declining costs of ICT also made them available to a much wider part of the world population (Benkler, 2006). Yochai Benkler (2006) has argued that this has led to the creation of a new communicational, interconnected, virtual environment from which spawns a new social productive model, different from the typical industrial one. Benkler describes this new model, exemplified by the free/open source software (FOSS) projects or the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, as Commons-based peer production (CBPP), which reduces the value of proprietary strategies, making public, shared information more important, but also allows large-scale, co-operative, voluntary information production efforts (Benkler, 2006).

So far CBPP practices have been a subject to systematic research for productive fields of information such as software, news, knowledge and design. But can CBPP processes really be applied to artistic production? And if so, to what extent? This paper begins with a brief outline of the theoretical background concerning some fundamental characteristics of CBPP. Next, we present the case studies of *Matryoshka* and of *The man with the spotted tie*, two projects which wittingly tried to follow a CBPP approach in their development processes. We then discuss the results in relation to the potential of the adoption of CBPP in artistic production, concluding with recommendations for future research.

The emergence of CBPP¹

It has frequently been argued (Bauwens, 2005; Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Lessig, 2004) that culture is becoming more participatory and self-reflective, 'where many more of us participate actively in making cultural moves and finding meaning in the world around us' (Benkler, 2006: 15). Millions of blogs and media hubs, the open-access and open-content movements and the free dissemination of music, photography and literature via Commons-oriented licences provide an account of the 'free culture movement'. In this context, CBPP could be considered a new (proto) mode of production that has been enabled through Internet-based co-ordination where decisions arise from the free engagement and co-operation of the people, who coalesce to create common value without recourse to monetary compensation as a key motivating factor (Bauwens, 2005; Bauwens as cited in Orsi, 2009).

According to Benkler (2006), CBPP is a more productive system for informational value than the market-based or the 'bureaucratic-state' ones. It produces social happiness as it is based on intrinsic positive motivation and synergetic co-operation (Benkler, 2006; Hertel et al., 2003; Lakhani and Wolf, 2005). Benkler makes, amongst others, two intriguing economic observations which challenge some 'eternal truths' of so-called Standard Textbook Economics (STE). Commons-based projects serve as examples

where STE's assumption – today often theoretically softened but practically still ubiquitous – that in economic production, the human being seeks solely profit maximisation is fundamentally challenged. Volunteers contribute to information production projects, gaining knowledge, experience, reputation and communicating with each other, i.e. motivated by intrinsically positive incentives. This does not mean that the monetary motive is totally absent; however, it is relegated to being a peripheral concept only (Benkler, 2006). The second challenge comes against the conventional wisdom that, in Benkler's words (2006: 463), 'we have only two basic free transactional forms – property-based markets and hierarchically organized firms'. CBPP can be considered a third, and it should not be treated as an exception but rather as a widespread phenomenon, which, however, is still not counted in the economic census and the institutional design (Benkler, 2006). In STE terms, what is happening in CBPP can be considered, as Bauwens (2005) maintains, 'only in the sense that individuals are free to contribute, or take what they need, following their individual inclinations, with a (sic) invisible hand bringing it all together, but without any monetary mechanism'. Hence, in contrast to markets, in CBPP the allocation of resources is not done through a market-pricing mechanism, but hybrid modes of governance are exercised, and what is generated is not profit, but use value, i.e. a Commons (Bauwens, 2005).

