

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Eskelinen, Teppo; Hirvilammi, Tuuli; Venäläinen, Juhana

**Title:** Introduction: Community economies and social transformation with, within and beyond the welfare state

**Year:** 2020

**Version:** Published version

**Copyright:** © 2020 the Authors

**Rights:** CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

**Rights url:** <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

**Please cite the original version:**

Eskelinen, T., Hirvilammi, T., & Venäläinen, J. (2020). Introduction: Community economies and social transformation with, within and beyond the welfare state. In T. Eskelinen, T. Hirvilammi, & J. Venäläinen (Eds.), *Enacting Community Economies Within a Welfare State* (pp. 1-21). MayFly. [http://mayflybooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ECEWAWWS\\_final\\_e-book.pdf](http://mayflybooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ECEWAWWS_final_e-book.pdf)

# 1

## **Introduction: Community economies and social transformation with, within and beyond the welfare state**

*Teppo Eskelinen, Tuuli Hirvilammi & Juhana Venäläinen*

This book is an exploration of community economies within Nordic welfare states. Even though the upsurge of community economies is typically discussed in the context of countries plagued with economic problems, we currently see active movements building community economies in the wealthy and stable countries of the Nordic region as well. As a countermove to the increasing penetration of capitalist market relations into all spheres of life, including spheres in which public service provision used to be dominant, people in Nordic welfare states are building co-operatives that foster small-scale production, new value-based networks such as timebanks, and various kinds of

local arrangements for creating and sharing resources collectively.

Amidst the threatening ecological crisis, people are seriously looking for economies that will be more sustainable, and ultimately, support a socially more meaningful life. What we indeed need is a different value conception and more localised economy, instead of mere 'redistribution'. Instead of accepting the destructive patterns and hierarchies penetrating the economy as we know it, we are looking for economic forms that are based on horizontal relations and the principle of equity. As concrete alternatives to capitalist forms of production, community economy initiatives represent to many minds a qualitatively better way of seeing and enacting the economy. We see these emerging community economies not as marginal curiosities but as great sources of inspiration on what 'the economy' fundamentally could signify, both in theory and in practice (e.g. Healy 2009).

The agenda for scrutinising the tension between community economies and Nordic welfare states is two-fold. First of all, we need a systemic and case-driven analysis of how community economies emerge on the outskirts of the welfare state model, a model which is in flux. Community economies often emerge by harnessing and repurposing the potent 'surplus' that the public service provision generates, and serendipitously filling the gaps that inadequate provision leaves unserved. Second, we need to see, how community economies directly challenge the ways in which welfare states currently develop, proposing new trajectories of societal change and alternative ways of framing this change. Both aspects relate to the relationship between community economies and welfare state institutions, and inform questions such as: On what terms can community economies and Nordic welfare states co-exist and cooperate? Could a Nordic welfare state be an enabling platform for community economies to diffuse? And, crucially: Could community economies show the welfare state its desirable future model?

### **Community economies and diverse economic relations**

But what exactly do we mean by ‘community economies’? Following J. K. Gibson-Graham, community economies refer to the ongoing democratic co-creation of the diverse ways in which we collectively make our livings, receive our livings from others, and provide for others in turn (e.g. Gibson-Graham and Community Economies Collective 2017). In Gibson-Graham’s vocabulary and within the social movements inspired by them, a community economy does not refer simply to a ‘local business activity’, but to an ‘ongoing negotiation with all life forms’. The approach highlights the process in which socio-economic relations are continuously coproduced (Community Economies 2019). Community economies exist for things (production, organisation) to be done differently. They exist for the sake of self-organisation, non-hierarchical relations and direct interaction. Thus community economies aim to ‘make real the possibility that the economy can be a space of ethical action, not a place of submission to “the bottom line” of the “imperatives of capital” as it is so often portrayed’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2011, 29). So, while community-based economic forms have existed throughout history, we use the term ‘community economies’ with a more intentional, even political tone. We see community economies exactly as politics in a concrete form.

