Circular economy through living community

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Abstract

This paper presents findings on the paradigmatic nature of business model development emerging from embedded, transdisciplinary research in a primarily linear economic context in the Netherlands. Reflecting on the author's critical ethnographic inputs from long-term operational research in a circular economic context and the sociological nature of community, new theory is proposed showing the paradigmatic matching of individuals and conglomerates with a linear economic outlook and persons and communities with a circular economic outlook. This research concludes that business models for a circular economy should be based on community perspectives, rather than individual outlooks, and presents an example showing what this could mean.

Keywords

Business model development, circular economy, paradigmatic approach, community perspectives, sociological nature

Introduction

The term 'circular economy' is presented as an alternative to the 'linear economy', which is commonly understood as not working in today's context of climate crisis and resource depletion. The linear economy has fallen short in the sense that it is not delivering outcomes for people and nature today, nor for future generations, evidenced by growing inequality, among other things. The circular economy is posed as a potential solution, but what does this mean for business models?

Hegemonic business modelling is based on the outlook of the individual. However, in many cultures, community is the basis for social life, including the economy, and these cultures have historically practised a circular economy. This begs the question of how can we move from operating as an individual to being in a community? Or: how do we *be* in community?

This pertinent question arose during my study of awareness and behaviour in envisioned transitions from a linear economy to a circular economy for the University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, as researcher in the Lectorate Networking and the Circular Economy (NiCE). In this role, I engaged in discussions with colleagues, researchers, and other actors on the circular economy. The subject of community arose often, whether the actor was in government, businesses, religious or knowledge institutes. It did not depend on the titles that labelled them as 'in charge' (e.g., owner or CEO) or exploring (e.g., academic or policy manager); in most conversations, the matter popped up at the beginning of the articulation of the collaborative research. Thus, this question - how do we *be* in community? - guided my research.

Context

The government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' set the target for 100% circularity in 2050 (*Nederland circulair in 2050. Rijksbreed programma Circulaire Economie*, Government of the Netherlands, 2016). This target put 'the circular economy' firmly on the national economic agenda. In its plans, the Dutch government defines the circular economy as follows: "In a circular economy, we handle products, materials, and resources efficiently and socially responsibly within the Earth's capacity, ensuring that future generations also have access to material prosperity" (Government of the Netherlands, 2016, p. 8, translation: author). This definition of what a circular economy entails is rather slim compared to the 77-word definition that Kirchherr *et al.* (2017) came up with after studying 113 definitions. Since then, many more definitions of a circular economy have emerged – and continue to emerge. However, most focus on materialities and reflect human-centred views of the world, not (yet) covering a broad spectrum of manifestations in Anthropocene (the current geological age of human dominance) complexities, let alone covering aspects of Symbiocene (re-integration of humans with nature) (Albrecht, 2019; Figge, Thorpe and Gutberlet, 2023). It appears that proposed normative denotations of a circular economy struggle to be specific, beyond handling of physicalities.

In this paper, I attempt to unpick the disconnect that I have seen in the literature and discussions on a circular economy, which I theorise is due to a clash of paradigms – the individualist versus the communalist. In this sense, I see the circular economy as an inclusive economy aiming for the pluralistic generation of merit for humans, non-humans, and other beings, at least, but not limited to, in the social, ecological, and commercial realms. Further, I regard the transition from linear to circular forms of economic life not primarily a change in 'doing', but as actions emerging from a profound change in 'being' (cf. Brown, 2017).

Theoretical framework

Studies in economics deal with complex sociostructural phenomena. Different theories and methods in research can enhance the diversity of approaches, aiding our understanding of complexities and contexts. Diversity adds conceptual relevance to practice, epistemological relevance to present and future economic research, and instrumental relevance to future research. Research in and from so-called 'Western' or 'modern' settings is particularly prone to a Eurocentric gaze, which usually entails the silencing – or epistemicide – of other ways of knowing (Grosfoguel, 2013).

From over 20 years of research experience in Africa and beyond, I am attuned to the presence or lack of communal sensitivity and framing in such research (cf. Yunkaporta, 2021). I see circular realities to be of all ages and in all places, linking in with wrought, ethical, and edifying 'normal(s)' (cf. Kehnel, 2023, p. 18). Therefore, I take a recalcitrant position on a common sense informed by a Euro-American genealogy of research and notions of superior (linear) economic progress embraced by 'developed' countries.