Following Bauwens (2005, 2009) CBPP is based on practices which stand in contrast to those of the market-based business firm. Specifically, CBPP is opposed to industrial firms' hierarchical control, but is rather based on communal validation and negotiated co-ordination, as quality control is community-driven and conflicts are solved through an ongoing mediated dialogue. In addition, instead of the division of labour in CBPP, a distribution of modular tasks takes place with anyone able to contribute to any module while the threshold for participation is as low as possible. Further, CBPP is opposed to the for-profit orientation of market-driven projects, as CBPP projects have a for-benefit orientation, creating use value for their communities. Finally, it is opposed to the rivalry (scarcity of goods) through which market profit is generated, as sharing the created goods does not diminish the value of the good, but actually enhances it. The CBPP projects typically flourish in states of abundance, which is arguably a natural, inherent element of information in contrast to the conventional understanding of intellectual production (Kostakis, 2012). The latter, through the introduction of intellectual property (IP) in the form of strict patent and copyright law, constantly tries to artificially create scarcities in order to generate profit (Kostakis, 2012). IP supporters claim that it offers the necessary motives, i.e. the profit/revenue motive, for information production and innovation to occur. However, there is a vast amount of literature critical of the concept of IP (see for instance Bessen and Meurer, 2009; Boldrin and Levine, 2007; Burrell and Coleman, 2005; Lessig, 2004), maintaining that IP is actually a government grant leading to private monopolies which can be alarmingly dangerous for social innovation, culture and society, and calls for change in institutions and laws.

Information is a non-rival good with near zero marginal cost of reproduction and the public use of information increases its value creating several positive externalities (Benkler, 2006). The CBPP is facilitated by free, unconstrained and creative co-operation of communities, which lowers the legal restrictive barriers to such an exchange, inventing new institutionalised ways of sharing, such as the Creative Commons or the General

Public Licences (Kostakis, 2012). These new property forms allow for the social reproduction of peer projects, as they are viewed to be inherently more distributive than both state property and private exclusionary property (Bauwens, 2005; Lessig, 2004). In terms of property, the Commons is an idea radically different from both the state ('public') property, where the state manages a certain resource on behalf of the people, and the private property, where a private entity excludes the common use of it (Bauwens as cited in Kostakis, 2009). It is, however, important to highlight that the latter approach to property 'does not assert that sharing is an ethical absolute' (after all each is, or should be, free to choose what type of licence they will adopt). 'It warns us that copyright, patent and trademark maximalism can turn our technical systems into a Panopticon' (Mueller, 2010: 268).

It thus becomes obvious that what sets CBPP apart from the proprietary-based mode of production – the 'industrial one' (Benkler, 2006) – is its mode of governance and property, whose foundation stones are the abundance of resources, openness, communal ownership and the underestimated, from the STE theories, power of meaningful human co-operation that can deliver innovative, remarkable results, in contrast to the allegations for low quality (Keen, 2007; Lanier, 2010), such as the Apache web server, Mozilla Firefox browser, Linux kernel, BIND (the most widely used DNS software) or Sendmail (router of the majority of email). CBPP arguably carries some innovative aspects which create a political economy where economic efficiency, profit and competitiveness cease to be the sole guiding stars (Moore and Karatzogianni, 2009); where innovation is harnessed; and where civil society has a more fundamental role bringing the notion of mutual cooperation back into the very heart of economy (Orsi, 2009).

Such creative fields, with cooperation and intrinsic positive motivation as driving forces, are going to be discussed next in order to illustrate how artistic creative production is also possible through adopting some of the CBPP processes. Of course the two examined cases, in their current form, stand far from being considered real civil society projects (as might be the case for Wikipedia or FOSS). They were chosen, however, because both cases were premised on dispersed, asynchronous collaboration amongst creators with the aid of CBPP technologies. Moreover, as it becomes obvious when studying the evolution of the productive mode from the first case to the second, the former can become more and more participatory to the extent that it could be considered a civil society-oriented mode of production.

Case study: A chronicle of *Matryoshka*

From the back cover of the book:

Matryoshka is the traditional, wooden Russian doll-in-a-doll. While its pieces unfold, with every smaller piece revealed even darker secrets come to light. At the same time *Matryoshka* is the manifold work of thirteen people who have never met in person. Words, images and melodies are the facet of a country that decays and at every turn of the page it increasingly looks like our monochrome thoughts and deeds.

