

CHAPTER 6

Building a Collaborative Community Economy: The Case of La Comunicadora

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Abstract

This chapter reflects on the role of accelerator programmes and entrepreneurship training in fostering the emergence of collaborative economy projects. More specifically it interrogates the mechanisms enabling a process usually criticised for (re)producing capitalism to produce other understandings and practices of the economy. It uses the example of Barcelona's La Comunicadora accelerator program. Instead of reinforcing capitalist understandings of the economy and a model of entrepreneurship tied to it, it can be the site of producing a diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 2006), thanks to a politics of language, of the subject and of collective action. Through the values conveyed by the teaching team, participants can resignify and reappropriate a series of notions, such as community. This reframing process is also that of themselves as an ongoing process. Nonetheless, resistances and non-recognitions of the framework presented to the participants, coupled to the precarious conditions of existence of the programme, limit the possibility of transformation of the

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individuals and of the projects. There is no singular outcome but rather a variety of paths taken.

Introduction

How do collaborative economy projects take shape and what type of collaborative economy do they end up embodying? As pointed out by Acquier et al. (2017), the collaborative economy – or sharing economy – is a contested umbrella construct at the intersection of three cores: the access economy, the platform economy and the community-based economy. All three have different, or even contradictory, promises and potentials. This leads to possible tensions, namely between ideals of empowerment, emancipation, decentralization, solidarity and social change and practices of value extraction and capture via capitalist markets.

Research on the collaborative economy has been carried out mostly on platforms and projects themselves, their potentials and impacts. In the course of the past few years, titles of academic papers on the collaborative economy, also known as the ‘sharing economy’, went from the approach ‘sharing economy: a potential pathway to sustainability’ (Heinrichs 2013) to ‘the sharing economy: a pathway to sustainability or a nightmarish form of neoliberal capitalism?’ (Martin 2016), to ‘When the sharing economy becomes neoliberalism on steroids’ (Murillo, Buckland & Val 2017). As revealed by this quick change in perspective, what was at first conceived – or at least marketed in the context of the 2008 systemic crisis – as an alternative solution to neoliberal markets, with many expectations regarding potential environmental, economic and social benefits, has turned out quite differently. ‘Sharing economy’ platforms have gradually challenged traditional sectors, public authorities and local communities. Studies have shown how platforms, such as Airbnb or Uber, are putting more pressure on already strained resources and infrastructures, (Cocola-Gant 2016), contributing to labour precariousness (Hill 2015) and being a further driver of inequality, such as perpetuating racial and gender biases (Ge et al. 2016; Edelman, Luca & Svirsky 2017; Schor et al. 2016; van Doorn 2017) or increasing earning inequalities within the 80% (Schor 2017).

To counteract this phenomenon and reconnect with some initial ideals of the collaborative economy, other models, such as platform cooperativism and open cooperativism, have emerged to put forth counter-hegemonic values and ways of doing. Platform cooperatives would combine collective ownership and decision-making, protection of workers, decent pay and security of income, transparency and portability of data (Scholz 2016). Workers would own, govern and operate such platforms. Open cooperativism promotes synergies between the commons-based peer production movement and the cooperative and solidarity economy movements, through multi-constituent governance, with active production of commons and a transnational orientation (Paizaitis et al. 2017).

Such movements have at times benefited from political support, leading to increased resources to help foster emergent projects adhering to these values. At a local level, the city of Barcelona has been a prime example. The 2015 elections of Barcelona en Comú to the city hall propelled a new municipalist agenda of prefigurative politics (Rubio-Pueyo 2017; Russell 2019). This was reflected in its increased promotion of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) and the commons, both with a long tradition in Catalonia. This interest was extended to the collaborative economy and platforms, as the city was a battleground between residents, social movements and some platforms, such as Airbnb, Uber or Glovo. A co-creation process was designed that ultimately led to a series of commons-oriented collaborative economy policy recommendations (Fuster Morell & Senabre 2020). To study such models and make further recommendations, a local working group, BarCola, was created in 2016. It included academics, entrepreneurs and collectives from the SSE, the sharing economy or the commons and the local and regional public administration (Rodríguez Rivera & Fuster Morell 2018). Following on BarCola's activities, in March 2016 the city hosted Procomuns, the first encounter of the Commons Sharing Economies. 300 people gathered in 90 sessions and 30 talks to elaborate a Commons Declaration and 120 proposals for a commons-oriented sharing economy. The proposals were then posted on Decidim – a citizen participation platform – to craft the 2016 municipal action plan. Some of the proposals asked for training in socio-economic innovation and technological sovereignty for collaborative economy projects, through Barcelona Activa, the city's economic development agency. The “accelerator” training programme La Comunicadora was born.