In addition to monetised market relations, economic relations include alternative market relations and non-market relations, alternative paid labour and unpaid labour. They include exchanges based on socially transformative values. The already existing ‘spaces-beyond-capitalism’ are diverse and relational (S. Wright 2010, 299). According to Ethan Miller (2013), community economies are constructed by three interconnected moments: the ontological, ethical, and political. Within the ontological moment, both the content of ‘the economy’ and ‘the community’ are in still in flux: the economic ‘figures as an ‘open-ended discursive construct’ organising a vast, heterogeneous field of relations’ (Miller 2013,

521). The ethical moment opens a space for negotiating ethics: the questions of livelihood and interdependence' (Gibson-Graham 2006b, x; cited in Miller 2013, 523). Lastly, in the moment of politics, the 'positivity [i.e., a positive, normative understanding of the community's objective] is collectively enacted' (Miller 2013, 525). Our case studies move between the ethical and the political moments: they serve not only the purpose of illustrating the heterogeneity of economic practices in general, but they also open spaces for ethical discussions and develop into collective political projects.

Community economies come in many forms, some primarily institutionalising a new form of currency, others a new form of exchange, yet others a new kind of community. Some might mostly attempt to decommodify a given sphere of life. Examples discussed in this book range from food production and distribution (Chapters 3–5) to harnessing vacant car seats through online mediated ridesharing (Chapter 6), and further to the managing of cultural and community spaces and services (Chapters 2–3). What is common to this wide set of projects and initiatives is that they not only setup institutions, but are also performative examples of economic versatility, manifesting the general notion of diversity of economic systems. Furthermore, while all systems have some articulated purposes, reasons to engage in community economies are versatile. For some people, reasons for participation are very practical: access to otherwise inaccessible goods and services, forming social contacts, and for others even survival. Springing from these motivations arise a diversity of economic relations which we aim to endorse with the concept of community economies. Indeed, the notion of 'diverse economies' is used throughout the book to refer to this general plurality of forms, purposes and motivations.

In any case, the ontological and social basis on which community economies operate can be seen as distinct. Usually, it is referred to as 'the commons' (e.g. De Angelis 2017). Commons systems

comprise not only of collectively managed resources, but also of social subjects or actors that manage them (commoners) and the cultural practices of commoning that sustain the productive cooperation. While the concept of commons is far from restricted to community economies, community economies can be seen exactly as instances of establishing a commons as a sustainable and equitable system, the organisation of which deviates from the logic of the modern state. The notion of commons is helpful for analysing tensions such as inclusion/exclusion and complementariness/co-optation in the process where community economies take functions that have been understood as core welfare state competencies. Commons systems are based on a radical conception of inclusiveness that surpasses the citizenship-based universalism of the welfare state. As Stavros Stavrides (2016, 38–39) argues, commoning only retains its defining dynamics if ‘always expanding beyond the limits of any community that gives it ground and develops it’, a feature that presupposes ‘an ever-expanding community of potential collaborators’.

However, this principle of spontaneous and open-ended collaboration can be a double-edged sword when portrayed as an alternative to public services, rather than as a complement to them. For example, when commons-based peer production steps into the arena of safeguarding minimum subsistence (Chapter 5) or providing minimum transport services throughout the country (Chapter 6), there is a risk of community economies being used as what De Angelis (2013) calls a ‘commons fix’: an arrangement where the existence of grassroots-level mutual aid becomes a justification for the deterioration of the universal provision of public services.

### **Approaching community economies in the context of Nordic welfare states**

So far, the discussions on the diversity of economic systems and on community economies have mostly focused on organising

community economies (e.g. Wright 2010; Seyfang and Smith 2002). The research on diverse economies has less often connected the analysis of the local economic practices to the study of the state and the broader cultural and social structures through which diverse economies are performed (Jonas 2013). However, economic alternatives do not and cannot exist in a social vacuum but interact with their surroundings. To better understand the transformative role of community economies, the task is to see the existing and potential place of such systems beyond their ‘niches’, or ‘protective spaces’ (Smith and Raven 2012), in constant interaction and friction with governance outside them.

Community economies function across a wide range of social systems. Why, then, to focus on their relationship with the Nordic welfare state? This is due to various reasons. First, the welfare state is not just a system of governance but also a kind of ‘real utopia’, clearly being an inspiration especially for the Anglo-American left. Its long history has always included the promise that through state-organised regulation of capitalism, given social rights will be realised and welfare can be guaranteed universally. At least on the level of policy ideas and normative goals, the Nordic welfare states have sought to maximise human well-being within capitalism, or to enable ‘socialism within capitalism’ (Kloo 2015; Iqbal and Todi 2015).