In late November 2011 the publishing house Voreiodytikis, based in Ioannina, Greece, with the support of the Athens-based music label Antelma Music published, under a

Creative Commons licence, a collaborative project named *Matryoshka* (Ματρίόσκα). The project, which includes a book accompanied by a CD, consists of literature (11 stories), music (eight original songs as the soundtrack of the book) and photography (11 photos related to each story). Thirteen individuals based in six cities and two countries – most of them had never met in person – collaborated via modern Internet-based technologies (email, wikis, survey tools and VoIP) to produce to project. Apart from photography, which was assigned to a single photographer/member, literature and music production was considerably based on open source tools and practices.

In January 2011 the instigator of the project, Vasilis Kostakis, with four collaborators of his assembled the core team. Then, each member could invite new contributors, with whom they might have a friendly relationship, to participate in the project on the basis of four principles set by the initial core team. First, all contributions would be openly subject to change and editing by all the community members, even the non-expert ones. This predicated that every member should be, or become, knowledgeable on using modern Internet-based technologies such as editing a wiki site. Second, the final product would be available under a Creative Commons licence enabling the widest dissemination of the work. Third, it was clearly stated that there would be no monetary exchange or reward concerning the input of each member. Fourth and last, every member would delegate Kostakis to speak with the publisher on behalf of the community. There was no formal acceptance of the aforementioned principles, rather an informal agreement through the email list created to support the coordination of the productive processes of the project. Every member could contribute a story which then went through collaborative editing and evaluation.

The concept is built on the semi-fictional character ‘El Roy’ who holds the protagonist role in the plot of the book. El Roy was the nickname of Kostakis in his two previous books published in 2008 and 2010. However that later came to embrace all the creative community as El Roy became the editor of *Matryoshka* and actually the real hero of the book. According to the storyline, El Roy has gathered 11 different writings (such as a letter, a note or a diary) from 11 different characters that he might have met or just heard of. Individuals living socially marginalised lives, such as (legal or illegal) immigrants or (literally or metaphorically speaking) inmates, narrate their peculiar and unheard stories through their personal writings before El Roy’s turn comes and the reader is led to catharsis. El Roy’s identity remains enigmatic before the last paragraph of the last story when the reader realises that El Roy shared a lot of characteristics with each of the 11 characters of the book. Each story consists of two parts: firstly, El Roy cites the manuscript of the main character of the story and then he sheds light on the unknown dimensions revealing to the reader how this piece of writing came into his possession and what had really transpired.

The aforementioned element made the collaborative writing of each story possible. Using wiki technology every member of the community could write the first part and Kostakis, following the vein of each story, would write the words of El Roy. Afterwards all the members would be invited to make corrections and comments in each story which was then uploaded on a wiki site intended for internal community use. It is important to highlight that firstly Kostakis wrote the story entitled ‘Ema’ along with its postscript note by El Roy. ‘Ema’ was emailed to everyone and served as a pattern for the stories that

ensued, helping the members have a better understanding of the concept that Kostakis had proposed. Moreover, 'Ema' was the first story that was also emailed to Yiannis Pliotas, the owner of Voreiodytikis publications, along with a covering letter explaining the plan of the manifold work that was to take place. Pliotas liked the concept and asked Kostakis to submit for review the final collection of stories to his publishing house once the literature part of the project was over. Then, in accordance with Voreiodytikis' view on the literature part, the two sides would further discuss about the music and photography.

Consensus regarding which story would be included in the project was reached with the use of LimeSurvey, an open source online survey tool. Community members were asked to rate each story in a scale of 1(exclude), 2 (good), 3 (very good) and 4 (great). Three out of 13 stories gathered at least one 'exclude' point and so the final consensus was reached after open discussions that took place via email amongst the core members. Two of them were finally rejected and, thus, 11 stories were submitted to the publisher for review in early April 2011. The main reason why the core team of the project decided to submit its manuscript to Voreiodytikis publications was because it is the only publishing house in Greece that publishes its books solely under Creative Commons licences. This means that the e-book is freely available for download and sharing whereas the physical copies can be found and bought for a price at bookstores. So, in early May, the publisher, Pliotas, informed Kostakis that the literature part of *Matryoshka* was accepted and scheduled for publication in November 2011. Moreover, Pliotas, after listening to two demo songs of the soundtrack music, agreed on releasing a CD attached to the back-cover of the book. However, the recordings should be managed and funded by the creative community of the project, as Voreiodytikis had no connection to or experience with music production.