The question "How *do* we *be* in community?" offers a refreshing perspective from which to study a circular economy. The question made sense to me, as I have observed that companies seem to be searching for 'new ways' to relate to both suppliers and customers, against a background of changing regulations, roles, and interactions. But there appeared to be more at stake. Does this question indicate a more profound, underlying issue? Is it indicative of the emergence of a different paradigm? In my conversations about a circular economy, with colleagues and other actors, issues of love and attention, unquestioned foci on human individuals, and epidemic loneliness surfaced in their follow-up remarks. Might there be tension between contemporary practices and a circular economy that need us *to be* together?

This paper explores theoretical, methodical, and practical notions around these issues. Drawing on a reflexive science, I reconstruct theory that could benefit from further study in the transition of towards a paradigm that would support a circular economy a circular economy. In particular, I look at individual versus community ways of understanding the economy and identify perspectives that are in line with a linear economy and those that are in line with a circular economy.

Method

In my studies, I immerse myself in society and, as a pracademic, observe local narratives and human and non-human behaviour. After my work in communities and academia outside of the Netherlands[1], in 2022, I opened up to Dutch literature and observed established and emerging practices in Dutch society. In the process, I have interacted in depth with over 50 researchers and practitioners since mid-2023. My conversational partners came from all walks of life with a wide range of experience and responsibilities in government, knowledge handling, politics, culture, and commerce. I triangulated Dutch inputs with my observations and experiences over 20 years of living and working in and from Africa (van Stam, 2021b). I discussed my determinations in person and through telecommunications with the interlocutors and researchers in northern Europe and Southern Africa.

This study applied a method derived from a cognate discipline of applied research called 'living research'. Living research (van Stam, 2019) is an explorative and transdisciplinary research approach that uses mixed methods centring on critical ethnography in a reflexive science (Burawoy, 2009). This method is characterised by contextualised critical thinking, articulating local stories, and attempts to espouse critical theory in complex situations. In living research, the researcher is an integral member of society, allowed 'in' as a collaborating knowledge-worker. In applying this method's reflexivity, I seek to adopt a 'decolonial' attitude by embracing incompleteness and mediating the dangers of *domination* by being inert, *silencing* by hegemonic ideologies through refraining from speaking, mediating *objectivation* by focusing on oral means of communication, and *normalisation* by reduction in categories through transdisciplinarity (van Stam, 2017a).

The epistemological lens of this research is dynamic and integrative, in which emotions, intellect, evaluation and pragmatism support subjective *knowing* by accumulating insights in the *knower* (du Toit, 2007; Bigirimana, 2017). In this orientation, the researcher gathers insights through experience, contemplation, judgment, and action (Bigirimana, 2017).

The living research method is a morally grounded (Murphy and Ellis, 1996) and paradigmatic response to cross-cultural issues and how the technique relates to power and coloniality (Hlabangane, 2018). It focuses on narrative points of view, taking note of both the voices heard and those that are not. It observes 'what is there' and 'what is not there', sensitive to an imbued sense of 'togetherness' to navigate clashes of worldviews (Mawere and van Stam, 2015). It relies on *faith*, in relation to the substance of learning to be acquired, and a *hope* that it is possible to know comprehensively. However, as agnostic to

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[1] I lived and worked as an engineer and researcher in Zambia and Zimbabwe for over 20 years (1998–2022), where local communities invited me to study community life at the intersection of society and technology.

normative knowledge, the research outcomes cannot be more than indicative: a peg in the ground, a snapshot of a particular view, set in time and place.

In this research, the seven steps of living research transpired as follows:

TABLE 1. RESEARCH STEPS: LIVING RESEARCH

Living research process	Affect	Effectuation in this research
STEP 1. Community sets the why, what, and who of the research.	Belonging	Invited as a researcher by Windesheim University and as a conversation participant by each interlocutor
STEP 2. Community representatives introduce research in existing structures.	Embedding	Introduced as a researcher by authorised people
STEP 3. Conceptualisation, write-up, and discussions are held in and with communities.	Populating	Physical presence at institutes and frequently with interlocutors; write up in public environments
STEP 4. Any action is instantly interacted upon in the geography of the community.	Conversing	Findings continuously discussed with others in the host institute and with interlocutors
STEP 5. Community members embody knowing and present the learnings.	Knowing	This has not yet taken place, as process understanding takes longer than six months to mature.
STEP 6. Communications are co-developed, discussed, and presented in the community first.	Sharing	This paper has been concluded with interlocutors and, upon wider acceptance, presented in a research setting first.
STEP 6. Community stewards propagate information and can veto its transfer and content.	Authority	This paper is approved by interlocutors, with veto rights at any step of the way.

Step 1 in the living research process – the community sets the research agenda (why, what and who) – functions as an essential selector or inclusion criteria, if you may. The research-inviting process requires an active attitude from the inviting institute or people involved and is a test of the authoritative consent within the research relationship. Moreover, the invitation signals inclusivity and indicates incompleteness and openness in context. The inviting entity/human being will likely want to play an active role, contributing and collaborating towards worthwhile investigation. Additionally, through an invitation process, comprehensive ownership is anchored. This anchoring transforms the role of the researcher in a communal setting to that of a participant with derived responsibilities.

In this situation, from an ethnographic perspective, this research began at the moment I was invited to take up the role of researcher in the Lectorate Networking and the Circular Economy (NiCE) and got going in earnest upon the first invitation to converse with companies and their networks about stewardship. This invitation is mutual recognition and acknowledgement of relationship and the desirability of mutual contemplation of the topic, i.e., circular economy. Thus, this research started well before the subject matter was fully defined.

During this research, I met with other researchers, practitioners, and actors unconstrained. Interactions took place without a pre-set agenda. The pace and content of the interactions unfolded serendipitously in the interactions and mutual exchange of stories and ideas. These meetings were a mix of chance and formal meetings. As the research evolved, the following emerged during the research encounters:

1. Introduction: Personal introduction of each person present, which offered insights into life stories, intrinsic motivations, authority, and circumstances leading to the encounter.
2. Round 1: A first round of research/discussions on the question 'Why are we meeting each other?' and the questions or observations underlying the gathering.
3. Presentation: Upon invitation by the convening authority, the researcher presented pracademic perspectives on the emerging questions posed during the personal introductions. The researcher introduced living theory present in embodied knowledge and introduced potential scientific observations. Among these was a discussion of roles in a healthy 'Triple Helix', consisting of government, entrepreneurship, and knowledge institutes and the disclosure of the authorisation of the researcher.
4. Round 2: A second round of gathering questions and ruminations from others, reflecting on the preceding content of conversations.
5. Invitation to collaborate: An open invitation to co-develop the emerging investigation, a discussion on how to respect and report to relevant authoritative persons, not in attendance, and a commitment to further research collaboratively.

At each stage of living research, all people present contribute, prompted to do so if not. Each step in the list above became organic upon saturation by exhausting and recognising all contributions by all people present. The encounter ends when all people present allow for it to end or the convening authority summarises the encounter.

This method can be considered innovative within north European culture. In particular, this method takes time for people to contribute and build consensus, and linear notions of time (such as those held by European cultures) can hamper the method's effectiveness. Therefore, cultural constraints and the polychronic nature of time are discussed in advance and, although many of the participants described feeling the 'pressure of the clock', in many circumstances, abundant time was provided by them. Thus, saturation could be achieved in most encounters. Some interlocutors testified about the research approach and its 'holding of space' as a breath of fresh air. While this approach may be less usual in the Netherlands, in some cultures, people find the method to be common sense (cf., Bidwell *et al.*, 2013).

Literature review

What is a community?

Numerous scholarly works delineate two primary social entities: the 'individual', representing a singular human being, and the 'community', signifying an amalgamation of individuals. This hegemonic narrative demarcates these social categories, observing a discernible schism between the individual and the collective, evident in terminological overlaps, such as between 'group-of-experts' and 'community-of-practice'. The distinction and interplay between the individual and the community constitute a prevailing thematic framework for research outputs. Sensitised in decolonial thought, the literature based on these two main categories evokes a disconcerting sense of discord, which is the result of a clash of paradigms (Mawere and van Stam, 2015).

The dichotomous concepts of 'individualism' and 'communitarianism' introduce further complexity, as the relationship between 'communitarians' and 'communities' remains ambiguous. Questions arise regarding the nature of the individual's connection to community, particularly considering the observable challenges proto-individuals face in recognising the inherent value and values within communal settings. Individuals collaborating with communities walk a challenging path, fraught with difficulties, imbued with sentiments of trouble and despair, and, at times, culminating in withdrawal marked by disdain and arrogance. The prevailing notion that a community is merely an aggregation of individuals persists in scholarly discourse and popular stereotyping.

While understanding what constitutes an individual is ostensibly straightforward within a Western-trained perspective, the definition of a community remains mysterious. Some posit that 'modern Western society' has relinquished an appreciation of community life, attributing this to the erosion of communal values. The question emerges: if a group of individuals forms a community, does this collective experience communal life? Apparently not necessarily (Boutellier, 2019).

I addressed this quandary in prior research by scrutinising categories within two distinct contexts: the private/secluded and the public/social spheres (van Stam, 2021a). This analysis revealed two additional categories: the person (in the private domain) and the conglomerate (in the public sphere). The incorporation of these categories elucidates the essence of a community, offering clarity on a perceived 'lost knowledge' – in Western framings, that is – surrounding community dynamic. This approach redefines the conceptual linkage between individuals and communities, transcending the dominant understanding. The interactions guided by these positions of human beings are well explained by a schema describing the classifications of individuals, conglomerates, persons, and communities (van Stam, 2021a), depicted in Figure 1.

Individual Unrelated Human Being	Conglomerate Individuals together
Person Related Human Beings	Community Persons together

FIGURE 1. OVERVIEW OF CATEGORIES OF SINGLE AND GROUPS OF HUMAN BEINGS

In this model, 'an individual' is a human being, regardless its relationships, and 'a conglomerate' is a group of individuals together. 'A person' is a related human being, i.e., a person embedded in relationships, and 'a community' is a grouping of persons.

Who is in charge?

The historical context of concerted efforts by categorised people to establish systems of dominance over others in other categories is not novel. It is showcased in orientalism, imperialism, and colonisation, spanning all times and places. The concentration of authority to regulate or impact on the conduct of individuals is conspicuous. Conglomerate stakeholders actively safeguard their interests through strategic manoeuvring in political arenas, thereby influencing the politics that conceptualise and categorise realities, determining endorsed practices.

In previous research, I deduced that preserving values and cultures holds profound significance in locales where socio-political engagement fosters the cohesiveness of society. These cultural aspects are the prerequisite of relationholders (van Stam, 2022). Operating from their social embedment, relationholders exhibit skill in navigating interpersonal relationships, exerting influence over the acceptance of proposals and the endorsement of specific practices and powers. Figure 2 illustrates the contrasting approaches, wherein relationholders engage with cultural realms rooted in their social context, while stakeholders undertake similar engagements in political realms.
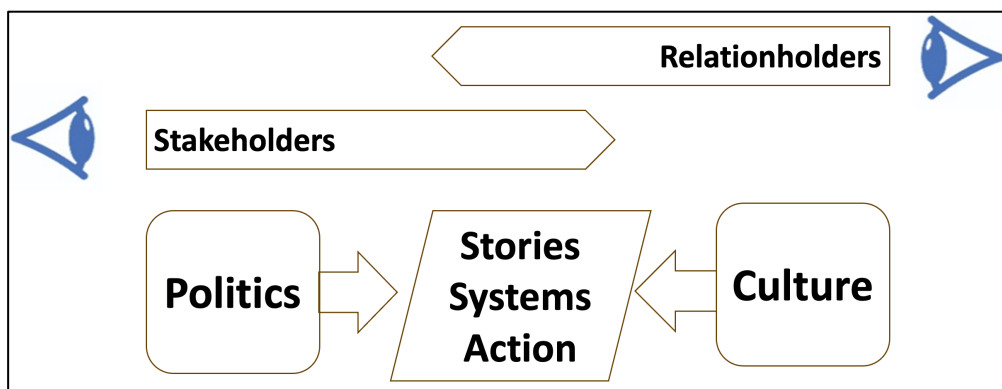

FIGURE 2. POSITIONING OF RELATIONHOLDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Findings

In framing a transition from linear to circular business models, recognising the centrality of the question "How do we *be* in community?" is significant. In the Dutch context, collaborators reiterated the importance of 'community', 'values', and 'intrinsic motivation'. They considered these words crucial to their actions, especially in the unfolding future. However, they were uncertain as to how these words could crystallise and guide their actions in contemporary practises.

Reflecting on 'the circular economy', Dutch interlocutors acknowledged that their institutional and personal heritages – set in history, identity, and roles – and a shared understanding of sustainability and responsibility – including a drive towards a circular economy – were implicit elements of their behaviour. They considered exercising responsible behaviour a 'normal' part of their being, although context and circumstances forced them to act in often perpendicular and unsettling ways (Rijsdijk and van Stam, 2024).

Dutch interlocutors testified about inert systems and severe socioeconomic pressure to comply with hegemonic economic thought and measures of success set in Eurocentric philosophies. Economic framings set in a normative epistemology severely limit their scope of interpretation. To introduce epistemic plurality, during the research, an overview was co-developed to aid reflection on how clashes of viewpoints could look. Table 2 reproduces the resulting overview.

TABLE 2. NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES IN LINEAR AND CIRCULAR ECONOMIES

Theme	Linear Economy	Circular Economy
Action	Structuring	Including
Attitude	Taking	Sharing
Behaviour	Indifferent	Compassionate
Boundaries	Defining	Fading
Communication	Compartmentalised	Comprehensive
Complexity	Specialisation	Generalisation
Expertise	Disciplinary	Holistic
Fear	Guilt	Shame
Focus	Advantage	Wellbeing
Funding	Short-term	Loyal
Game plan	Zero-sum	Win-win
Ideology	Normative	Dynamic
Intention	Isolating	Contaminating
Interest	Rent-seeking	Wealth-creation
Motivation	Desire	Intention
Philosophy	Individual	Community
Purpose	Exploitation	Stewardship
Unit	Separation	Harmony
Orientation	Accumulating	Contributing
Respect	Power	Authority
Place	Unconnected	Grounded
Positioning	Competition	Collaboration
Regulation	Power	Authority
Social skills	Functional	Seasoned

Success	Quantity	Quality
Time	Linear	Polychronic
Transparency	Opaque	Lucid
Change	Exnovation	Innovation
Issues	Dilemma	Paradox

Reflecting on Table 2, Dutch interlocutors regarded the words in the column 'Circular Economy' as aspirational, but foreign to realities in their day-to-day work. Some interlocutors were upfront and stated, "A circular economy does not work for me; I will only do it when it is being demanded", in an analogy to Dutch consumers reportedly wishing to embrace circularity only when its products and services are "better at a lower-cost" (Koch and Vringer, 2023).

Reflections

Eurocentrism

In my studies of European literature and practice, I observed ubiquitous Eurocentrism, in which the circular economy was explained in terms of the linear economy (van Stam, 2024). This framing of 'the new' using concepts of 'the old' became very apparent when Zambians volunteered their participation in the research and joined one month of interactions and conversations with Dutch collaborators. After being asked to provide input on their observations at a public event, they testified to live happily in a circular economic setting because, at home, they *live community life*. Subsequently, in further discussions and interactions, it became clear that although both worlds overlap, they appear to exist side by side, as in different paradigms.

The question "How do we *be* in community?" sensitised this research to the issue of social personhood in a setting of interconnected coherence, which is one of the marks of a circular economy. Social personhood emerges from social cohesion and collective unity, embedded in belonging structures, culminating in social bonding, balancing duties and rights, communalism and reciprocity (van Nes, Nullens and van den Heuvel, 2022). This social personhood can also be a basis for conviviality ('*gezelligheid*' in Dutch, and per '*ubuntu*', see Nyamnjoh, 2015) and recognising embodied knowledge in relationship building and maintenance. This social personhood is not related to an individual self. An individual aims to attain self-sufficiency and control, culminating in social contracting.

Paradigms

In previous research, I recognised and conceptualised (at least) three paradigms (van Stam, 2017a). The 'I-paradigm' constitutes individual selves in an atomic universe focused on the redemption of rights. The 'We-paradigm' consists of social personhoods in a coherent universe, focused on incompleteness and the redemption of reciprocity. The third paradigm

is the 'It-paradigm', which represents a metaphysical and revealed personhood in religious-constituted belonging.

From the interactions, observations, and contemplations, I deduced that the question "How do we *be* in community?" indicates a paradigmatic challenge: how do we *be*? How do we do *being*? This question is valid from the vantage point of a sovereign individual, claiming the right and (partial) ability to constitute togetherness. From Figure 1, it is apparent that such togetherness leads to forming a conglomerate, not a community.

Figure 1 shows that those who are part of the community are understood as persons, not individuals. They *are* because of what the community *is*. Thus, the research question implies another question: 'how to change the paradigm', or 'how to change consciousness'.

