

CHAPTER 8

Building the Playground for Collective Imagination: Ethnography of a *Détournement* around Moneywork and Carework

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Abstract

The chapter presents a case study of a digital complementary currency – Santacoin (SC) – co-designed, implemented and deployed at a 10-day performing arts festival in Italy. SC allowed participants to create a parallel economy within the blurring boundaries of the festival, in a sort of ‘serious game live’: enacted in the wild, with money and bodies at stake. The case study was conducted through a team ethnography that analysed the engagement of festival attenders, artists and staff with the system and the artistic intervention at its root. Indeed, SC was conceived as the core of a performance co-designed by Macao art collective and a group of local caregivers and wellbeing practitioners

How to cite this book chapter:

Bassetti, C. 2022. Building the Playground for Collective Imagination: Ethnography of a *Détournement* around Moneywork and Carework. In: Travlou, P. and Ciolfi, L. (eds.) *Ethnographies of Collaborative Economies across Europe: Understanding Sharing and Caring*. Pp. 149–172. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bct.i>. License: CC BY-NC-ND

who then provided their services in the public space. This was thought of as a radical and experimental performative action for leading people to imagine new forms of social production and reproduction within an alternative world, a ‘citadel’ where finance could be thematized and sociopolitical imaginaries practised. It was a localized experiment in community building and collective imagination around issues of inequality and social re/production. The chapter provides an ethnographic account of the collaborative intervention and its main results. In doing so, it reflects on two main dimensions: the intersection of ‘moneywork’ and caring practices as explicitly thematized in the public space, and the role social interaction, relationships and communities play in collective imagination experimentations.

Introduction

Monetary transactions ‘support people in making connections, to other people, to their communities, to the places they move through, to their environment, and to what they consume’ (Ferreira et al., 2015: 11). Money configures an interaction space where transactions are embedded in social relations (O’Neill et al., 2017) and their trustworthiness is socially constructed. The mechanisms and artefacts to conduct ‘moneywork’ influence collaborative interaction, which in turn shape relationships (Perry and Ferreira, 2018, see also 2014), and vice versa. It is within this framework that complementary currencies can contribute to counteract inequalities, as they allow experimenting with alternative systems (NEF, 2015) and provide opportunities for ‘embodying design propositions about the future trajectories of economic exchange’ (Carroll and Bellotti, 2015: 1507). However, how people may come to imagine such trajectories and new socio-economic models is more of an open question.

In this chapter, I reflect on how to foster collective imagination and on the role design and performing arts may play in that. I do so by discussing the case of Santacoin (SC), a digital complementary currency introduced as an artistic and action-research intervention at a 10-day, open-air performing arts festival in Italy – Santarcangelo Festival – in collaboration with the art collective Macao, based in Milan. Being also a means of payment for festival-related purchases, SC was conceived as the core of the artistic performance curated by Macao: CryptoRituals. Santacoin were accepted by local wellbeing practitioners, called Body&Soul Caregivers, who provided their services in the public plaza as part of CryptoRituals. It was a radical performative action for leading people to imagine and practise new forms of social re/production within an alternative world, a ‘citadel’ where socioeconomic relation could be thematized. It was an

experiment in community building and collective imagination around inequality and mutual caring.

Part of an H2020 project and conducted as a team ethnography within a participatory action research and design framework characterizing the whole project, the intervention allowed observation of people confronted with a ‘serious game live’ – conducted ‘in the wild’, with money and bodies at stake. Mutual trust was thus fundamental, like the willingness to collectively experiment within the safe boundaries of the local, festival and artistic communities. How to provide for those boundaries? How to sustain and foster trust? Leveraging already existing social relations, in a context mixing diverse communities, revealed a critical success element. Design features of the Santacoin system also proved relevant, particularly in terms of ‘moneywork interaction’, i.e., social interaction in and around monetary transactions.

Related Work

Complementary currencies

A complementary currency (CC) is an agreement within a community to use something as a means of payment in parallel with official ones (Lietaer, 2001). Throughout history, CCs have been represented by heterogeneous materials, ranging from pieces of clay pots in Ancient Egypt to cigarettes in WWII to contemporary cryptocurrencies. These physical and digital artefacts have been used to facilitate trade in communities. Agreeing to accept them in exchange for goods and services gives a CC the status of money.