Little is known about start-up training, notably accelerators, used by or dedicated to collaborative economy projects, despite their impact. Seed accelerators can be defined as ‘a fixed-term, cohort-based program, including mentorship and educational components, that culminates in a public pitch event or demo-day’ (Cohen & Hochberg 2014: 4). Airbnb is one of the most well-known alumni of Y Combinator, the prestigious start-up accelerator. Entrepreneurship training is a key step to understand how these projects are shaped in their early days and how this will mark their evolution. Accelerators aim at helping projects define their product, identify potential customers, secure resources and ‘speed up market interactions in order to help nascent ventures adapt quickly and learn’ (Cohen & Hochberg 2014: 10).

Beyond the mere access to resources, entrepreneurship training is also a site of producing ideals of entrepreneurship (Parkkari 2015), which reproduce and reinforce capital (Costa & Saraiva, 2012). For Parkkari (2015), accelerators socialize and discipline participants to perform entrepreneurship through pitching, to think big in terms of international projection and profitability, and to become lean tech start-ups. How then can entrepreneurship training, such as an accelerator, be the site of producing counter-hegemonic understandings of the economy and society? How can an accelerator such as La Comunicadora

foster the emergence of collaborative economy projects adopting values and practices around empowerment, decentralization and social change and rejecting extractive practices? In this chapter, I will argue that the ideals and practices conveyed under the guise of entrepreneurship training depend on the values and framework adopted by the teaching team. Instead of reinforcing capitalocentric discourses, it can be the site of destabilization of the ‘economy’ by producing other understandings of what a diverse economy can be like (Gibson-Graham 2006), as can be seen through the case of La Comunicadora. Accelerators can thus play a key role in orientating projects towards specific framings of the collaborative economy over others.

La Comunicadora

I carried out this study while doing an ethnography of the third edition of La Comunicadora between November 2018 and April 2019. I did participant observation during the initial sessions of presentation and recruitment for the programme, the bi-weekly training sessions with the project holders and instructors and some sessions between project holders and their tutors. I had informal chats with project holders and instructors during the breaks, or before or after the sessions. This was complemented with 18 in-depth interviews with project holders from the first and second editions of the programme and the supervising team from Barcelona Activa. In an effort to triangulate multiple data sources, the interviews and fieldwork were combined with the analysis of notes and content produced by the participants in each session through Teixidora.net, a collaborative documentation tool.

Held in 2018–2019, the third edition of La Comunicadora gathered an initial cohort of 11 heterogeneous projects. The programme brought together a diversity of profiles, with varying degrees of familiarization with the framework of the SSE, the commons and collaborative economy. Projects too were heterogeneous, at different stages of their development – from idea to operating – and spanning sectors, which was actively sought after by the team. The heterogeneity in how familiar they are with these frameworks is related to how projects were informed of the programme. Some were oriented by advisors from *Barcelona Activa* towards the programme, and usually had less prior knowledge than those who heard of the programme directly from the teaching team. Projects were then selected through an application process, graded by the teaching team, Barcelona Activa’s staff and some members from BarCola. The six-month programme offered bi-weekly classes and workshops. Each selected project was followed by a tutor and benefited from personalized mentorship to respond to the project’s specific needs.

The teaching team is made of members of organizations directly involved in free/libre software, open and free knowledge and the SSE. Composed of members of femProcomuns and LabCoop, both cooperatives, the core of the

organizing team, who won the public tender from Barcelona Activa, was part of the aforementioned BarCola group and Procomuns event. Their vision is directly informed by their professional and activist trajectory. Monica Garriga Miret and David Gómez Fontanills have co-founded femProcomuns. Monica is trained in law and communication, has been a foreign correspondent and developed several open knowledge projects. David has long been a digital commons activist, defending open knowledge notably in the Catalan Wikipedia chapter and in participatory art projects. He has also researched online collective creation. Wouter Tebbens, of the Free Knowledge Institute, is an industrial engineer with 20 years experience in free/libre software, open and free knowledge and commons-cooperative sustainability models. Guernica Facundo Vericat is trained as an economist and is a specialist of the social and solidarity economy; she co-founded LabCoop a cooperative of cooperatives dedicated to foster the creation of new cooperatives. Other instructors are members of LabCoop or come from other cooperatives, with complementary skills regarding emotions and communication or legal forms, for instance.