By March 2011 most of the songs and melodies were already composed by two core members, Yiannis Karakatsanidis and Kostakis, and in April Akis Vaiou and Anthie Kyrkou offered input with lyrics and music respectively, as two new stories that had been submitted for community review at that time provided fresh inspiration. Recordings started in the middle of May 2011 and finished in late August of the same year. They took place in three different cities in Greece with each musician/member adding his/her input during the instrumentation and arrangement of the soundtrack. Quite often Kostakis and Karakatsanidis would email all the members some draft versions of the songs and everyone had their say in evaluating the progress of the pre-mastered recorded tracks as well as making suggestions. To get a better understanding of the recording process, it would be interesting to emphasise the fact that drums, bass, guitars and keyboards were recorded in Kilkis; the piano in Thessaloniki; and the vocals with some guitar riffs in Ioannina. Hundreds of digital files were exchanged via email while private and group discussions took place either via email, VoIP or phone in order to reach a consensus for the final track-list. In late August 2011 the final tracks were mixed and mastered in Ioannina.

At the same time, Kostakis reached Stathis Drogosis, owner of the music label Antelma Music which distributes the digital copies of its music under Creative Commons licences. Drogosis listened to *Matryoshka*'s demo soundtrack and agreed on distributing and promoting it under his music label. So the publisher came in contact with Drogosis

to arrange the details of their cooperation while Ilias Katsouras, based in Groningen, the Netherlands, was finishing the photography. Katsouras emailed approximately two pictures for each story and the community, along with the publisher, this time, reached a consensus about the final selection. In early October the pre-final digital version of the book was sent by the publisher to Kostakis who forwarded it to the common email list asking for swift feedback. Three members replied that they could immediately help in the refinement of the manuscript. Hence, Kostakis proposed that it would be better if the review took place in a linear way, i.e. the assigned reviewer A would send the first round reviewed document to reviewer B and so on until the final document reached Kostakis again. So, in five days the manuscript had gone under a thorough review process with members adding their detailed comments and even their input while making corrections to mistakes that the publishing house had failed to refine. Kostakis was the final editor before the reviewed manuscript was sent back to the publisher. Hence, in mid October the final version went to press while the CDs were on the production line. In November, the first 1000 copies were in Voreiodytikēs' storage ready to be distributed to bookstores and relevant retail shops.

Apart from the promotion strategy that was followed by the publishing house and the music label, the project community has been applying a distributive model of promotion. This means that each of the 13 members has been trying to promote *Matryoshka* via his/her network and to organise events in his/her city such as book presentations or live gigs. The latter has been very important in making the project sustainable, with regard to the expenses for music recording. Depending on the time and place of the event, the available members/musicians of the community would meet and perform live for the price of a ticket the songs of the *Matryoshka* soundtrack and others. During the gigs a video projector would project the photographs while copies of the book (including the CD) would be sold. This made the project sustainable and, after a while, lucrative, not considering the profits from the sold copies. Therefore, Kostakis asked the members how they thought the profits should be invested. It was unanimously agreed that the community should try to produce video clips for some of the songs.

At the time of writing (September 2013) four video clips have already been filmed in which five members held a key role while they invited new individuals to participate in the production, either as actors or assistants. No member of the community is professional, in terms of full-time author, musician, video producer, photographer or actor. In addition, it would be interesting to mention that many members of the community have still never met in person. Moreover, eight gigs have taken place in five different cities in Greece, and *Matryoshka* has been the most commercially successful project of Voreiodytikēs publications (interview with Pliotas, 2012). In a 13-month period more than 880 copies have been sold (interview with Pliotas, 2013) while, on average, 310 individuals on a monthly basis visit *matrioska.info*, the official website of the project. In addition, more than 1400 individuals have shared the *Matryoshka* website on Facebook and it can be claimed that thousands of people have read or downloaded the e-book and soundtrack online. It is, however, difficult to provide a precise estimate on the number of downloads since, apart from the official places (i.e. Voreiodytikēs' and Antelma's websites), over 15 different sites on the web (from torrent sites to open book platforms) offer the project (interview with Pliotas, 2012).