CCs can facilitate ‘different types of relationships and behaviour, and they ask questions about how money could serve us’ (Seyfang, 2009: 141) – i.e., they hold a transformative power. Manchester LETS, for instance, was conceived ‘to bring about significant social change’ by fostering decentralization and freedom of economic interaction, as users could set the value for each transaction (North, 1999, 2007). Faircoin is a digital CC for developing a fair global economy. Commoncoin is a collectively issued currency to reward individual contributions on the basis of both labour and political participation (De Paoli et al., 2017a, 2017b; cf. also further: subsection “Partners”).

CCs can empower communities to counteract inequality by providing a parallel line of credit and increasing the local multiplier effect (Hughes, 2003). Further, as manifested also in time banking initiatives (Cahn, 2004; Carroll and Bellotti, 2015), CCs can be empowering and transformative by ‘redefining

work to include the unpaid “core economy” of work in the neighbourhood and community; nurturing reciprocity and exchange rather than dependency; growing social capital; encouraging learning and skills-sharing; involving people in decision-making’ (Seyfang, 2009: 152). By promoting closed economic circles, moreover, communities can be insulated (vs isolated) from adverse dynamics of the mainstream business cycle. As a by-product of proximity trade, finally, CCs may reduce the ecological footprint (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2013).

Despite advantages, CCs face several challenges, particularly in scaling-up and infrastructuring. With few exceptions (Studer, 1998; Gelleri, 2009; Bendell and Greco, 2013), there is no normative framework to accommodate them. From a design perspective, the issue of ‘standardization and interchangeability’ is critical (Perry and Ferreira, 2018); as the ‘one size fits all’ approach may not always be desirable, interoperability becomes crucial between both digital and physical currencies and different types of digital ones (O’Neill et al., 2017). Overall, money configures a complex design space in which the cultural context (De Angeli et al., 2004) and issues of trust (Briggs et al., 2002; Vines et al., 2012), fairness and realness (Wang and Mainwaring, 2008), alongside usability (Coventry et al., 2003), are central. Therefore, CC design requires understanding the dynamics of cooperation and community building (O’Neill et al., 2017), as it offers possibilities to extend social interaction, make more local connections and derive value from them (Carrol and Bellotti, 2015).

Artistic practices and action research

Joint endeavours across the arts and ethnography – such as performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Alexander, 2005; Finely, 2005; Given, 2008) or arts-informed research (Cole et al., 2004; Irving, 2007) – and between the arts and action and/or participatory research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; special issue edited by Brydon-Miller et al., 2011), including participatory arts-based research (PABR, see e.g. Nunn, 2020), are relatively recent. Yet they hold the promise of a more multifaceted understanding of social life and power relations, and of higher sociopolitical impact.

This resonates with action research (AR) ‘emancipatory and transformational intentions’ (Seeley, 2011: 85). Seeley proposes to consider action researchers as ‘Artists of the Invisible’ (Kaplan 2002: 86), working to create spaces that are transformative for ourselves, those we work with, and the systems of which we are intrinsic part. Performing arts seem particularly suited for such purposes. Beyes and Steyaert (2011) consider neo-avant-garde performative practices and highlight their politico-aesthetic power to interfere with social assemblages and to change what is visible, sayable and doable.

This posits AR ‘as a creative and potentially political practice of world-making [where] research, politics, and aesthetics are interwoven’ (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011: 104).

With a stronger political accent, and addressing marginalized populations, Tofteng and Husted (2011: 27) argue for theatre-based AR to open ‘new ways to communicate and make visible knowledges and experiences from below’. They connect to critical utopian AR, and theatrical traditions like Brecht’s and Boal’s, to emphasise how criticism must be combined with envisioning alternative pathways, and how non-traditional drama forms underpin societal learning. Erel and colleagues (2017: 307–308), looking at participatory theatre, similarly point out the importance ‘to embed forum theatre in a critical and emancipatory discourse of social transformation that highlights a range of different power relations’ and underline that the ‘process is transformational in that it allows participants to see the social world as one that can be changed’ (Erel et al., 2017: 310). If the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1974, 2009) requires a certain commitment by the spect-actors involved, as much as PABR projects do with their recurring encounters – a condition shared by CryptoRituals Caregivers – in some cases, such as the one considered here, it is *also* the attention of the passers-by that one may want to attract and that a playful performative action may provide.