La Comunicadora presents several key differences from typical accelerators. First, it neither offers funding nor takes an equity stake. Second, the pace is much slower. It does not demand a seven-day-a-week commitment during its duration, with few assignments. Lastly, the day of final presentations leads to no award or reward. Projects arrive in La Comunicadora with a disposition to change and to produce change. Starting the programme means openness to the ideas and framework that will be developed. Nonetheless, it does not presume the actual effects. Participants do not see themselves as lacking; they are not characterized by hostility or powerlessness, as in the participants of Gibson-Graham's action research projects (2006), but are seen as having the capabilities to initiate an entrepreneurial project. Part of the work is already done when they arrive in the programme. Despite being receptive to change and connectedness, it is not a straightforward process. Language, subjectivity and collective action are all challenged and reconfigured during the length of the programme.

Building a Community Economy: A Politics of Language

To help foster counter-hegemonic projects, the teaching team develops a theoretical framework and sets of practice based on a reframing of the economy around the community. Gibson-Graham's *Post-Capitalist Politics* (2006) provides a useful framework to approach their work. The first step of such a project is to denaturalize the 'economy', as something that can be transformed instead of taken for granted. Imagining a different 'economy' takes into account the specific geographical contexts and historical path-dependencies shaping it rather than seeing it as something governing society (p. 53–54). This entails 'deconstructing the dominant capitalocentric discourse of economy' (p. 56) and 'dislocating the economy' to 'liberate these alternative languages

[of economic difference] from their discursive subordination' (p. 57). Through a language politics that expands the economic vocabulary, it 'widen[s] the identity of the economy to include all of those practices excluded or marginalized by a strong theory of capitalism' (p. 60). To resocialize economic relations, Gibson-Graham points to a community economy to articulate economic interdependence, where 'economic decisions are made in the light of ethical discussions' (p. 80), on necessity, surplus, consumption and the commons as coordinates.

La Comunicadora attempts to liberate these languages of economic difference by denaturalizing the collaborative economy and the platform economy. It attempts to reframe values attached to them, resignify key notions such as community and the cooperative and introduce and normalize notions unfamiliar to many participants, such as commons and open knowledge. To do so, the teaching team elaborated their own situated framework drawing from international and Catalan academics and activist-scholars on the commons and the social market, putting the community at the centre.

The first session of the course is a three-hour session introducing the framework for the rest of the course around some key notions: the commons and the hybrid sustainability model around which they developed. It starts with a macro lens to denaturalize the economy: asking what the economy is for – to satisfy the needs of people – and who can fill this role – the state, the market and/or the commons, the most unfamiliar possibility for the participants. They then approach the commons from two perspectives. First the historical one of Elinor Ostrom (1990), of the resources shared by a community with a governance model of norms and regulations, situating it in the Catalan and Spanish context. Second, the one of digital commons, its replicability and unlimitedness and where relations are open and free, through the work of Yochai Benkler (2006). Its presentation of collaborative economies almost feels like reading a paper's state of the art on the topic: it traces its current understanding to the beginning of collaborative consumption and the work of Botsman & Rogers (2010) to popularize the notion. It then scales up through start-ups, unicorns and giants like Amazon, Airbnb, Uber or Deliveroo. They are not just presented as platforms but reframed as 'extractive' platforms pursuing the maximization of profits with the associated negative impacts on local economies or working rights, triggering the emergence of protests and social movements. This discursive destabilization provokes surprise and questioning, creating an affective disposition for participants to recognize what they took for granted: platforms either as neutral or as beneficial. They can then reframe them, taking into account a new paradigm allowing for a plurality of models:

[the platforms of] ... like 'platform capitalism.' They say they are collaborative and all of a sudden we discover that, wait! They aren't all collaborative, far from it. There are the unicorns ... we learnt the nuances that exist, that is ... the differences [between models]. All that is sold as [collaborative] isn't collaborative, nor social. (Manuel, participant of the first edition)

The teaching team then presents possible answers. One is the revitalization of practices of community management, such as the urban commons or time-banks, and of the SSE and the social market. Other activists offer new notions, such as platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2016), centred for them on shared ownership and decision-making of the platform and protocols, or open cooperativism (Bauwens & Kostakis 2014; Conaty & Bollier 2014), with a focus on the commons. They conclude on their own hybrid model between the commons and the social market they elaborated: that of ‘commons sustainability’. At the centre is the community and its needs, around which are the pillars of governance, income and resources, modes of production and, last, knowledge sharing. Each pillar is then developed in following theoretical and practical sessions. Through this, participants are familiarized or reaffirmed with other ethical coordinates and normative values to guide their projects:

There are the principles of the interests of a specific community or an association or a group of people that gather to cooperate, they create cooperatives, with the basic principles, with a governance. I learnt all of that more in detail in La Comunicadora. That its only purpose shouldn't be profit, although it can be influenced by it but there is a series of values ... the sustainability, environmental and social aspects. And gender equality ... democracy, decision-making and the governance in those companies. And open knowledge and software, that is the data and the code understood as another instance of the common goods and services or resources of the entire community, right? It used to be water and land, well now it's also data. (Manuel, participant of the first edition)

The model they offer breaks from the most common conception of (digital) ‘entrepreneurship’ as something born by a visionary individual, centred on monetization and a business model. The centrality of community is derived from the adopted definition of the commons: that of a shared resource, around which a community is constituted to govern it. It is the collective, rather than the individual founder(s), that should decide what the initiative should be about and how to operationalize it around a model of sustainability rather than a business model, around different possibilities for labour, exchange and enterprise. Nonetheless, they find various challenges along the way regarding language. The notion of ‘community’ needs constant reframing during the programme, given the fuzziness of the term.

During a workshop session, projects were invited to reflect on their models of income, contributions and resources to share to be sustainable:

Teacher: You have used the words ‘client’ and ‘community’, those are two different things.

Participant 1: They are the same for me?

Teacher: The client is not the community. Marketing makes us misuse concepts.

Participant 2: It's a subtle difference; you are a client of SomEnergia.

Teacher: Before being a client, you are a member, you need a 'godfather' [someone who can introduce you to the community]. A community is not a bunch of clients. It matters to know to what extent we are willing to hack the classical model of selling a service or use a community one, centred on the commons, where there's a shared resource. (La Comunicadora, 10 January 2019)

The teacher tries to signify the notion of community away from its capitalist co-optation as mere client. Gibson-Graham (2006) points to some of the problems of community as a notion. Its uses across the political spectrum, and specifically its neoliberal co-optation, give a sense of common being, that of unity, immediacy and mutual identification, and obscure difference, mediation, negotiation and becoming together, at the heart of a community. Gibson-Graham sees the community as an ethical space of decision, which transpires from the comment of the teacher in their idea of 'member', of an active participant who co-decides how to produce and sustain the commons.

The later sessions dedicated to each pillar allow some concepts to be normalized, notably to resignify the cooperative and to introduce open knowledge and licences. The sessions on governance present all possible legal forms the project can adopt in Catalonia. They dedicate a lot of attention to cooperatives, a model sometimes unknown or with bad connotations for participants:

I had a prejudice against the social and solidarity economy. This prejudice may have come from because I have been living in Barcelona since 2010 and the three regions where I've lived are very different socially. So the solidarity economy in Andalucía, which is my previous reference, is very linked – and now I see it positively, before I didn't – to the agricultural world, to agricultural cooperativism, to some values that are against modernity I know they are against capitalism, against neoliberalism but they are also very anti-modern depending on the cases ... it goes against my individual values. So what happened? When I got here [to La Comunicadora], the values of the social and solidarity economy, to which I didn't give a name, got more linked to civic values, which are more transversal than this difference between city and countryside ... That is fraternity, equality, etc. and if I consider how I feel as a cosmopolitan person ... they don't trigger, let's say, a cultural rejection like it did in Andalucía. (Juan, participant of the second edition)