A feature that has made Nordic welfare states special and different from conservative or liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990) is the strong emphasis on universalism: indeed, the very legitimacy of the welfare state is connected with the universal provision of high-quality services. Furthermore, universal public services and a comprehensive social security system have decommodified everyday lives: when the state guarantees a minimum income and social protection, a person becomes less dependent on capitalist relations. Public services such as libraries, education systems or universal health care that are produced by municipalities and financed on tax revenues, can be seen as ‘spaces-

beyond-capitalism’; spaces where all have an equal access regardless of the ability to pay. The welfare state has helped to create various kinds of social commons – or, at least, proto-commons: platforms upon which collective grassroots socio-economic cooperation is possible.

Second, the focus on the current welfare states provides an interesting case to explore the ongoing ‘penetration of capitalist market relations’ to new spheres of life and new policy fields. Despite the inspirational ideas, the contemporary realpolitik of the welfare states sees the idea of decommodification fading away. If the welfare states were always largely capitalocentric in terms of being based on capitalist value creation, its current form is ever more often a state pervasively intertwined with capitalist accumulation and productivist labour markets. Numerous elements of Nordic welfare states have become qualitatively different from the golden era of welfare state expansion in the 1980’s, or early 1990’s in the Nordic countries.

The hegemony has put emphasis on the ‘post-industrial pressures’ to welfare states, including globalisation, decline of manufacturing production, the health and pension costs of ageing populations, and changing household and family structures (e.g. the steady rise of single-person and lone-parent households in all Nordic countries). Marketisation, through which market mechanisms such as competition, economic incentives and private provision, are implemented in the public sector, is increasingly offered as a solution to improve quality and economic efficiency of the welfare states (e.g. Moberg 2017). In addition to concrete actions prioritising private market actors, the marketisation trend has taken more subtle forms in the public discourse when the focus is put on social investments, economic incentives and economic productivity of public services. Consequently, the welfare institutions are geared towards competitiveness and narrow-minded cost containment. As this causes institutional uniformity and lack of political manoeuvring space, one can critically ask if



this context allows any room for economic diversity?

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the current Nordic welfare states have largely given up on the goal of decommodification. While of course continuously producing services, this production takes increasingly often a market form in its production and organisation (e.g. Moberg 2017). Such services can be useful and necessary, but they do not contest the market imperative. So much of the attempts to recreate community economies can be seen as efforts to create decommodified spheres, in a situation when the state is losing its interest in providing such spheres. As the chapters in this book reveal, the current capitalist welfare states may not always give a warm welcome to the efforts of community economies to provide decommodified spaces.

Furthermore, the current Nordic welfare system emphasises ‘individual responsibility’, which means that cash benefits are less generous, more conditional, and more adjusted towards targeting and means-testing. Nordic welfare states have adopted ‘activation’ policies with entitlements restrictions and activation programmes with sanctions. This has led to the recommodification process in which the income of citizens has become more dependent on the fluctuations of the labour market than it was during the decommodifying expansion phase of the welfare states. (See McCashin 2016; Farrants and Bamba 2018.) Yet these changes have not taken place as abrupt, ‘shock doctrine’ style social engineering, but rather gradually, as a subtle ‘recalibration’ of welfare institutions. Despite this transformation, the welfare state ideology appears to be rather resilient: amidst all the cuts to social protection, retrenchment policies have remained unpopular.

The outcome of all this is an interesting conflict between the ideal or the ethos of the welfare state, and current policies within the welfare states. This distinction and tension between the ethos and the institutionalised form of the welfare state serves as a one starting point for our analysis: what is the role of community economies in reviving the ethos and pushing it further? Looking

from the other side, the literature on community economies has been quite silent on potential similarities with the welfare model on the level of ideas. This nexus clearly calls for scrutiny.

### **Ecological limits**

The focus on community economies in the Nordic welfare states is highly relevant amidst the fundamental transition that is required for creating ecologically sustainable welfare models. The most pressing challenge of all Nordic welfare states is the current situation where high social outcomes have been achieved at the cost of grave overproduction that exceeds biophysical boundaries. For example, carbon emissions, material use and land use per capita overstep the sustainable limits. (Neill et al. 2018.) Mitigating climate change requires urgent action. Overcoming this challenge calls for reconsidering the relationship between welfare states and capitalist economies. Is economic growth an inalienable part of the welfare state? Has the titubant ecological balance proven that the promise of the welfare state is over? The answer appears to depend on how the relation between economic growth and the fundamentals of the welfare state is seen.