In this respect, two concepts may prove fruitful: on the one hand, the Debordian (1967 [1994]) *détournement*, intended as the dialectical inversion of the existing relations among concepts (thesis 206), which allows a critique of mainstream cultural representations together with a critique of extant social and power relations. Displacing body care practices in the public plaza (*piazza*, in Italian, with all its cultural underpinnings¹) like CryptoRituals did, can be considered a performative inversion of this kind. On the other hand, it is worth noticing that (design) games, and play more generally, in co-design have been found useful for ‘promoting a creative and explorative attitude’ in participants and for ‘facilitating the players in envisioning and enacting’ (Vaajakallio and Mattelmäki, 2014: 66). A ‘fantasy aesthetic’ (Zhang and Zurlo, 2021) can be helpful for ‘transporting participants into another world – a magic circle as physical and ideal playground’ (Vaajakallio and Mattelmäki, 2014: 65; see also Zhang and Zurlo, 2021: 1752). ‘Ideally, the magic circle invites participants to think beyond the ordinary’; it is a place ‘where consequences of different decisions can be played out in safe circumstances’ (Vaajakallio and Mattelmäki, 2014: 67), ‘a sphere of engagement “freed from the usual constraints” [and r]emoved from everyday life – though informing and informed by it’ (Nunn, 2020: 5). As the ‘circle’ or the ‘citadel’ is also a physical space, the importance of the setting and location for the

¹ The *piazza* is the public place *par excellence* in Italy (e.g., Garau, 2016).

performance has been highlighted (e.g. Agger Eriksen, 2012: 399, cited in Vaajakallio and Mattelmäki, 2014).

Case Study

The intervention was the outcome of a long-lasting collaboration among the H2020 PIE News / Commonfare project (2016–2019), grounded in participatory action research and design; the Macao collective, involved in the project since its start and characterized by an engagement with both the arts and action research; and the Santarcangelo Festival, with which Macao has collaborated for years, based on a common interest in performing arts, community building and sociopolitical transformation.

Partners

Commonfare's objective was to promote the Welfare of the Common as an alternative and sustainable socioeconomic model based on collaboration, solidarity and caring (Fumagalli, 2015; General Intellect, 2018). We co-designed a digital space, *commonfare.net*, together with people and communities in three countries (Bassetti et al., 2018, 2019). It allows sharing information about collaborative economy initiatives and supports experimentation via the Social Wallet API (Roio and Beneti, 2017), which easily creates CCs. It was used to implement Commoncoin – *commonfare.net* built-in CC – and several Group Currencies by and for communities. Santacoin experience was instrumental to develop, test and refine this tool.

Macao is a collective that emerged in Milan in 2012 in response to the precarious conditions of cultural workers. It defines itself as an 'independent centre for arts, culture and research'. It provides co-working spaces, events, art exhibitions and a variety of workshops to fellow citizens. As mentioned, Macao has been involved in the Commonfare project since the beginning, experimenting with Commoncoin as it was prototyped. 'In a nutshell, Macao conceived of Commoncoin as an internal digital complementary currency and basic income provisioning system in Euros for financing and remunerating biopolitical production, while discouraging hoarding and speculative practices' (Bassetti and Sachy, 2019).

Held in a small but renowned medieval city in Italy, Santarcangelo Festival is the biggest of its kind in the country, and an international reference. During the 2017 edition, various CCs including Commoncoin and Faircoin were presented to the municipality and festival organizers. This increased their interest in experimenting with money(work) between art and socioeconomic innovation. The vision was then enacted in 2018, with Santacoin allowing participants to create a parallel economy within the blurring festival boundaries.



Figure 8.1: CryptoRituals at Santarcangelo Festival: overviews (a, d); details (b, c).

CryptoRituals

CryptoRituals was a performance enacted by crossing caring practices and economics, while focusing on care and love of oneself, the other and festival participants as a community. A group of 30 local caregivers – yoga practitioners, masseurs, hairdressers, Ayurveda professionals, etc. – were involved by Macao months before to co-design the performance, and they provided their services in the public space in the evenings (7pm–1am) of the two festival weekends, accepting payment in SC only (Figure 8.1). This was complemented by performative readings by Macao members, bringing attention to finance and carework.

Practising care in the plaza was configured as an interference with social order, performed by caregivers together with their audience, who actively participated by bringing in the power of their exposed bodies. The CC was used to make visible, hence rethinkable, the power money holds in structuring social relations. Overall, CryptoRituals is to be thought of as a community building and social innovation artistic project supported by a digital complementary currency and proposing caring as a key political element of social life.



Figure 8.2: Talisman with QRCode encoding the digital wallet.