‘Taking into consideration the small size of the Greek literature market; the ongoing crisis; the increasing number of books (Greek and foreign) and publishing houses which create a field of fierce competition; the fact that our publishing house has not been around for more than a year and a half while it is based in a small city like Ioannina; and the public relations that one may have in order to be promoted by the mainstream media, I have to confess that *Matryoshka* has not still gotten the amount of attention it really deserves’, Pliotas, on one hand, argues. On the other, he maintains that ‘the qualitative originality of the project – which may be in itself an obstacle to promotion as it is a novel approach, context- and production-wise, to art – along with the use of zero cost promotion through social media has gained slowly increasing attention from asophisticated audience’. In addition, Pliotas claims that this audience ‘then spreads the word for us either through mouth-to-mouth practices or publishing enthusiastic critiques and articles about our project.’ One can find dozens of positive posts on alternative websites, magazines and papers with an interest in art. Moreover, in the cities where gigs are held the purchases and orders of the book quickly increase (interview with Pliotas, 2012). The experience of this collaborative form of artistic production – no matter how commercially successful it will finally be – made Kostakis commence another project in September 2011 which would adhere even more to CBPP principles. This concerns the collaborative writing of a theatrical play and is discussed in the next section.

Case study: A chronicle of *The man with the spotted tie*

From the back cover of the book:

Jacob Letherman, 33, single, has graduated from a famous business school and holds a MSc in Finance having been working for the last 9 years at the bank colossus Fabulous Life and Co ... [Its] offices are situated on the first 30 floors (of the total 110) of the building and Letherman’s office is on the 24th. 6 floors from the top of company’s hierarchy and 24 from the pavement. Early in the morning, just before the beginning of the working day, Letherman decides to commit suicide jumping from the 24th floor of this, have-to-say, glamorous skyscraper. Pedestrians and drivers are witnessing a man in suit with a strange spotted tie soaring 75 metres above the ground. For the first time in his life Jacob Letherman – who was in absolute despair a couple of minutes ago – feels so free and seems to enjoy the view. He is 75 metres above the ground and his fall begins: $t=0$ sec; $s=75$ m; $m(\text{Jacob Letherman})=78$ kg. And the floor: 24th. What is happening in Jacob Letherman’s mind?

The challenge with this artistic project was to collaboratively write a scenario for theatre adhering more to open source principles. What had become apparent, amongst others, from *Matryoshka* was the great importance of the role of coordinator/leader who would give, context-wise, coherence to the final form of the project, whether it was book or music. This importance was increasing as the project was becoming more complex including various aspects of artistic expression. This time it was decided to work on a less complex project, such as the collaborative writing of a theatrical play, which would allow for a more bottom-up mode of governance. Hence, the popular free encyclopaedia Wikipedia served as an example for the organisation and production process of this project. In early September 2011 Kostakis invited four members of the *Matryoshka* creative community to

take part in this new project: Akis Vaiou, based in Athens, who had written four stories in *Matryoshka*; Yiannis Farsaris, based in Creta, who had written one story and was the coordinator of *Matryoshka*'s community-driven mode of promotion; Yiannis Karakatsanidis, based in Polikastro, and Aristotelis Kalyvas, based in Ioannina, who both held crucial roles in the music side of *Matryoshka* now taking up the role of authors and editors. Agreement was reached and immediately a wiki site was built, in the fashion of Wikipedia, with the first paragraphs of the play written by Kostakis. It would be interesting to stress that during the writing of the play the five participants never met in person.