Nordic welfare states were developed hand-in-hand with capitalist economies. The golden era of welfare state expansion was also an era of high GDP growth. Therefore, it is possible to argue that welfare systems are instrumental for the growth paradigm and useful catalysts for capitalist reproduction. Even social transfers can be seen to ultimately support the economic growth model and thereby also the ever-increasing consumption possibilities. And in turn, Nordic welfare states depend on economic growth because of the intertwined patterns of productivity, employment, taxation and social spending (Kloo 2015). In this reality, any economic downturn generates social ills.

However, this is not the only possible interpretation. Even if the welfare state as we know it undeniably depends on growth and contributes to increasing (over)production, this dependency

might be undoable. We call for rethinking the growth-dependency of welfare states and draw on degrowth research that has shown how the economy could steadily decline in a controlled fashion without catastrophic outcomes on unemployment and poverty (Victor 2012). This might require the implementation of new welfare institutions like taxation on resources and energy, work time reduction, universal basic income, maximum income and public control over the creation of money (Kallis et al. 2012; D'Alisa et al. 2015). It is possible even to argue that the post-growth reality with the need for new welfare institutions is already here: the high-income welfare states are devoid of new engines of growth, having to learn to live with a stagnant or contracting economy – and make the best out of it in terms of quality of life.

The questions regarding the possibility of a welfare state not based on continuous economic growth remains a debated subject (see e.g. Bailey 2015; Buch-Hansen 2018). Some welfare institutions might indeed be more able to adapt to non-growth conditions, and certainly many welfare functions would remain in a degrowth scenario. Yet this speculation is not our point here. The bottom line is that to comply with the challenges created by the ecological crises, two fundamental changes are in any case needed. First, there will have to be more locally organised, fossil-free economic forms, more commons-based economies, and more small-scale economic systems; second, the welfare state will have to assume forms which foster decommodification. Consequently, the question emerges, how can the relative share of non-growth-dependent activities expand. Community economies thereby fit the picture by creating sustainable economies as well as spaces, platforms and livelihoods that render a life despite growth socially meaningful and materially more possible.

As the welfare state goes through changes, new questions emerge concerning not only scarcity but also abundance. The old welfare states have become abundant with material goods, and as an outcome of this, they produce various kinds of leftovers and

excess. An interesting issue is then, how should this excess be seen? Is the production of excess a sign of success or failure of the welfare state? Two chapters in this book take excess as their specific starting point, with two very different kinds of examples: leftover food (Chapter 5) and vacant car seats (Chapter 6). Harnessing excess for the purposes of community economies might lay the ground for new forms of social interaction.

On the other hand, it might as well be a sign that the universalist ethos of the welfare state is crumbling. In the emerging commons systems or commons-like systems, there is always interaction and metabolism between the commons, state and market systems. The new commons are not entirely self-reliant, but are in many ways dependent on the intentional or arbitrary benevolence of the welfare state: the different forms of state-provided subsistence that can be used for building meaningful community economy activities. At the same time, the newly created community economies – such as the network of ridesharing groups – are always prone to be captured and used as prototypes by the market actors that directly capitalise on social cooperation (such as the commercial platform economy services).

### **Local vs centralised**

To add yet another element to the analysis, despite its ethos of decommodification, the Nordic welfare state is based on strong state governance, and thereby tends to favour hierarchical, top-down approaches. Yet this does not mean that all kinds of local initiatives could not and would not exist within it. The elaboration of the practices and prospects of community economies within the Nordic welfare states can cast some light on the questions of state power and legal governance in relation to small-scale community economies that are often ‘willfully cultivated and fiercely defended’ (Wright 2010, 298).

During the expansion phase of the Nordic welfare states, power has been transferred from local associations and governments

to central government. Nowadays, centralised power and comprehensive state regulation seem to be partly in contradiction with horizontal community economies when the state imposes top-down rules and regulates communities that are trying to increase their autonomy and self-sufficiency. If community economies function on the grassroot level, the state can be understood at a regime level that is mostly geared towards the status quo. In this case, the state-led governance structure and close interdependency between state actors and capitalist market actors express noteworthy difficulties in accommodating community economies in present Nordic countries. The context being this, state actors will assumedly fiercely protect a status quo instead of a transformative process, especially in a situation where the Nordic states are financially and materially so linked with the capitalist economy. In this case, the centralised power can easily end up in the hands of big corporations instead of local communities.