Santacoin

SC was designed in collaboration by the Commonfare team, Macao and the festival organization. It was intended to be bought at an exchange rate at par with euro. Visitors could pay for merchandising, tickets, food and beverages. SC were issued through the Social Wallet API implemented in commonfare.net as a social-purpose, open-source digital wallet (Roio and Beneti, 2017). To give visitors a sense of belonging and a tangible artefact, a Talisman (Figure 8.2) was designed to interface the API. It portrayed a QRCode sticker on a recuperated, biodegradable plastic plate, wearable as a necklace. By scanning the QRCode, the holder could access commonfare.net and register, thereby creating a digital wallet (optional), where balance and transactions could be checked, supporting liquidity awareness (Perry and Ferreira, 2018).

The buyer would show the talisman or digital QRCode to the merchant, who would scan it with a smartphone, fill in the amount and ask the payer to click the 'Confirm' button on the interface, thereby improving transactional visibility (Perry and Ferreira, 2018) and embedding a mechanism for sharing transaction responsibility (Figure 8.3).

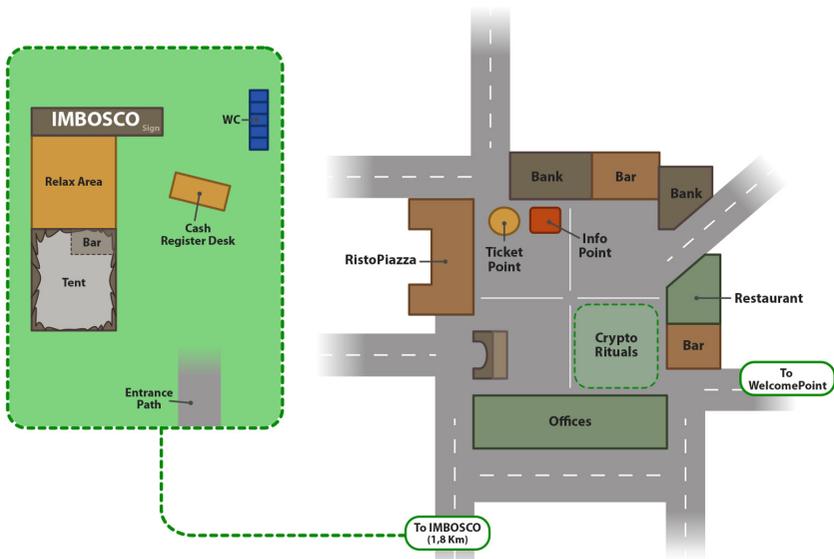


Figure 8.4: Map of SF main locations.

Locations and staff

SC were managed at six locations during the festival (Figures 8.4 and 8.5):

- InfoPoint, where information on the programme and SC were provided, talismans managed, and merchandising sold;
- TicketPoint, where tickets bought online were collected, and seldom bought;
- RistoPiazza, where dinner was served under the Municipality colonnade;
- Imbosco clubbing venue, featuring since the second day a SC-only register;
- WelcomePoint for artists, journalists and critics, where empty talismans were given to guests with the welcome kit;
- CryptoRituals area, also managing talismans since the second evening.

The cashiers at RistoPiazza and Imbosco were local women aged 25 to 50; the WelcomePoint staff too included local women, more connected to the arts; InfoPoint and TicketPoint operators were university students in their twenties with an interest in art management, and nonlocal. All operators had been working for the festival organisation for months, and most of them were staff members also in previous editions.



Figure 8.5: Santarcangelo Festival locations: (a) InfoPoint, (b) TicketPoint, (c) RistoPiazza, (d) Imbosco, (e, f) WelcomePoint.

Figures

Santarcangelo Festival 2018 saw 11,324 tickets sold, >12,000 attendants and 200 performances. 8,908.88 SC were exchanged (cash-in, top-up, cash-out). Out of this, around 30% was converted back to euro. The remainder (6,078.40) was spent (Figure 8.6): CryptoRituals accounted for almost half of the income – confirming the motivating effect of the artistic intervention – followed by RistoPiazza and Imbosco, the sociability location *par excellence*.