Another lesson taught from the examination of CBPP projects, such as Wikipedia and FOSS, and testified by the *Matryoshka* experience, was the importance of modularity in the design of the project. As has been stated for open source software production, modularity is crucial because without a modular design it becomes much more difficult to understand enough of a design in order to contribute to it, or develop new features and fix defects without affecting other parts of the system or product (MacCormack et al., 2007). Therefore, the plot of this play was determined to take place in several distinct chapters/floors. At this point it is necessary to elaborate on the storyline to offer a clear view of the project's modularity and subsequent development. To begin with, the play is a black comedy dealing with the suicide of the banker, Jacob Letherman. Early one morning, Letherman decides to commit suicide jumping from his office window situated on the 24th floor of his company's headquarters. The play attempts to investigate what is happening in the mind of the person who is committing suicide while he is falling – based on the assumption that while somebody is facing death, time distorts and seconds feel like hours. What if he regrets his decision and wants to live? What secrets of life are revealed when seeing (while falling) what is happening at each floor of the skyscraper? So, each floor (starting from the 23rd until the final scene when approaching the ground) stands for a new adventure in answering the questions posed in the beginning.

In early November (just two months after the initiation of the project) the play had a coherent storyline and it was unanimously decided to publish it as an e-book. Lengthwise approximately 70–80% was written by Kostakis, 10–15% by Farsaris and another 10–15% by the rest of the team. However, corrections and suggestions were made by everyone on an almost daily basis, in the style of editing a Wikipedia entry. In addition, Karakatsanidis composed and experimentally recorded three songs for the play. The e-book was published by OpenBook.gr owned by Farsaris, which is a publishing platform in Greece – with an average of 300 daily unique visits (interview with Farsaris, 2012) – that solely publishes e-books with an ISBN that are then freely distributed. 'El Roy + ABΓ' were the authors with ABΓ (the first three letters of the alphabet but also the first letters, in Greek, of the contributors' names) used as a play on words implying that everyone could contribute to future development of the scenario. Finally the e-book was published in March 2012 in order not to distract attention as *Matryoshka* had been published the previous November. On average, since its release on 4 March, every day it is downloaded 37.7 times from OpenBook.gr (interview with Farsaris, 2012). However, it is again difficult to calculate the times the play has been downloaded as it is available from several websites. The play was published under a modified Creative Commons licence which allowed not only for its sharing, reproduction and remix but also for its performance if the aims are not for-profit or are for the benefit of

non-government organisations with humanitarian activity. Regarding the latter possibility, any interested person is asked to get in contact with Kostakis who, once more, represents the creative team.

The goals with the first phase of the project, as agreed via email and VoIP discussions amongst the members of the team, were to publish the play as an unfinished artefact, as happens with all the CBPP projects (Bruns, 2008), in order to attract attention from directors and theatrical groups. Then, in a second phase, a wiki platform would be built where people could contribute their input creating different versions of the collaboratively created cultural artefact. In other words, the play would go totally open source following the Wikipedia pattern. At the time of writing, two professional theatrical directors from Athens and Ioannina are working on the play and a percentage of the profits from tickets will fund the recording of the music. They are going to perform the play in their respective cities in different time periods in 2013 (autumn) and in 2014 (winter) respectively. Also, an amateur theatrical team from Larissa has already performed the play in two cities (four performances in Larissa and one in Irakleion) with much success in the late spring of 2013 according to the director and actor, Anestis Damianidis (interview with Damianidis, 2013). Moreover, an Athens-based film-maker and producer is working with his team on a proposal for the adaptation of the play into a cinematic movie. It is expected that initiatives like the aforementioned will attract increasing attention that will enable the widest dissemination of the idea of Internet-aided collaborative writing and the open source approach to artistic expression, creating the necessary impetus for the second phase to start. For example, the play has been uploaded to the pilot platform called 'wikitheatre' – which has already received mainstream media attention after it went viral on social media sites – and is open to editing by anyone. In addition, the creative team has also recorded the first track of the play's soundtrack with the money received as an advance fee from the Athens-based professional theatre production company. Moreover, new, recently developed open source tools for co-ordination and online decision-making, such as Loomio, are being experimented with in the governance of a wikitheatre community and platform.

