

Community Supported Economy

– CSX –

**New entrepreneurial narratives
in words, deeds, and pictures.**

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Foreword

We are writing history, together. Every single day. With every (in-)action. Ever have. Ever will. Because life does not simply happen to us. We can co-create it. Often cited Margaret Mead said:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

This book is the result of committed individuals coming together around a shared interest: community-supported (CS) entrepreneurial narratives – existing ones and those which want to be told from now onwards.

While each chapter, i.e. author collective tells different stories, what they have in common is the finding that so-called “alternatives” or solutions do not necessarily need to be invented but to be seen and experienced.

This book is an invitation to learn from practice – *to learn from the emerging future* – and imagine and feel into new narratives. May this book be useful to both: those of you who first get in touch with the concept of community-supported economy (CSX); and the entrepreneurs among you who want to take ‘economy’ literally. ‘Oikonomia’ originally means household management. Therefore, economy is actually an act of caretaking. Let us do take care of what lies in our hands, e.g. the transformation of economic systems, hence the way we relate to each other.

Theres Konrad

PART I

Preparing the ground

1. WHY this book?

“So how do you change paradigms? [...] you keep pointing at the anomalies and failures in the old paradigm, you keep speaking louder and with assurance from the new one, you insert people with the new paradigm in places of public **visibility** and power.” (Meadows 1999, p. 18; highlights by T.K.)

#CSX: Community Supported Economy. The new paradigm we have been waiting for? The **intention** of present book is to give ‘new entrepreneurial narratives’ visibility.

Introduction

System changes, from individual to organizational to societal level, are oftentimes connected to moments of disruption, (inner) conflicts, surprise, disorientation, and / or frustration. These moments are valuable though! They bear great potential, depending on *how we decide to react*. How we react depends on our own inner state, and on our mindset. Latter was classified as the deepest leverage point of how to intervene in a system (Abson et al., 2017).

The author Antoine de Saint Exupery wrote:

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

Sharing visions, creating pictures in front of our (inner) eyes, is powerful, as history has already demonstrated us several times. Journalist George Monbiot highlighted this in his TEDtalk “The new political story that could change everything”¹ and artist Shilo Suleman at her performance during the COP 26 in Glasgow, equally stating that “the stories that we tell are vital”². Similarly, “People & Permaculture” author Looby Macnamara (2012) asked

“What are the limiting factors for achieving a socially just and sustainable future? What’s taking us off in the wrong direction? Is it lack of information, imagination, education or resources? (...?) Perhaps we do not have a **clear vision** of what we would actually like as a society, (...)

¹ George Monbiot (2019) The new political story that could change everything. TEDSummit 2019: https://www.ted.com/talks/george_monbiot_the_new_political_story_that_could_change_everything [27.01.23]

² Shilo Suleman (2021): <https://ecovillage.org/inspiring-women-shilo-shiv-suleman/> (11:47min) [26.05.22]. Like her, we are eager to see and explore what our relationship with the planet can be.

People need access to attractive alternative ways of living.” (Macnamara, 2012, p. 168; highlights by T.K.)

There is a call to tell and share **new stories** – new narratives humanity can grow into, giving our minds and hearts something to connect.

Need of new narratives – from personal to societal level

Desirable future visions, new narratives about economy & society, hence, about **how we connect with each other**, are needed so we have a mental model of what can be paths forward.

This process involves people’s intrapersonal dimension (Konrad 2023).

Macnamara (2012) brings to the point why changing our own narrative is key:

“If we cannot change ourselves then how can we want or expect the rest of the **world** to alter? When we change one person in a relationship then the dynamic shifts. We alone can transform ourselves and through this we can change the world. Our growth and development will alter the environment around us. (...) what we do for ourselves we do for the greater good.” (Macnamara, 2012, p. 52)

Background of the book

The authors of the following chapters, students of the very first course about community supported economy (CSX) at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, have not been familiar with CSX before the start of the course in April 2022. The result of months of (self-) exposure to the growing field of community supported economy – keyword visibility and attention – you have in front of you. The authors first investigated already existing community supported endeavors before, second, transferred lessons learned into another context. The mission was to allow students to **relate** and **reflect**, co-create, experiment, and innovate new sustainability ideas in practice.

Hope for the book & outlook

This book delivers new entrepreneurial narratives which are presented in such a way that one can feel into these, making alternatives graspable – and, last but not least, do-able. Together. Before new narratives can be explored, key terms and the approach of the book are introduced (chapter 2: WHAT, and chapter 3: HOW).