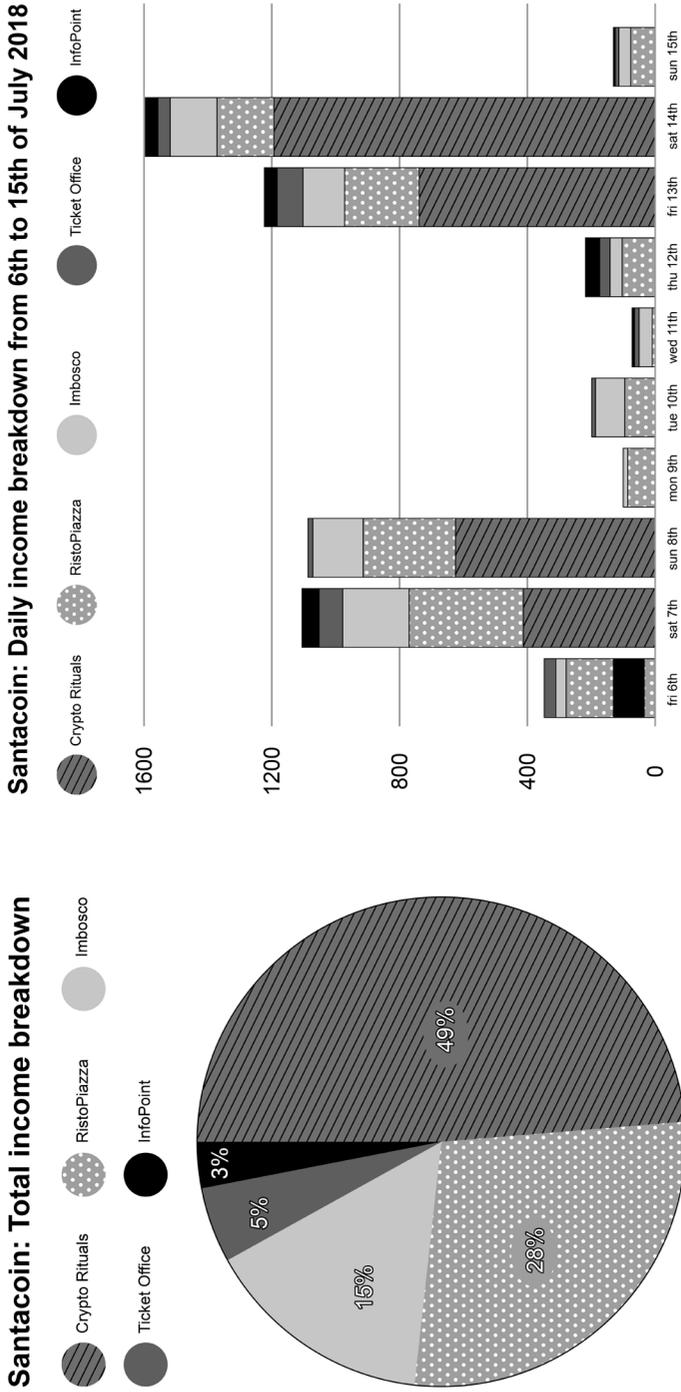


Figure 8.6: SC (a) total and (b) daily income breakdown.

Team Ethnography

During the festival, a group of researchers conducted team ethnography, provided technical support, and contributed to dissemination – all in close cooperation with Macao members. Additionally, the team together with Macao networked with local authorities and associations with a view to extending SC potential benefits beyond the festival. We held meetings and shared knowledge with the city Mayor and representatives of local businesses and associations, who were by then intrigued about the opportunities offered by CCs, and we explored possibilities for future development also with a local group that provides legal and CC-related support to cooperatives and communities nationwide, but whose relationship with the municipality and other actors in the territory was minimal at the time, and was reinforced by the considered action research activities.

Led by the author, the ethnographic team consisted of eight researchers in total. The daily group ranged from four to six people (more at the weekends), with two researchers – the author and the CC expert who also worked with Macao at piloting Commoncoin – covering the whole duration. The schedule was such that all day periods (10am–3am) were covered. The ethnographers alternated in different times and weekdays in the different locations, to share observations and develop a common understanding. We favoured shared immersion across sites (Creese et al., 2008) over the ‘divide and conquer’ approach (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999). Debriefing sessions were held once or twice per day. A fieldwork plan was prepared in advance alongside common research tools including guides for observation, informal interviews and semi-structured interviews with staff.

Data include daily fieldnotes by individual ethnographers, six semi-structured interviews and several informal ethnographic interviews, photos and videos. In parallel, we collected log-data on SC transactions and commonfare.net usage. The chapter is based on a thematic, abductive (Peirce, 1995; see Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) analysis of fieldnotes and interviews.

World-Makings

The making of a citadel

As the festival itself temporarily transforms the town, the intervention was aimed both at supporting such a transformation via a devoted currency and at creating a further qualified place – a citadel within the festival space-time – where socioeconomic relations could take centre stage and be collectively reimaged.