Discussion: CBPP as an alternative mode of artistic expression

Why should we talk about alternative production methods? Why do people seek out new and innovative ways to co-create? Is this happening because ICT has become cheaper? Is there something specific about the art world wherein people's interest in creation has an a priori range of alternative incentives? Is CBPP actually a workable alternative mode of artistic production? These are some of the questions that we attempt, in this section, to briefly address and provide with tentative answers, informed by the experience from the aforementioned cases.

It has been claimed that the idealised artistic production, which remains free from the pressures of both the market and hierarchical control, is an example of 'unalienated' work (Shorthose and Strange, 2004; Wittel, 2004). However, Böhm and Land (2009: 97), echoing De Angelis (2006), argue that 'capital and the state have an instrumental interest

in applying both “external” and “immanent” measures of value to culture and the arts in order to, first, capitalise on the cultural industries for continuous economic growth, and, second, use culture and the arts as instruments for social reproduction’. In addition, they (2009: 97) maintain that ‘in both of these ways, cultural and artistic labour needs to be understood as productive labour’ to suggest turning ‘our attention beyond the walls of the factory in order to understand the contemporary capitalist production of value and resistance to it’ (2009: 75).

While culture and artistic expression are applied ‘to form the social in the image of capital’ (Böhm and Land, 2009: 75), CBPP could arguably provide artists with tools and practices that empower the autonomy of cultural and artistic expression as well as enforce the social reproduction and the impact of Commons-oriented artistic projects. In the beginning of this paper, we referred to the democratisation of ICT which simultaneously reflects a change of attitude towards participation making culture more participatory and self-reflective. This change is arguably evident in the formation of new peer-to-peer relations (as observed in CBPP projects), while new forms of political and productive organisation are emerging (Bauwens, 2005; Benkler, 2006).

Both examined cases are (we choose here to use present tense since the theatrical play is still an ongoing project) premised on the collaboration of people who coalesce to create common value without profit as a key motivating factor. Hybrid modes of governance are exercised based on the onion model, an oft-cited depiction of the governance processes followed in CBPP projects (Nakakoji et al., 2002; Ye and Kishida, 2003). This means that at the heart of the onion is a single person, the project leader, who is, as in most of the CBPP projects, the initiator of the project. Also at the centre, supporting the project leader, there are the core members who have elevated authority compared to other project developers, having been involved for a lengthier period of time and who have made serious contributions. For instance, in the theatrical play project, the initial writers, who had cooperated also in *Matryoshka*, tend to have more authority than new members. Stadler’s (2008) view on the leadership in CBPP projects is in line with our case studies where leadership is not egalitarian, but meritocratic. This implies that ‘everyone is free, indeed, to propose a contribution, but the people who run the project are equally free to reject the contribution outright’. The core task of managing a Commons, like the content of the discussed projects, is ‘to ensure not just the production of resources, but also to prevent its degradation from the addition of low quality material’ (Stadler, 2008).

Further, as discussed in both cases’ chronicles, a distribution of modular tasks (i.e. composing and recording music, writing, promoting, negotiating, taking photos, video-recording, website creation and administration, etc.) takes place based on free, permission-less cooperation and engagement. This modularity is of crucial importance not only for the coherence of the project but also for allowing anyone to contribute to any module while the threshold for participation is kept as low as possible. Although it is attempted to follow O’Neil’s (2009) advice for supporting maximum autonomy for participants enabling communal validation and negotiated coordination with a community-driven quality control, sometimes decisions have to be made in short time; and thus, a benevolent dictatorship is exercised, as is common in CBPP (Kostakis, 2010; Malcolm, 2008).