ACTIVITY

Now, before you start delving into this book, we invite you to spend a moment with yourself, reflecting upon your status quo understanding of 'community' and 'economy'. Take a picture if you want, representing your current understanding. *Might it become subject to change?*

2. WHAT is this book about?

This book is about ‘new entrepreneurial narratives’. More precisely, it is about community-supported (CS) entrepreneurial endeavors. It is about economy taken literally. Economy derives from ancient Greek and translates more or less into managing the household. *Is this what came to your mind first when you pondered about the term ‘economy’? What went through your mind thinking of ‘community’?* Before we outline what ‘CSX’ actually means and where it derives from, here key terms explored.

Creating a shared frame of reference

Inspired by Photovoice method (Wang and Burris 1997), to get to know our status quo understanding of ‘economy’ and ‘community’, each student researcher brought two pictures to the second seminar session (April 2022). While the images, some of which shown in this book, capture what economy and community meant to people individually, they inspired a collective meaning making process. *Do you see a common thread?*

Economy – in pictures and words



Economy:

Economy is about money.

Economy:

I thought about how economy entails growth and producing senseless needs which then results in e.g. cheap plastic products and a lot of trash.

Money rules the world

For me, economy consists of different aspects: competition, supply and demand and selling goods. In the status quo economy the most important factor is money: earning money, saving money and spending money.



"The Capital": The "economy" that I know is a very capitalistic one. Everything I look at is almost always selling me something. This wall full of ads of empty shops and flats for rent reminds me of that feeling. I was intrigued by the pizza box at first, thinking it is some kind of art installment. But of course, it is selling me pizza again.



A steady rise in profit and consume, short life cycles of products and no adequate solutions for waste and end of life products are characteristics of the current economy. Therefore, economy for me is finding all types of our (western) waste, like this disposable coffee cup, in every corner of the world.

I see the economy as a greedy institution that has taken over too big a part of our lives, "caging" us (in the red shopping baskets of supermarkets / in offices for the majority of our time). They are always coming up with new things they want us to buy, because of the ridiculous need to grow, but in the end, most of it is junk.



Economy:

This picture shows the impact of the war in terms of damage to infrastructure, a decline in the labour force, inflation, shortages, insecurity and an increase in debt and, of course, the disruption of the economy.



A happy fridge: For me, economy is safety (even if it feels unsafe) for everyone, it is a fridge with food and memories of those you've shared meals with. It is also the possibility of the meals and the memories to come.



Economy:

Economy is for me about RESOURCES and about the way they are GIVEN and TAKEN. I couldn't realize the picture the way I wanted, because there weren't enough hands around – I had to imagine a mass of hands that give and take in order to stress that economy consists of RELATIONS



Associations with, e.g., waste, cages, and war indicate that 'economy' does not have the best reputation³. Some already highlighted that it is about relationships. *May there be a link between community and economy?*

³ In given context of international master students at Leuphana.

Community – in pictures and words

Community means people. For me, community stands for people. In a community people support and complement each other as well as create a safe space for each other.



Non-human community: The picture shows two horses of a herd massaging each other. While there are certainly hierarchies and conflicts in every group or community (of horses or humans), it is part of the instinct of horses in one herd to care about each other and help out when in need. Living in a community means to have structures but also to share and help each other.



This picture shows the importance of innovation in the community and how together we can address and respond to social problems to find the better solutions for the society.



This is our shared flat's kitchen and living room. It's the space where our shared life happens but for me, it is also a symbolic picture for our community. My flatmates are my friends and chosen family and we organize our daily lives in a shared, solidary way.



Schulterblatt 24G: Community for me is support and trust. It is understanding that sharing and helping unites us and gives us a sense of belonging. Community for me is also healing and grounding. In the picture of the left, the view from the community that welcomed me here in Hamburg, when I had very little and felt very lost. On the right is a china set that I am gifting to my neighbour, and that I picked up from the giving away station. A circle.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. The picture shows my parents taking my daughter outside to explore. We went on vacation together during the end of last semester while I had to spend a lot of time on my assignments. Community to me is supporting each other where we CAN and being able to ask for help and receive it.





I want to stress the interweaving of our being in the world. As humans, but also as animals, plants etc. we ARE and BECOME in COMMUNITY as we ARE and BECOME in RELATIONS. These plants are growing together. Hidden for us on the picture are the roots, the taking, giving and interchanging of nutrients, water, information... With my eyes, I can discern individual plants, but with a different perspective I can realize that there is a community, and that it's all about relations.



"The Community Garden" a shared space to grow, visit and gather

Community is about relations. *Isn't economy, too?* Whatever your status quo understanding of community and economy were, let us tell you about community-supported economy, in short: CSX, now.

Community supported 'X' – its origins

Community-supported 'whatsoever', or in short 'X', derives from community-supported agriculture (CSA) and is a form of social and solidarity economy⁴. In CSA, a community, i.e. a group of people connected by a shared interest, such as the need to eat quality food, takes joint responsibility for food production. Groh & McFadden (2000, p. xv) pointed out that "[T]he primary need is not for the farm to be supported by the community, but rather for the community to support itself through farming". This statement suggests already the change of roles, from formerly consumers and producers to 'prosumers'. CSA is a **shared-risk** enterprise (Fig. 1). **Responsibility** is taken together. In the context of agriculture, not only for food production but for land stewardship (Konrad 2015).

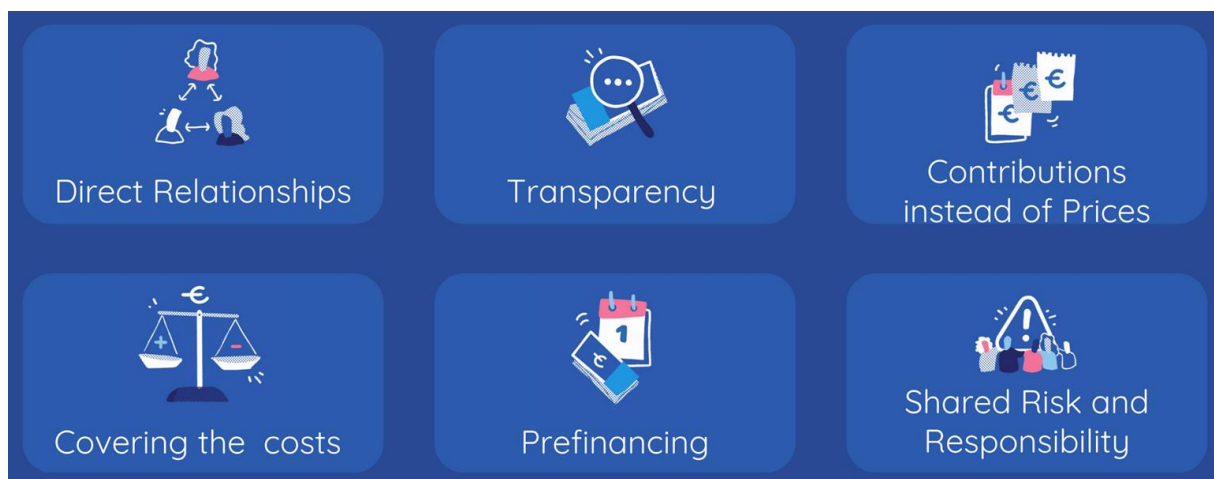


Fig. 1: source: adapted from CSX Website⁵

CSA allows local, socially and environmentally sustainable, and fair food production, while providing for financial security of the farmers by paying in advance a, e.g., monthly **contribution** (Fig. 1, **prefinancing**). In some cases, this contribution can be defined by each community member, dependent upon one's own financial situation, and is organized via 'bidding rounds'. How do they work? Following the principle of **transparency**, the producer / service provider, shows what they need in financial terms. Then, the community looks how to make it happen together (**covering the costs**). This can be by someone contributing 5€ and somebody else with 50€ per month. Not only solidarity towards the service provider is shown, but also towards each other. I give what I have and can, and I get what I need. How is this organized? It can be as simple as writing one's contribution on a piece of paper, putting it in a hat and once

⁴ More on the social and solidarity economy see Bonfert (2022).

⁵ Gemeinschaftsgetragen.de: <https://gemeinschaftsgetragen.de/en/>

everybody did that somebody checks if the costs can be covered. Sometimes a second bidding round is needed to reach the financial goal; key for starting the endeavor.

However, CSA is not growth and global market oriented but targeted to local needs. A CSA is not to grow endlessly but to serve a community. Hence, if there are more and more people interested, the idea is that another community supports itself through farming. In terms of food produced, there is also no need for labels as the community consists of **direct relationships** and is based on trust and solidarity. Hence, in a nutshell, characteristics of CSAs that have already been found to find application in other sectors (from CSA → to CSX) are direct relationships, transparency, contributions instead of prices, cost coverage, prefinancing and shared risk and responsibility (Fig. 1).

ACTIVITY

While the 'A' stands for agriculture, the X stands for all other fields to which the principles of CSA could be applied. *What would you like to see community-supported? Might it already exist?* How the X was set out to be explored in this book is briefly introduced in the next chapter.