The overall successful engagement with SC of attendants, artists and staff that we observed relates not only to the convenience of the system (see next sub-section), but also to the enthusiasm for a devoted currency, an identitarian object marking the community boundaries. The issue of such boundaries and the community they mark – or create – is crucial. In this respect, most

participants held a common expectation: once they understood what SC was, they took for granted that the whole city was involved.

He is in his mid-fifties, not Italian. Mary presents SC ... 'I'm not sure I understand. This badge is a sort of money, right?' ... He asks how he can recognise shops dealing in SC. Mary does not understand the question ... By taking for granted that during the festival the whole city or so deals in SC, he repeats his question: 'How do I know who's taking SC? Is there a sticker with QRCode or something?' [6 July 2018, WelcomePoint]

'So, at the moment you can only pay festival-related stuff, not yet the whole city, right?' Mary confirms. He: 'Alright, then I take the 20-SC one [talisman].' [6 July 2018, WelcomePoint]

She regrets SC is useless in local shops and bars. She wishes for an extended coverage in 2019. [7 July 2018, InfoPoint]

As soon as the status of money is bestowed on an artefact – on clay tiles, metal coins, plastic talismans or digital QRcodes – the 'model of use' is available to participants, and the artefact becomes an object of talk, discourse and practice – of social interaction – based on a tacit mutual agreement grounded in a shared imaginary. Social interaction, in turn, is nothing but where collective imaginaries are practised and (re)produced (e.g. Fine, 2012). As space is tightly bound to practice – thereby marking a place – the question about its boundaries is pivotal, as it marks the boundaries of both the community and the experience itself. Participants wished for a city–festival community, for a complete overlap between the city(s) and the festival(s) borders). The dialectic between the city-place and the temporary festival-place lies at the bottom of unmet expectations. Behind the existence itself of a *place* to experience lies instead a common imaginary.

The CryptoRituals place was more self-contained, and further qualified than the city/festival one. Located in one quarter of the large *piazza* (see Figure 8.4), the area was characterized by scenographic and proxemic arrangements delineating boundaries. Although porous ones, their relevance was evident. Originally, the area was intended for caring services only, with people having to reach the InfoPoint to take the talisman to pay caregivers. This proved less than satisfactory, hence a desk managing talismans was added at the centre of the area on the second evening, resulting in almost doubled participation. A caregiver – a schoolteacher in her forties with the hobby of Tarot reading – elaborated on the issues as follows:

She says it is a matter of 'context', to which she repeatedly refers as a 'citadel'. 'Once inside the citadel, people didn't want to exit to reach the InfoPoint, they didn't want to cross the thresholds between the two

worlds so quickly.’ She insists that it was not a matter of distance (less than 50 meters), but of atmosphere and experience. It was neither that people were bothered by the impossibility to pay in euro, she repeats nobody complained about that. She adds that years ago in Brisighella there was a medieval festival ... ‘where you paid everything with the Brisighello, the local currency in medieval times. So, it was already more than 10 years ago, and none was even dreaming of complaining. The idea was precisely to enter to have an experience, knowing you’re crossing the thresholds of a new world, so to speak.’ She interprets CryptoRituals in the same way. [14 July 2018, CryptoRituals]

Not going to InfoPoint once within CryptoRituals and desiring the festival to completely overlap with city life are grounded, I believe, in the very same desire for immersive experience, one in which you forget you are playing, you lose yourself in the action, an ‘optimal experience’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Not only proxemics and artefacts as diverse as the scenography and the currency (physical and digital infrastructure) contributed to citadel-making, but also activities and their location. The wall-less citadel being located in the public space, caring practices were dislocated from their usual private space to the public sphere, that of political action. This qualified as a significant disruption of the everyday interaction order (Goffman, 1983) and social order* (Garfinkel, 1967) at large (see also Tavory and Fine, 2020). First, half-naked bodies, or bodies in (usually regarded as) embarrassing positions/conditions, were staged in the plaza, apparently unconcerned with their face (Goffman, 1955, 1959); second, (usually regarded as) mundane bodily maintenance activities and ‘reflexive body techniques’ (Crossley, 2005) were publicly performed not for disruption per se, but to bring socio-political issues to public debate.