For instance, these can be found in the Linux project, where Linus Torvalds is the benevolent dictator (Malcolm, 2008) or in Wikipedia, where Jimmy Wales holds that role (Kostakis, 2010). Coffin (2006) highlights the necessity for a benevolent dictator (who typically is one of the founders of the project), maintaining that the foundation developers and the early adopters set the project ethos as well. If these benevolent dictators (Bruns in Kostakis, 2010) abuse their power, their leadership becomes malicious and a substantial exodus of community members often occurs. These members, however, due to the low marginal costs of information, are free to fork the Commons-based peer produced information and start their own project, if they wish. For instance, in *Matryoshka*, the instigator of the project, when negotiating with the publisher or the music label, followed the consensus of community, as subjectively interpreted, and often had to improvise and take initiatives which might have provoked disagreements later on.

Another aspect of CBPP in arts that should be stressed is the sharing ethos which does not diminish the value of the shared good, but actually enhances it, creating several positive externalities. For instance, Matarasso (1997) notes that participation in the arts could have a positive impact on the development of several skills such as language skills, social skills, creativity and imagination. Moreover, echoing Böhm and Land (2009), artistic CBBP projects could arguably facilitate social inclusion by bringing in the disengaged, i.e. those who find themselves outside of mainstream society.

But why do we need to say goodbye to traditional forms of artistic creation? In fact, we don't and won't need to – either in the near or even further future; but, as this paper argues, alternative forms of production are emerging, they are being taken up in artistic creation, and, last but not least, they work or at least can work. With substantive, indeed massive techno-economic changes appearing in our world, most things will eventually change in line with them or at least adapt somehow (Perez, 2002). Art and artistic creation especially will not drag its heels, but will, as we see, take up the challenge and the opportunity very swiftly, reflecting and reacting to these changes, oxymoronically linking both direct, temporal appeal and the almost timeless immediacy of art, including novels and theatre (see Gadamer, 1987).

Conclusions

Apart from the 19th century legacies of the 'heroic creator' that may still make many in the literary world automatically ill-disposed towards the collective production of art – even 'production' may be a pejorative word in this context – can CBPP really lead to serious results, rather than haphazard experimentations and fashionable embarrassments? Is there a business model in the non-business framework of the Commons base? Will presses and publishers 'buy in'; will people buy or at least watch, read, listen, download? These are the initial questions when we accost the still-new and still-disruptive world of CBPP in artistic creation, especially in traditional genres such as plays and books (rather than in, say, concept or performance art). Trying to answer the questions may result in the kind of potentially fruitful discourse that is much needed by both 'sides', literature and CBPP.

What these case studies, limited though they naturally are, may show – although we say this from the creator's point of view – is that the answer to all these questions is, or

at least has been in our case and therefore principally can be, a ‘yes’. We can use CBPP for artistic production that works, that is successful, for all stakeholders – the creators, the promoters and distributors, and the audience – because in our cases, their expectations, their wants were at least fulfilled and perhaps, we hope, exceeded. Maybe – we would say probably – this was even more the case than in a traditional framework, precisely because CBPP and artistic creation are not primarily geared towards the maximisation of personal financial profit, and thus do form a logical match. Whether this is ‘the future’ of artistic creation remains to be seen, but it is a highly probable future, we think, given the possibilities and constraints we are facing – and, as we have seen, a viable form of the present already as well.

The current study has some characteristics of design that may influence the application, the generalisability and the interpretation of the argument. Some parts of the data and the descriptions provided are self-reported and therefore – although we have tried to the best of our abilities to avoid such dangers – selective memory, telescoping, problems in attribution, bias and exaggeration might have influenced this paper’s narrative. However, in a field where there is lack of available case studies and relevant documentation, we hope that this paper would take part in a creative discussion about collaborative arts and their role in socialisation, self-expression, communication and learning.

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Note

1. This section is based on Kostakis’ (2013: 176–179) review of Commons-based peer production.

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Author biographies

Vasilis Kostakis is the founder of the P2P Lab as well as a research fellow at the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology. Also he has served as an author and a musician.

Wolfgang Drechsler is professor and chair of governance at the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology.