



www.ijccr.org · ISSN: 1325-9547

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Alves, F. (2018). Editorial: Building community, promoting the commons, and surfing the digital wave. *International Journal of Community Currency Research* 22(2), 1-3.

<https://doi.org/10.15133/j.ijccr.2018.012>

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# International Journal of Community Currency Research

2018 VOLUME 22 (SUMMER)

## EDITORIAL: BUILDING COMMUNITY, PROMOTING THE COMMONS, AND SURFING THE DIGITAL WAVE

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

*“The development of community currencies has reached a crucial stage: it has become evident that the attempts of small groups of social activists to overcome the scarcity of money are not sufficient to create alternatives. It will also be necessary to enter a political struggle and campaign for appropriate framework in which economically viable community currencies can prosper” (Schroeder, 2011<sup>i</sup>).*

A decade has passed since the great financial and economic recession of 2008, and in many respects, it has been a rich and prolific decade for complementary and alternative currencies worldwide. The curiosity, search for and openness to new monetary and financial solutions and designs brought a rapid multiplication of new experiments; the spread and replication of good practices at different scales; the creative diversification of currency designs to fulfil new and different functions; the potentiality of blockchain technology and the digital revolution; the increased ‘municipalization’ of complementary currencies; and a tremendous boost in research in this field. Of course, this time of growth and development also brought new challenges, new tensions, new people and many intriguing questions to explore and research. All of it has made the past decade unique, and there’s little doubt that these are great times to work in, research and develop the field of complementary currencies (CC). Public awareness and interest are on the raise, fuelled by campaigns to “Move your Money<sup>ii</sup>”, to create “sovereign money”, to invest in Bitcoin or Ethereum, or join a Time Bank. Funding opportunities have become more common and projects such as Community Currencies in Action (CCIA<sup>iii</sup>) have made important contributions to the CC world and represent a stepping stone for the future. The willingness and acceptance of communities, municipalities and regions to welcome, develop and promote CC is stronger than ever, stretching across the political spectrum, making CCs attractive projects to build alliances for social integration and economic revitalization.

Within this socio-economic and political setting, Rolf Schroeder’s words from 2011, cited above, remain relevant as the links and interdependence of the necessary monetary revolution and its inevitable socio-political counterpart becomes more and more apparent. As the field evolved from the scattered pioneering phase of the last decades of the XX century, through the building of networks, experience and knowledge characteristic of the beginning of the third millennium, to the slowly maturing communities of practice consolidating today, three key invitations present

themselves. The first is an invitation to keep building a strong, resilient and sustainable community of practice. Second is the invitation to connect with other movements such as solidarity economy, the sharing economy, the degrowth and post-growth and the commons. Third, the invitation to embrace and internalize the digital revolution and with it explore new socio-economic realms and possibilities. Three invitations, or three movements in the wave of transformation that we are now surfing, and that the Barcelona conference aimed at fully capturing and riding.

## 2. THE CONFERENCE

It was within this co-creative space of potential, new developments, challenges and opportunities that the *IV International Conference on Complementary and Social Currencies*<sup>iv</sup> took place in the vibrant city of Barcelona in May 2017, gathering more than 380 researchers and practitioners from 34 countries for four days of presentations, debates, and mutual co-learning and co-development of CC practice and research. With the support of the International Journal of Community Currency Research (IJCCR), the Research Association on Monetary Innovation and Community and Complementary Currency Systems (RAMICS<sup>v</sup>) and fantastically hosted by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Dr. August Corrons (Professor in the Department of Economics), the conference was an opportunity not only to gather the global CC community, but also to have a small glimpse of all that is happening in the field, and share valuable insights.

It was not by chance that the conference took place in Barcelona, a city and a region (Catalunya) leading the way in monetary innovation and experimentation. From digital currencies such as *Faircoin*<sup>vi</sup> to Municipal experiments such as the *Gram*<sup>vii</sup> and the growing value of the alternative *ECO*<sup>viii</sup>, the strong presence of local and regional activists and researchers was an inspiring and fertile ground for this international event. Of particular interest for myself and in line with the program of the conference, four transversal topics were key: the relationship between multiple CC's as the interactions between them increase and the common space of complementarity expands; the relationship with the wider economic, legal and monetary systems as CC's gain scale and/or are implemented by different actors such as municipalities and even governments; the promises, challenges and opportunities of digital technologies and blockchain in particular; and finally, the true economic, social and environmental impact and effectiveness of CC's. These topics made up a big part of the conference, and therefore also of this IJCCR Special Issue, aiming to honour and publish some of the best works presented in Barcelona, while building the growing literature on CC and exploring some of its edges.

## 3. BUILDING COMMUNITY, THE COMMONS AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

The opening paper of this Special Issue - *IJCCR Publications: A Literature Review 2009-2016* - investigates the patterns, trends and overall conclusions of the IJCCR publications since 2009, offering the reader a unique view of past research as well as insights for future developments current research gaps. It is followed by two papers that explore growing edges related to the management of the commons and the role CC's can have in this crucial economic challenge for the XXI century. These are a practical and pragmatic Swiss case study - *The District Currency - A New Currency Design for Managing the Commons* -, followed by an exploration of the values-based and theoretical principles underlying time credits as a tool for re-balancing power inequalities and promoting a new economy - *Forms of Money Power and Measure of Economic Value. Time Based Credit for Care and Commons Economy*. Our fourth paper adds yet another piece to the vast research done concerning the Palmas currency and banking system in Brazil, looking into the phenomena of the digitalization of the Palmas, the use of the e-Dinheiro platform and the different ways in which new digital technologies can be adopted by CC communities - *A digital community bank: mapping negotiation mechanisms in its consolidation as an alternative to commercial banks*. Continuing the topic of digitalization, our fifth paper focuses on the potential of blockchain protocols to host and develop CC's, presenting the Trustlines Network system architecture and unfolding its possible

uses for digital CC's and for CC's exchange - Extending Blockchain Technology to host Customizable and Interoperable Community Currencies. Finally, our sixth and seventh papers look into the impact and the sustainability of CC's through the lens of empirical studies in Switzerland and Poland, presenting important insights for future CC developments and designs - *Swiss impact currency: improving impactful currency systems for a sustainable economy in Switzerland; Sustainability of local complementary currencies - Conclusions from an empirical study in Poland*. Our last paper of this Special Issue - *Identifying Barriers and Solutions to Adoption of Social, Complementary and/or Virtual Currencies* - offers exciting and valuable recommendations to CC practioners on how to overcome emotional, management, technological and environmental barriers to CC implementation.

This Special Issue is the first of two, both building on works presented in Barcelona to showcase some of the best current CC research. Both Special Issues also aim to launch new research questions and trigger new insights for the development of the field and the growing scientific excellence of the IJCCR Journal.

I wish you a fantastic reading!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Schroeder, R., Miyasaki, Y. and Fare, M. (2011) 'Community Currency Research: An analysis of the literature' International Journal of Community Currency Research 15 (A) 31-41

<sup>ii</sup> This was a very famous movement in 2010 in the US and Europe that got media attention and helped raised public awareness about the design of the banking systems. The link for the British movement: <http://www.moveyourmoney.org.uk/>

<sup>iii</sup> CCIA was a EU funded project through the Interreg Program that took place between 2012 and 2015: <http://communitycurrenciesinaction.eu/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://dineroyvalores.com/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://ramics.org/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://fair-coin.org/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.gramenet.cat/moneda-local/>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://cooperativa.cat/es/otro-sistema-economico/la-moneda-social/>