Finance was made mundane and malleable, differently imaginable, reconnected to people’s lives and the life of their community. For a caregiver in her seventies:

I think it’s important, and it’s good that certain new activities are experimented in small communities, because the small community can easily change and practically work. Otherwise, we only hear all those discourses from the big finance and ... and imagine who knows what. People are wary. People are afraid especially in a climate, like today, where we are in an economic recession ... And instead in small communities, perhaps, the sense of self is taken back, the sense of having something in common. [Gigliola, 14 July 2018]

In parallel, CryptoRituals made visible neglected activities deserving appreciation: caring practices as the concrete work of maintenance of the community, with affective, ethical and political implications (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Here the body as both (a) the locus of subjectivity – as it is often conceived in Western societies – and, at the same time and more importantly, (b) where intersubjectivity takes substance and is experienced (Bassetti, 2021: 177–192) was the crucial technology.

The making of a currency

A surprising result concerns festival staff, as they were not involved in CryptoRituals nor in the currency co-design, and as routine workers are generally disadvantaged by technological innovation (Ehn, 1988; Grudin, 1988; Agre, 1995; Card and DiNardo, 2005; Bassetti, 2012). Instead, operators – local cashiers especially – found Santacoin convenient.

Roberta turns the smartphone towards me to allow me to press ‘Confirm’ ... While clicking, I ask: ‘Is it easy to use, rather than open the register, calculate the change...?’ – ‘Oh my goodness! Look, it’s truly truly soooo much easier, really.’ [8 July 2018, RistoPiazza]

Whereas initially Roberta was supposed to be the only cashier managing SC payments at the RistoPiazza, with the days passing by, the confidence in the system increasing and Santacoin spreading among festival participants, also the second cashier working at the venue started to manage payments in SC, until the two colleagues ended up playfully fighting over the only SC-devoted smartphone:

22.50, at the dinner cash desk, Roberta says to her colleague: ‘C’mon, do you stop stealing the phone?’ – ‘Eh, my dear, they gave us just one ...’ – ‘[...] C’mon, give me that thingumabob.’ She picks up the SC-devoted smartphone and scans my digital QR code while we all laugh. [13 July 2018, RistoPiazza]

The system seamlessly integrated with the ordinary working practices of the cashiers, both in *cognitive* and *interactional* terms. Attentional resources being freed from the tedious and critical task of checking the change, they could turn on the customer. Transaction time was not affected; cashiers invested the time saved to engage in social interaction, fulfilling one of their work tasks and more importantly, a rewarding one. This was embedded by design with the ‘Confirm’ button, contributing to transactional visibility (Perry and Ferreira, 2018), and allowing responsibility to be shared while also offering a conversational opportunity. The interactional gain proved critical, especially as cashiers were operating in a context where existing social relationships with local customers were also at stake.

Further evidence of local cashiers’ enthusiasm – in terms of both convenience (cognitive efficiency, interactional reward and shared responsibility)

and the desire for an identitarian element strengthening the temporary community – concerns the Imbosco SC-devoted cash register (and queue). When we arrived in Santarcangelo the day before the festival opening, we had an aperitif with Macao members and other artists. The latter pointed out ‘how cool it would be to have a SC-devoted cash register at the Imbosco’. The evening after, I spotted the General Director and Roberta, the RistoPiazza cashier, at the Imbosco cash desk.² I approached them to discuss the opportunity of an additional cash register at the Imbosco, accepting SC only.

I start by talking primarily to him (gaze), but I immediately realise that Roberta ... has already fallen in love with SC. Therefore, I do my part to provide her with conversational space, and indeed she supports my ‘peroratio’ in an amazing (and/as unexpected) manner. [6 July 2018, Imbosco]

The Santacoin team was not thinking of a devoted register in the first place, but a group of artists made us do so. Then we tried to actualize the idea, and, in the absence of practical need for a further register, having local people (Roberta was not the only one) sharing the related imaginary and proactively acting accordingly was crucial. The visible presence of Santacoin at the Imbosco has been an act of collective imagination and action.

Art-student operators too favoured transactions in SC, to the point that they were at times annoyed by having to perform ‘normal’ transactions.

An operator asks a tourist: ‘Do you pay in Euro or Santacoin?’. The tourist replies ‘Euro’. The operator grimaces with disappointment. [13 July 2018, InfoPoint]

However, when working at the euro–SC interface and acting as accountants, they witnessed the difficulties related to the lack of a legal framework:

The top-up proceeds as smooth as silk with Anna. At the same time, Paolo is topping-up 20 for a man who has arrived just after me, and has addressed Paolo with ‘Hi, I would like to top-up’ – ‘Sure, how much?’ – ‘Twenty’ – ‘Ok, just wait until I also prepare the receipt for you’. The ‘problem’, the dull, long, bureaucratic, tedious thing is precisely the handwritten, carbon-copied receipt. On the contrary, the top-up takes an instant, it is (presented as) non-problematic. [10 July 2018, InfoPoint]

² Roberta can be considered as the informal local cashiers’ coordinator: once the RistoPiazza was closed, she was checking everything was in order at the Imbosco.