To be clear, the welfare state is not a definite or fixed system but can take various forms. Generally, we understand 'state' not as a monolithic and static entity but as a concept that refers to multi-layered governance with constant political struggles over parliamentary power and decision making. The welfare state is distinct from the welfare society. As Robson (1976, 7) has written, there are two sides of the coin in a welfare state: 'The welfare state is what Parliament has decreed and the Government does. The welfare society is what people do, feel and think about matters which bear on the general welfare.' Even if this rough categorisation fails to acknowledge the variety of institutions, we find it useful to see state actors as different from 'society'; in our case the active people cultivating community economies. The cases described in this book show a clear gap between 'the state' and 'the society' and a high mistrust of public authorities in general. It is therefore worth asking, what is the proper role of the state- and what spheres of communities should stay outside of state regulation? Is there a

risk of ‘state penetration’ of community economies?

Accommodating the goals of community economies within the state apparatus requires a deep process of democratisation at all levels. This is why the community economies have to be the starting point, as a non-hierarchical logic already exists in their operation. How can this non-hierarchical organisational logic and idea of value diffuse to ever new social relations? Could Nordic welfare states be transformative and open to the values of alternative economies?

### **Possible approaches of welfare state institutions**

While we take the perspective of community economy activism rather than governance as the starting point, sketching possible ways how the welfare state can relate to community economies assists in constructing a general framework for the articles. The ways in which governments in general and welfare institutions in particular can relate to community economies, can be categorised as inaction, creating enabling background conditions, and finally, direct assistance and institutional learning.

#### *Inaction*

As community economies often face considerable pressures from the side of government (be it municipal or national), it would be highly tempting to think that government inaction is the preferred response to the ascent of these alternatives. Indeed, actions by government often appear outright interventionist from the perspective of the community economies, so the logical reaction for them is to resort to protective spaces with clear boundaries and distinct operational logics. This is highly understandable in situations in which government intervention threatens the very existence of a community economy. The threat can come for example in the form of a taxation measure disabling the practical functioning, or seizing the space operating as the base for the community economy (e.g. Joutsenvirta 2016).

Yet the operations of community economies do not thrive on the basis of government inaction only. In addition, ostensible inaction can also involve subtle forms of control. Promoting alternative economies can also be used for keeping the unemployed busy or even 'self-employed', when the universalist service provision base has eroded, and an ethos of self-responsibility is enforced. As will be shown in Chapter 3, work practices are more complex than the dichotomic model (activity/inactivity) imposed by governmental social policy allows. There are also ongoing attempts by governments to control community economies through the 'voluntary sector', strategically governed through planning, monitoring, target-setting, financial incentives and other attempts to align the sector with government policies (Eskelinen 2018). This is typical in austerity policies, which are often combined with the active promotion of community development and decentralised governance (Smith 2010; Coote 2011). Especially the selective use of recognition and funding can be used to effectively govern an ostensibly autonomous sphere, particularly when funding comes with strings attached.

#### *Creating background conditions*

For the reasons mentioned above, the role of government should perhaps be seen through the perspective of creating (or failing to create) background conditions for community economies to operate. The way in which a government can take a positively enabling role is related, first of all, to the general structure and cultural mood within a society. Often such background factors go without explicit recognition. Because of their very general nature, the interpretation of the mere existence of these conditions can legitimately be seen as inaction; yet these conditions are highly significant for the autonomy of economic alternatives.

This relates particularly to the general societal mood prevalent in fairly equal societies. Several studies have pointed out the strong tendency of welfare state regimes to foster general trust within

society (Larsen 2007; Rothstein 2001). This general trust is clearly a factor that contributes to the creation of alternative economic systems, even to their very autonomy. In an atmosphere of high generalised trust, alternative economic systems can be to a larger degree governed with a collectively designed ethical code and internal conflict resolution procedures, rather than having to rely on formal sanctions. For community economies, high general trust represents an element of independence from the government.

It is also easy to point out a number of policies relevant to the autonomy of alternative economies. Collectivisation of social risks is an important policy measure since it would allow public actors rather than market actors to decide on individual wellbeing (Johnston et al. 2011). To mention another obvious example, policies allowing more autonomy for the unemployed are clearly more enabling than strict labour market conditionalities (see also Chapter 3). Alternative economic projects not only attract unemployed people to provide material and social improvements to their condition, but the very existence of an alternative to capitalist labour contributes to the social space of alternatives. Therefore, proposals such as the universal basic income are also proposals for greater autonomy for alternative economy projects (see e.g. Henderson 2017; Wright 2011 on basic income and autonomy).