The sessions allowed him to overcome his prejudice, by resignifying the values associated with cooperatives and more generally the SSE, thus making them compatible with his own ethical compass. Rather than being viewed as a rejection of modernity, the city, cooperatives are resignified positively, as promoting desirable values. Juan is not the only one who overcame his prejudices:

others acknowledged how their own lack of knowledge enabled them to project and generalize gossip, discrediting cooperatives. La Comunicadora allowed normalizing of cooperatives by presenting the possibilities and constraints of this legal form, on an equal footing with more familiar ones:

Some ignorance, so, you only remember things you heard about some cooperatives ... about scams, frauds, and so on. Those things. So you think ‘alright, it’s a world ...’ Basically like any other, because it’s an obscure world if you don’t know it. So, after seeing it [in the programme] you see that ultimately between a cooperative and a Ltd there is no difference. That is, both have a governance, both ... they have different ways [of doing so]. They are, like everything is very typified, very legalized, what you can do in both cases, right? It’s not how it looks from the outside; it looks like everything is very hippie, like ‘ah! Alright’. But ultimately it isn’t really like that, right? So it’s the ignorance of this world, both entrepreneurial and cooperative that I wasn’t interested in. Because of La Comunicadora, well, you learn about the different forms that are out there. (Cesc, participant of the second edition)

Self-Transformation, Together: A Politics of the Subject

Another important step according to Gibson-Graham (2006) is building a politics of the subject, that is a process that goes beyond discourse to take into account the bodily experience and how the self and the world shape each other (p. 127). This process of self-transformation to ‘reframe identities and capacities of individuals’ (p. 144) is ‘not an easy or sudden one. It is not so much about seeing and knowing as it is about feeling and doing’ (p. 152). As we have seen previously, the discursive destabilization and ensuing resistance and non-recognition and the reframing of some notions are first steps in the process of self-transformation. The adoption of this new and resignified language of economic diversity can then lead to producing positive affect and creating spaces of identification and ethical openings to commonality. The cultivation of the self as subject of freedom entails ‘self-believing in our economic capacities, [being] responsible to our political abilities, conscious of our potential to become something other than what we heretofore have “chosen” to be’ (p. 169).

As seen previously, participants arrive at La Comunicadora with a disposition to change but much of the work is still ahead. This transformation is not only that of reframing economic notions and stopping seeing oneself as lacking, but also that of affirming one’s vision and acting upon it. By accessing a new vocabulary or deepening one’s understanding, participants can start naming things, giving them a sense of possible connection and relevance:

We got empowered to speak of urban nature as a common good. We sensed it but didn’t get there. (Mireia, participant of the second edition)

This self-transformation is also that of recognizing and acknowledging our interdependence, rather than just transforming into an enterprising self. It is less about responsabilization of one's employability, successes and failures and looking for constant self-optimization as can be taught in entrepreneurship programmes (Berglund 2013) and more about realizing one's agency, and one's need for and impact on the collective. During La Comunicadora they learn about many open source or local alternatives to dominant Silicon Valley platforms. They start realizing that through consumption, their choices affect others, by allocating demand, money or power towards companies whose values they may or not be aligned with. These decisions affect both what and whom they choose and do not choose. Are they helping to relocalize the economy? Are they impacting their health?, and so on. This leads to reassessing their consumption habits and making some adjustments, starting with the platforms they use:

Instead of Google, we use Ecosia [for searching the web]. Well, those changes are not ... Well I did change phone companies, I got Som Connexió ... well, giving up on those big companies and seeing there are alternatives. That was also useful in La Comunicadora, to see that everything isn't La Caixa and Google. There are more options. But people don't know them. But they exist. (Carla, participant of the second edition)

This ethics of decision can start pervading all types of significant choices, and help assess who will be benefiting from them. Prioritizing certain types of enterprises, like cooperatives over large for-profit companies, can become a new norm.

I took it into account for impactful decisions, at an individual level, a family level, a community level, at school. Things that I didn't use to value. If the school's kitchen could be run by a small cooperative rather than a big conglomerate producing 15,000 menus that have nothing to do with the territory. Situations in which I support these kinds of decisions, when other people question them. Five or six years ago, I wouldn't have done that. (Juan, participant of the second edition)

This acknowledgement of one's impact in the world is also the acknowledgement and affirmation of one's value, and the value of one's labour.