They also regretted the under-exploitation of the system:

I believe SC is super handy. Also bookkeeping is done automatically. On the contrary, doing double accounting as we are doing is stupid. [Edoardo, InfoPoint]

Giulio asks me about filtering opportunities for SC transaction data, as he is thinking to the potential advantages in terms of administration and bookkeeping. [8 July 2018, InfoPoint]

And they envisioned adopting SC internally to the festival organisation, to manage food and accommodation costs of artists and operators.

Conclusion

Overall, people's enthusiasm and imagination superseded our expectations. Art-student operators envisioned digital bookkeeping and internal costs management. It was a group of artists that proposed the Imbosco SC-only register, and cashiers that pushed for it with festival management. Within the festival community at large, many expected a full coverage scenario. Here, the festival as a frame for experimentation, as enabling the engagement of imaginaries, is quite relevant. And such a frame consists of conceiving the festival as a space-time of extra-ordinary experience, of immersion, of belonging. Artefacts such as complementary currencies can contribute to that.

Social relations within and among communities were central to engagement. Initially, people's trust was towards not Commonfare or Macao but the organisation of a renown festival (by artists, art operators and non-local audience), and local fellows belonging to such an organisation (by local attendants).³ Participation by local and nearby inhabitants with limited interest in the arts was mostly due to their relationship with local festival staff or caregivers. Many had dinner at the RistoPiazza; the cash register was the second fulcrum of social interaction besides tables. Similarly, the register desk was a conversational point at the Imbosco. In both, we observed sustained interaction around the talisman and the SC smartphone.

CryptoRituals further succeeded in creating a citadel wherein usual social order and 'relations in public' (Goffman, 1971, 1983) were subverted, hence re-imaginable. This was supported by the currency, but also and more specifically by the '*détournement* power' of bodies and of the literal staging, representation and performance of the centrality of caring practices. Moreover, CryptoRituals

³ Initially, they are cautious with respect to my questions. They loosen up when I say I am with the festival organisation. [6 July 2018, InfoPoint]

played a crucial role in engaging people belonging to different communities. Extant relationships were pivotal also for participation in CryptoRituals. Local caregivers' involvement and the characteristics of the performance itself allowed for a participating audience made both of 'lay' people and art experts. This is crucial for the development of *narratives of alternatives* shared across individuals and communities, which is fundamental to empowerment (Carr, 2003; Freire, 2005).

This all enlightens the relevance of communities – local and not – in creating the opportunities for social ties to further develop, mutual trust to increase, and hence *citadels of experimentation and imagination* to exist. There is where people are provided with a context to interact, thereby developing a common cultural terrain allowing them, in turn, to imagine together, to share visions and narratives, which is central to infrastructuring (Neumann and Star, 1996; Kow and Lustig, 2018). The thematization of the monetary dimension of living together – brought down to earth rather than framed as theoretical debate – allowed for a temporary place where people felt comfortable in experimenting with alternative forms of interaction, living together and sociopolitical envisioning. A place for cultivating a different culture rooted in care has been sustained through an artistic and AR intervention where technology was used to make visible hence rethinkable the power of money in structuring social relations. It is worth mentioning that the Mayor of Santarcangelo met with the Santacoin team by her request and based on her interest in the experiment. She was considering both to extend Santacoin to the whole city in the 2019 festival edition and, more importantly, to employ SC to increase the purchasing power of the poorest strata of the population, homeless people in particular, through a city-issued currency accepted by local businesses (whose interest in the complementary currency was reported by the Mayor) and repeatedly recirculated in the local economy.⁴ In short, a process of collective imagination and envisioning had set in.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the former Mayor and the Municipality of Santarcangelo di Romagna, the organisers of the Santarcangelo Festival, and Macao for their hospitality, willingness and efforts to experiment with Santacoin. My gratitude also goes to the festival staff and the CryptoRituals caregivers, whose commitment has been invaluable for the successful outcome of the experimentation. Special recognition goes to the Commonfare researchers for their dedication to co-designing and implementing Santacoin, and observing and evaluating the intervention during the festival.

⁴ This was not actualised as, with the coming election in Autumn 2018, the mentioned Mayor was not re-elected.

Funding Acknowledgements

The PIE News / Commonfare project was funded by the European Commission under the H2020 programme (Grant Agreement No. 687922).

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