Reviewing Figure 1 with this understanding in mind, combined with the notion of the I-paradigm and We-paradigm, resulted in insights into how individuals and conglomerates align with the I-paradigm and how persons and communities fit with the We-paradigm. Figure 3 shows this insight graphically.
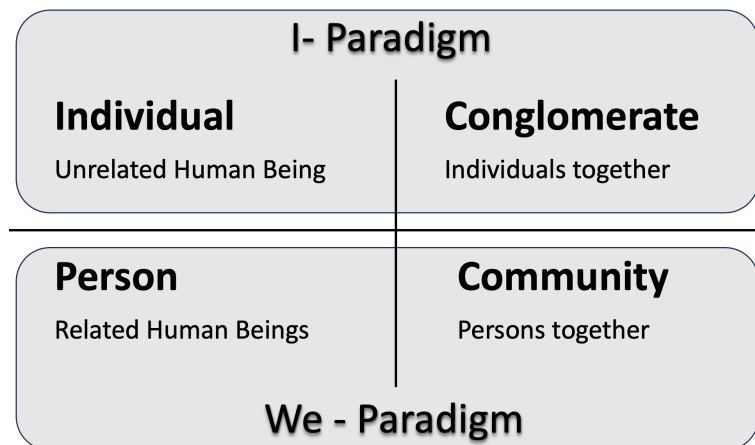

FIGURE 3. CATEGORIES OF SINGLE AND GROUPS OF HUMAN BEINGS MAPPED ONTO I- OR WE-PARADIGMS

Further reflection on the large variety of normative definitions of a circular economy (see the Introduction) and the positioning of authority in relationholders and power in stakeholders (presented in Figure 2), in conjunction with the revelations contained in Figure 3, brought a new perspective on the paradigmatic nature of a circular economy. In this reasoning, the linear economy relates to conglomerates governed by stakeholder-related notions of individuality. These notions are intrinsically linked to I-paradigmatic consciousness. The circular economy, however, is connected to communities with its representation governed by relationholders, set in a We-paradigmatic consciousness. Figure 4 depicts this.

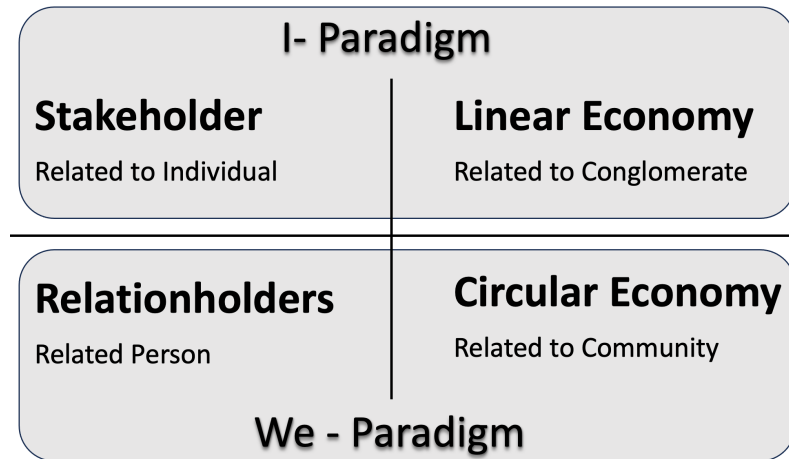| I- Paradigm	
Stakeholder Related to Individual	**Linear Economy** Related to Conglomerate
Relationholders Related Person	**Circular Economy** Related to Community
We - Paradigm	

FIGURE 4. LINEAR AND CIRCULAR ECONOMIES PLOTTED IN I- AND WE-PARADIGMS

Figure 4 makes intuitive sense. In the linear economy, powerful stakeholders are the actors in economic life. Their influence plays out in a political, market economy. This narrative is corroborated in the literature (e.g., Dussel, 1993). However, in such a setting, the discussions on the circular economy go reluctantly beyond quantifiable resource use. Although widely acknowledged as part of circularity, guidance on what is meant by societal and ecological value creation struggles to go beyond market-based principles, as it is conceptualised in linear economic thinking.

The hegemony of neoliberalism has resulted in various normative, linear economic variants. These variants are closely linked with the individual/conglomerate realm. There has been a growing understanding that renewed partnership and amalgamation in governance, interventions, and thinking is needed. When assessing Figures 2 and 4, one can recognise the roles played in this triad. When contemplating the role of stakeholders in the political realm, one realises how this role is constitutive of governments, as in the Westphalian understanding of the role of nation-states. When contemplating the role of relationholders, one recognises how – in Western societies – this role is being executed by knowledge institutes like universities and other institutes of knowing (i.e., religious entities). When contemplating the roles expressed in 'actions', one can recognise various forms of entrepreneurship to take on this action, guided by governments (politics) and knowledge (culture). Governments sustain political settings in which stakeholders act, entrepreneurship creates the primary resources for action, and knowledge entities guard the cultural setting in which relationholders operate.