Having it clear that you shouldn't work for free. That was something they told us at La Comunicadora ... It's not because you do something for the common good and let's say, something with ethical values and taking into account people, which it has to be free. That's a false concept that at times we had internalized, saying, 'If you do something for the community, it has to be for free'. No, it can also be a way of life, not a capitalist way of life looking to maximize profit, but to live with dignity. (Carla, participant of the second edition)

Ultimately La Comunicadora acts as a catalyst rather than a trigger of a larger process of redefinition of one's life choices. By affirming one's vision and value, by reintroducing an ethics of decision, participants become ready to make some significant professional changes.

I have to say, when I started La Comunicadora, I was working as a freelancer in an architecture firm that was governed by a sexist, abusive architect. And participating also in La Comunicadora ... empowered me to say, 'I'm resigning from this job which doesn't satisfy me'; I realized I was a grey person, that I was living in automatic mode, that I was a grey professional basically. So I resigned and created my own business: 'Now I am going to do things the way I think they should be done and how I really decide', looking for this alignment with those values ... I said 'I will not feed this system anymore'. (Carla, participant of the second edition)

Rather than a goal achieved once and for all, such as becoming an active maker or being empowered to act, self-transformation should be seen as a permanent process, as a journey rather than a destination. It consists not only of reframing the existing, such as capabilities and skills, in a positive light, but also of allowing one to critically assess oneself and consider if one's many life choices reflect one's values.

This process of self-affirmation can sometimes be at odds with the adoption of the new framework and vocabulary. The teaching team can at times place this process of taking action above the fit of the work. During one session, participants, rather than the team, were invited to elaborate presentations and materials to teach some of their own skills to the other projects, while adapting them to the framework of the course. They covered social media skills, brand identity, facilitation, etc. Rather than adopting the participative workshop-like method of the programme, one presentation was a PowerPoint presentation explaining the basics of using social media without recalibrating with the tools and frames of the programme. After that session, one teacher told me: 'That presentation was really not a good fit, she didn't understand what we were aiming at, but what matters is that she got empowered, she got to present and speak to an audience.'

This transformation of the self, this acknowledgement of one's interdependency and affirmation of one's values, can then lead to the transformation of the projects. By giving examples of active projects from prior editions, such as Som Mobilitat¹ or Katuma,² the team shows it is feasible here and now, it is already being done. This can translate into changes of the projects. This shift is partially reflected in projects changing their name during the programme, either

¹ A Catalan electric car sharing platform cooperative.

² The Catalan version of open source platform Open Food network to connect food producers with consumer groups.

by clearly identifying them as a cooperative or to the SSE (by using ‘coop’, or ‘ESS’ in the name) or as part of a Catalan cooperative identity, emphasizing the collective (*som*, i.e. “we are”; *fem*, i.e. “we make”). It can translate into their legal status. SomAtents, a not-for-profit collective of journalists producing online media, had been considering becoming a cooperative and decided to effectively do so during La Comunicadora. They stopped viewing their readers only in monetary terms as customers–consumers. They started realizing instead the potential for participation, to view them as members of a community in which they can decide, be prescribers of the project. Adopting open licences can be more complicated. In a previous edition, the teaching team had many disagreements with a couriers’ cooperative that did not want to adopt open software.

Transforming the World Together: A Politics of Collective Action

As Gibson-Graham (2006) put it, collective action aims at creating a community economy, based on what the collective will identify and debate as its needs, resources and skills.

The community economy is an acknowledged space of social interdependency and self-formation. Anything but a blueprint, it is an unmapped and uncertain terrain that calls forth exploratory conversation and political/ethical acts of decision. (p. 166)

La Comunicadora is a site where, through self-transformation, the individual or organization can shift its priorities by acknowledging the role of the collective:

A very strong feeling that things can be done collectively and that the world of economy isn’t only ‘free entrepreneurs’. But at times it’s the creation of a community that really matters. (Quim, participant of the first edition)

Unlike conventional demands on entrepreneurship, this change can entail slowing the pace of the project. Project leaders can take a step backwards and reorient priorities to build a community and enable collective discussion and negotiation. This is reflected in the evolution of TextilESS, a project led by a foundation to help local seamstresses order larger amounts of materials. During the last session with their tutor and a worker from Barcelona Activa, to review their progress during the programme and map the next steps, the project team, made up of workers from a foundation, shared that they had stopped seeing themselves as an economic agent that wants to sell a project. On the contrary, they were finishing the training with the intention to foster a community around a product generated and sold collectively. They saw themselves no longer as the driving team of the project, but rather as facilitators, as another beneficiary.

Collective action is at the centre of the programme. Whether it is the initiative itself with collective rather than individual entrepreneurship, the group exercises, or the invitation for projects to think of ways of working together and the potential collaborations with projects of the social market, working with others is the norm. Initially the team tries to advocate for projects with a similar aim to merge, or at least build bridges, but the ideals behind the projects may not match despite an apparently similar end product. This happened with two projects of platforms to help parents build a support network in their neighbourhood. One project was meant only for single mothers, wanting to create a safe space for them and with some defiance of other family configurations, while the other one wanted to include any kind of family configuration, emphasizing the potential support over the type of family. The leader of the second project, Sara, ended up collaborating with a different project, that of an app to help families hire carers. The collaboration was built on sharing skills: Sara, a UX designer for apps, could help Ferran build the technical platform, and use this first experience for her own project. It was during the informal moments, the coffee breaks, that they got to know each other and slowly built the trust needed to volunteer to help the other.

Beyond the programme, collective action is also enacted through cooptation into the SSE sector in Barcelona and inter-cooperation. The project tutors and different experts helping orient the projects are key to find support after the end of the training and provide a safety net as trustworthy interlocutors:

The first mentors we had in each area, like in communications, in finance and accounting, are the ones who, to this day, are still supporting us professionally in the project. Of course, bonds are somehow created that help you keep going and evolve your idea in the way you have been working it in La Comunicadora and this is really important. That you don't feel once the programme is over that you are alone again. (Laila, Participant of the second edition)

Nonetheless, collective action within La Comunicadora was constrained by precarious conditions of existence and limited resources granted by the public institution. Until its last edition in 2021, the contract was subjected to a yearly tender the team had to win again, with the date of publication changing. The teaching team was uncertain if the programme will be renewed and when it would be published every year. They had no budget to publicize it and usually had to rely in a short space of time on their personal network and social media contacts to help reach out to potential participants.

The programme had to face the expectations of the participants, which differ depending on their previous knowledge and the level of advancement of the project. The initial content was too theoretical and lacked practical aspects according to some projects, which expected a more classical accelerator programme. Given the limited time – three to six months depending on the edition – it may be too much content too quickly for those more unfamiliar

with the concepts, while for others it was not enough. Finding a middle ground for the teaching team proves challenging and leads them to personalize the content more and more to fit each project.

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that La Comunicadora, a training programme for commons-oriented collaborative economy projects, can be a site for a diverse politics of economy. Rather than reinforcing capitalist understandings of the economy and a model of entrepreneurship tied to it, it enables a politics of language, of the subject and of collective action to be developed. The reframing process participants engage in allows them to resignify a series of notions away from a capitalocentric perspective and reappropriate them. This reframing process is also that of themselves: but not only that of their own narrative, to stop seeing themselves as subjugated and to be active makers. There is no end to this reframing. It is an ongoing process that is never over, that acknowledges their interdependence through their personal and professional choices and invites them to continuously assess them critically. Nonetheless, there are many resistances and non-recognitions of the framework presented, and the self-transformation of the participants and projects might not always go in the direction wanted by the instructors. The diverging expectations of participants, coupled to the precarious conditions of existence of the programme, limit the possibility of transformation of the individuals and of the projects. There is no singular outcome but rather a variety of paths taken.

One critical aspect that is not explored in this chapter but is worthy of attention is that of the tools and materials used during the programme. Many are similar, although at times tweaked, from usual accelerator programmes: canvases, elevator pitches, etc. The rationale is that participants must be familiarized with them, to be able to adapt and speak multiple languages depending on the context and who they will be interacting with. The values behind the process partially enable another outcome: that of creating ‘entrepreneurs’, with another set of values and ethical compass. But tools and processes are not neutral but performative, and shape people in certain ways rather than others. Further investigation into what this produces in such a context would enable us to better understand the tensions and limits of using such a format, that of entrepreneurial training, for a diverse politics of economy.

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