Some public services might be directly or indirectly useful for the creation of alternative economies, even though this clearly represents a side-effect rather than the purpose of these services. An important example of this phenomenon is the possibility of digital organising. Organisation on digital platforms greatly contributes to the autonomous space of the practices of alternative economies, as this creates considerable ease in organising and fosters community-building. Yet digital platforms only function in conditions of sufficient and pervasive digital literacy, and high internet access rate. Digital literacy is an outcome of long-term education and public policy, while universal internet access



provision (as enabled in Finland) represents an explicit and simple choice to provide a high-speed internet access to all with a nationwide broadband and to make computers available for example in public libraries. While technically unrelated, these policies significantly contribute to the conditions of constructing alternative economies.

*Direct assistance and institutional learning*

Last, and most importantly, a government could seek to assist community economies and learn from them. The concept of 'the partner state' is sometimes used to describe the ideal of the government which actively supports alternative economies. Partner state is not so much an actual form of government, but rather a cluster of policies and ideas whose mission is to empower and protect direct social-value creation (Bauwens and Kostakis 2014). This is of course more of a vision than an observation, but nothing would prevent governments from making an explicit choice to support alternative economic systems with their existing means. Perhaps this could be seen as one aspect of a rearticulation of the welfare state ethos.

Naturally the extent and form of such support can vary considerably, and the boundary between creating background conditions and direct assistance might be fluid. A typical form of support would be the provision of spaces for free or for a symbolic price, as very often community economy organisations need some kind of spaces for functioning. Space belongs to the kinds of things that are relatively easy for the government, particularly municipal authorities, to provide. This of course holds only on the precondition that such authorities can give up the idea that all spaces should generate monetary profit in accordance with market pricing.

Direct assistance also means that the government provides alternative economy actors avenues for participation with real policy significance. This is vital, as sometimes it is easier for

governments to take a paternalistic ‘do-gooder’ approach than actually listen to and learn from alternative politics. The vocabulary that best describes the community economy logic of operation and valuation can be quite foreign to the mindset of governments. Therefore, positive interaction with public authorities requires processes in which the point of view of the practitioners gets ‘translated’ into public policy. The challenge is that this ought to happen without the hegemonic discourse to co-opt the alternative and radical vocabulary.

A partner state can then be understood as having two functions. First, it is a government which allows experimenting and maintaining ‘protective spaces’ (Smith and Raven 2012). The partner state as an enabler means maintaining spaces for self-organisation rather than incentivising civic activity towards determined ends such as full-time employment. The partner state should be open to transform itself in order to create social space for the community economies as autonomous entities. Secondly, a partner state should also be understood as a government open to learn from the values of community economies and be willing to reconsider its institutions to adjust to their logic, rather than merely allowing them to operate.

All this being said, a critical note should be added: direct support cannot be automatically taken as positive. Sometimes a good-willing government can also be a government operating too close to the community economy. On occasion, supportive government activity can also be government activity which will become institutionalised thereby creating a norm that is restrictive and in rigidity lacks the adaptive flexibility. Benefiting from a government requires not only goodwill from the side of the government, but also an element of autonomy and distance to the government for the community economy.

One challenge concerning both the state and the hegemonic capitalist economy is their narrow understanding of ‘value’. The

value model of community economies is discussed in Chapter 2, with a focus on timebanks. No system of governance could of course choose to shift overnight to an economy informed by another conception of value. However, nothing would prevent public actors from asking themselves, what steps they could take toward the direction of such an alternative value model. Fundamentally, if community economies do embody a qualitatively better conception of ‘the economic’, then wider economic systems should be informed by this conception.

### **Synopsis of the book**

To recap the point so far, we look for strongly sustainable, democratic and horizontal ideas and practices, incarnated in community economies. Furthermore, we are interested in how these initiatives can flourish within welfare states, and also impact their future forms. Therefore we promote the slogan ‘with, within and beyond the welfare state’, and maintain an insistence on the sharp division between the welfare state and welfare ethos, the latter remaining an inspiration for constructing democratic and sustainable societies. Our mission is not to promote the welfare state as it is but rather to save and rearticulate the ethos that facilitated the original construction of the welfare state and articulated it as a utopia. Or, to put a long story short: our aim is to analyse the tension between given community-based utopias and a presupposed state-based utopia. Community economies are a challenge to the welfare state, which we urge it to address.