3. HOW the book is structured

The intention of the book is to increase the visibility of new entrepreneurial narratives – in words, deeds, and pictures. *Words* as the authors write about the CSX projects they investigated; *deeds* as some authors developed their own CSX initiative or paved the way for others to set up theirs; and *pictures*, as the journey included photographs and other visualizations to better connect to content and cause.

The main body of the book – the following chapters – inform you what was learnt from practice and how future practice can evolve and look like. The approach behind the individual chapters was as follows:

First, teams of student researchers reached out to CSX or related practitioners and other stakeholders to inquire, e.g., about challenges and success factors of community-supported undertakings and certain sectors. Thereby, mostly qualitative research methods were applied. Second, to ‘experience’ the research findings, these were embedded in little stories, with protagonists the reader can relate to. If you find sentences in italics, these are *direct quotes* from people the teams interviewed for their research. Third, to make things explicit, lessons learned are spelled out at the end of each chapter or further thoughts are shared. We therefore hope that food-for-thought – and encouragement towards action – is given.

Inspired by the triple-S heuristic (Sellberg et al., 2021), the creation of the book intended to cater somewhat all: Science, Society, and Self. Striving for real world changes towards sustainability this book followed the transformational, solution-oriented approach of sustainability science; learning from already existing solutions and looking for transfer and scalability in new contexts (Wiek et al., 2012); without forgetting oneself along the process.

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PART II

Stories from the field

4. NOW – let's get it started!

New entrepreneurial narratives – in words, deeds, and pictures.

Part II of this book takes you on different journeys. Let Lana and Alina take you to Lüneburg, where they want to implement what they could learn from already existing community-supported consultings, like *Myzelium* and *Sustainable Thinking* (4.1). Check-out which insights Quinn got from an analysis of current issues in the cultural field, listen into their podcast, and have a look how they were inspired nevertheless by folks who took different-than-usual paths (4.2). Explore what Joice could learn from literature and several practice examples in terms of success factors, but also challenges, when it comes to starting and running a community-supported venture (4.3). In this regard, find out how self-care relates to community care and, like the authors, reflect upon yourself (4.4).

4.1 CSC – Community Supported Consulting

4.2 NEW COMMUNITIES FOR CULTURE AND A NEW CULTURE OF COMMUNITY

4.3 CSX in Practice: Tales of Challenge, Tales of Success

4.4 Laying the base for CSX-Care: From Burn-out, Stress, Isolation, and Shame to Self-Care, Connection, Vulnerability, and Community Care

Refl-ACTION

After the different inputs from each chapter: What do the stories have in common? Take your TIME – here is SPACE for your own TAKE-AWAYS...

5. WOW – what we have learned and where it could lead to

Epilog by the editor

What we have learned along the process is that to **dare to share** is a baseline for finding and co-creating community. This is also how the teams behind the chapters evolved. During the public event “CSX goes Lüneburg”⁶ in April 2022 people offered open spaces to different topics of their interest and concern. People dared to speak out, dared to show what they stand for⁷ – and see the outcome! **COURAGE**, which goes along with vulnerability, is a key ingredient for starting or joining a new community. Here, courage was demonstrated by embracing and exploring the unknown, relating to strangers, and questioning previous held assumptions and understandings of economy and entrepreneurship. Commitment, ownership, creativity, and good teamwork practices led to the chapters you just read.

Interpersonal or collaborative competency was found to be crucial, especially for initiators of CSX projects. This includes both the ability to motivate oneself and others, organize a group and keep the vision alive and present; as well as the intrapersonal dimension⁸. If I cannot look out after myself, and this includes taking my own needs as seriously as those of my community, then my initiative might not last, what several chapters pointed out. (Self-) exploitation is the way to (personal) ruin. *Why going that way?* So far because that is what we can observe in our surroundings – #burn-out on personal level; #climate crisis on global level – and we humans learn, last but not least, by observation and experience.

Let’s change the climate to one of self- *and* community care. Let’s change the economic system to one that serves people *and* planet. See this book as a step in this direction, presenting new stories we can grow into. The story is not over though. It is up to us to (continue) writing it!

The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.

⁶ <https://workshops.thereskonrad.org/?p=105> [28.01.23]

⁷ The economy – it is us! <https://www.insideoutproject.net/en/explore/group-action/die-wirtschaft-sind-wir-the-economy-it-is-us> [28.01.23]

⁸ More about “Be(coming) an ambassador of transformative change from the inside out” in Konrad 2023. The article evolved in preparation for the CSX course.