A 'presenced' business modelling exercise

How do the insights presented above relate to business modelling? Here, there is much room for further cross-paradigmatic research. The practice of living research allows for 'seeing with new eyes' through belonging and embedding, 'sensing in the field' through populating and conversing, and 'presencing' in active reflection. 'Enacting' and 'embodying' is carried out through sharing and in authority. Within this setting, how could one presence business modelling in a circular economy, in view of this research?

As Figure 4 indicates, one can switch beyond I-paradigmatic settings to seek insights from a We-paradigmatic setting. This exercise I did with collaborators in southern Africa when researching the social personhood of African engineers (van Stam, 2016). To understand such presence, it is an imperative to regard economic science as a social science set within stories and ideologies, where, in linear economic settings, a *belie*f is justified through rationalised analysis. In earlier research, I deduced *the terrible three* as an ideology set in orientalism, imperialism, and colonialism to underpin a Eurocentric, political (linear) economy (van Stam, 2017b). The *terrible three* translate into societal, I-paradigmatic values of separation, domination, and extraction. In contemporary times, these values are bolster by super-colonialism fuelled by individualism, efficiency, conservation, and shielding, as per the implementation of capitalism, globalisation, sustainability, and securitisation (van Stam, 2017c). The execution of economic models according to these values has led to obscene inequalities, with scarcity of resources in many contexts. In the transition to circular forms of economies, however, money is not the only measuring stick being used.

Learning from this research that both paradigms are being expressed in contemporary times, it can be said that economies currently contain two large and complementary parts: a (*neo-)classical* (linear) part and a *relational* (circular) part. Sheneberger and I (2011) dubbed this the relatio-economy. For a circular – relatio – business case, due to the uncertainty of the near future, one would choose to focus on the long term, as relationships are the part that one can be most certain about. This focus necessitates prioritising investments in the relational part of the economy, i.e., in one's 'social account'.

Only when there are surpluses can one invest in the less secure, or the short term. This mechanism necessitates understanding what economy means, which knowledge is set in the local context, established by local relationholders. In communities, any value creation balances with a deposit or withdrawal from social accounts.

Therefore, at least two balances are kept for economic survival in the We-paradigm. These are the available financial and ecological resources and social balances. Therefore, any actor in a circular economy would do well to keep track of their social standing and manage their needs accordingly. First, it is the social standing in which one finds certainty for sustenance. This non-monetary influence affects all other incomes and costs (van Stam, 2012).

There is nothing romantic or altruistic about this schema. It constitutes responsible behaviour. This rendering of an economy sustains all essential economic functions. The inferred system of *relationship credit* ensures financial security. Savings are kept in relationships. Each person has a social account, which the greater society manages.

A person deposits into a social account by showing good character, following social norms and obligations, and releasing resources when needed. Displaying poor character, breaking taboos, and, to a lesser extent, requiring the resources of others represent withdrawals. Therefore, within this economy, securing one's future by obtaining social value and maintaining connections with the community is possible. This system is based on conviviality and trust.

In other words, relationship credit can be considered merely an equally important form of capital. Wealth is created socially, and there are appropriate methods for securing its value, which are as valid as wage labour. Although the economy analogies fit, the actual manifestations depend on one's presence in time and place, they are unique and not apparent to the sensitised eye.

The short-term provisioning of resources emerges through similar means; one's social status and relationship value replace linear credit scoring and collateral systems almost directly. If a person has a financial need, the provisioning is contingent on the social standing and immediate need of the person. Because communities – like all aspects of life – operate partially in abundance and partially with constraints, the margin of error in the allocation of resources is thin.

Conclusions

In exploring the question "how do we *be* in community", this paper shares methodological and sociological insights. It illuminates the social dynamics of individuals and communities, and consideration of power (held by stakeholders) and authority (held by relationholders). Integrating these insights with paradigmatic perspectives, a new understanding emerges, positioning the circular economy within community and a 'We-paradigm'. From this theory derived from observing practices, it is concluded that business modelling in circular economies should prioritize community life over individualism.

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