This serves as the starting point for the remaining six chapters in the book. All approach the tensions discussed above from somewhat different perspectives. The cases discussed and approaches taken very purposefully reflect the versatility of community economies. Yet geographically, the cases are located within Finland. This is not because interesting cases would not exist within other countries with a traditional welfare state identity, but because they were easy to approach, and because the cases in Finland serve as good

examples that can be generalised quite like any others.

In Chapter 2, Teppo Eskelinen explores the notion of ‘social value’. While traditionally economic value has been anchored in either labour or market demand, community economies are unique in insisting on a distinct idea of value. This idea is based on interaction, recognition and community; yet it is ‘economic’ in the sense of facilitating exchange and being embedded in value-storing practices. After trying to state systematically this conception of value, the article moves on to ask, how can a government relate to this conception of value? Can it recognise this kind of value? Can it foster it? Could it, eventually, see itself producing value as understood within current economic alternatives, rather than being stuck with the capitalist conception?

Chapter 3 sees Tuuli Hirvilammi and Maria Joutsenvirta scrutinising the tension between work as understood within diverse economies, and the currently hegemonic ideas and norms of labour and employment. How can people devote their agency and time to constructing alternatives when they also need to survive in a capitalist economy, perhaps being pushed to employment by disciplining authorities? The question is approached by studying individuals who are actively involved in developing alternatives. The chapter takes up two case studies – an art centre and a food cooperative –, through which a repertoire of work practices are analysed. The article asks, what are the practical ramifications of decisions by state actors and welfare institutions on the work practices existing within these alternatives? The findings show how employment policies and social security systems have both enabling and disabling impacts on the possibilities to enact community economies. The chapter then proceeds to discuss, how could the enabling features be strengthened.

Pieta Hyvärinen contributes with an exploration of small-scale food production in Chapter 4. Small-scale food production is a living practice rather than a historical remnant. Furthermore, it should be seen as one of the potential remedies for the threatening

ecological crisis, in contrast to the productivist welfare state, which obscures the material basis of food production and sees the expansion of production as the most viable solution to existing problems. Hyvärinen examines small-scale food production in relation to various tensions which unfold from this setting: how can the welfare state be enabling and disabling; what kinds of relations with other species are in operation in the production practices; how does the capitalocentric worldview manifest itself here and how could diversity be promoted?

In Chapter 5, Anna-Maria Isola and Janne Laiho examine food waste as a specific kind of commons. While leftovers can theoretically be freely claimed by anyone, food waste is both a system of living on the surplus of the welfare state, and a contested terrain because of new 'participatory' systems. Currently, there are new initiatives to organise the unemployed to cook together from leftover food. This system combines control of the unemployed, participatory citizenship, and circular resource-efficient economy – in other words both positive and negative aspects. Through an analysis of such systems, the article analyses the colliding and mutually enforcing aspects of the welfare state and the 'leftover commons'. Is the leftover cooking system a way of the welfare state to enforce traditional productivist control over the workforce, or a way to establish a sphere of commons and support increasing independency from the monetary economy?

In Chapter 6, Juhana Venäläinen analyses the self-organised mobility networks created through online ridesharing groups. These systems challenge the traditional public transport services as well as more commercially oriented platforms of sharing. They can then be seen an institutionalisation of ad hoc 'transport commons', such as hitch-hiking. Yet it is an open question, whether such transport commons can really be an alternative to public/commercial modes of transport, rather than being merely complementary. To what extent do they ultimately depend on the existing transport systems? Could institutionalised transport

systems be formed on the basis of self-organised transport commons? The article discusses these issues by analysing the hybrid and dichotomous qualities of ridesharing systems, which currently enjoy the freedom to design their rules and practices relatively autonomously.

The concluding chapter is a commentary serving as a postface, written by Sanna Ryyänen and Laura Kumpuniemi. The chapter delves into the issue of whether the northern community economies care to learn sufficiently from the rich traditions of alternative economies of the Global South. Drawing from the experiences in Latin America, Ryyänen and Kumpuniemi point out that economic alternatives might look quite different when they are created for purposes of survival; and the reality of government partnering with community economies might create other kinds of outcomes than we would like to hope for.

Together, the chapters aim at entering a kind of implicit dialogue with each other, or at least providing a collection of viewpoints. The relation between community economies and welfare states is not settled, and one can ask, whether it ever will fully be. But different perspectives can shed light on different scenarios, points of friction, hopes and fears.