

# **Nurturing the affective commons of collaborative communities through events:**

**Atmospheres of togetherness, mutuality and attunement**

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# OUTLINE

**1.**

Introduction and  
research question

**2.**

Conceptual  
framework

**3.**

Methodology

**4.**

Findings

**5.**

Discussion, future  
work & questions

# Collaborative Communities

Collaborative knowledge creation has become the primary productive force in the economy

Quality of relationships and vibe of spaces and scenes as crucial factors for success - serendipitous encounters

Communities and platforms as new organizational infrastructure to facilitate economy of encounters

Immaterial and affective labor have been conceptualized as the shapers of symbolic value, affects, subjectivities and socialities

# Atmospheres

**How can we conceptualize this vibe, buzz, or feeling that something might be happening?**

**Atmospheres as the product of affective labor in a particular space-time - affect as a transindividual force of organizing**

**Human and non-human bodies, objects, affects, feelings, ideas attune to each other, altering the affective tone of the space**

**Transformation of the potential of how they can sense and act together - affective intensities & co-subjective circuits of feeling**



# 1. Introduction and research question

## Value vs. Valorization

Desire for more sociable relations mingles with industrious ambitions, like entrepreneurship, autonomy, creativity, and self-realization

Workers capitalize on and accumulate the irreducible singularity of events and experiences into narratives of authenticity

→ Communal ethos translates into individual reputation and 'associated brands'

Who supplies the labor to weave community fabric and who profits?

→ Precarization, entrepreneurial self

→ 1-9-90 rule





# Atmospheres as affective commons

Call for the study of atmospheres as pooled affective resources or ‘affective commons.’

They “*give social and material form to structures of feeling*” and function “*as manifest stores of action-potential that mediate dispositions and agencies*” (ibid.) to grasp emergent opportunities.

Affective commoning as relational processes can be sustainably accomplished in the interplay between a community, an ethos and a resource

Waters-Lynch, J., & Duff, C. (2019). The affective commons of Coworking. *Human Relations*, online first

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719894633>

# Research Question

**How can atmospheric qualities and their related structures of feeling help to address relational tensions in collaborative communities, thereby maintaining a flourishing affective commons?**



# The Phenomenon

## COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

Open Source Software...Coworking, Hacker and Maker Spaces...Urban Commoning...Agile Tech Firms...Collective Entrepreneurship...Codesign...Cosmolocal Production

- Self-organization (bazaar & cathedral)
- Fluid hierarchies & dialogic relationships
- Mediated by digital platforms
- Knowledge commons
- Virtuous purpose
- Voluntary contribution (lurking and bursts)
- Malleable boundaries

We connected them through their commoning and cooperative practices





# Drupal

Free software content management framework,  
started personal project of a student (2001)

Powering +1.5% websites worldwide (e.g. mtv.co.uk,  
data.gov.uk)

Strong sense of community: “you come for the  
software, you stay for the community”

Currently +1.4M users registered at Drupal.org, +30k  
code contributors (Rozas & Huckle, 2020)

Hundreds of local F2F events, dozens of camps and  
cons in 4 continents (Rozas & Huckle, 2020)



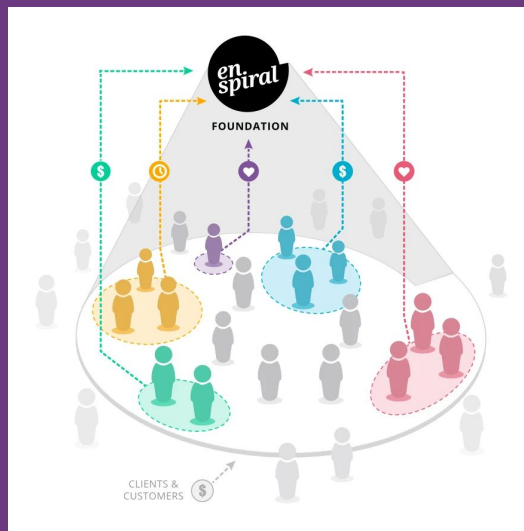
# Enspiral

## Collaborative Ethos

Entrepreneurialism, collaboration, autonomy, diversity, transparency, commons, mutuality

## Social Impact

A group of freelancers and entrepreneurs with the vision to build a livelihood by making the world a better place



## Collective Entrepreneurship

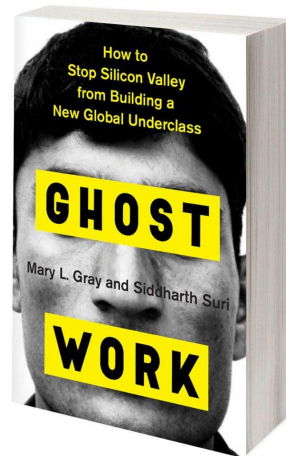
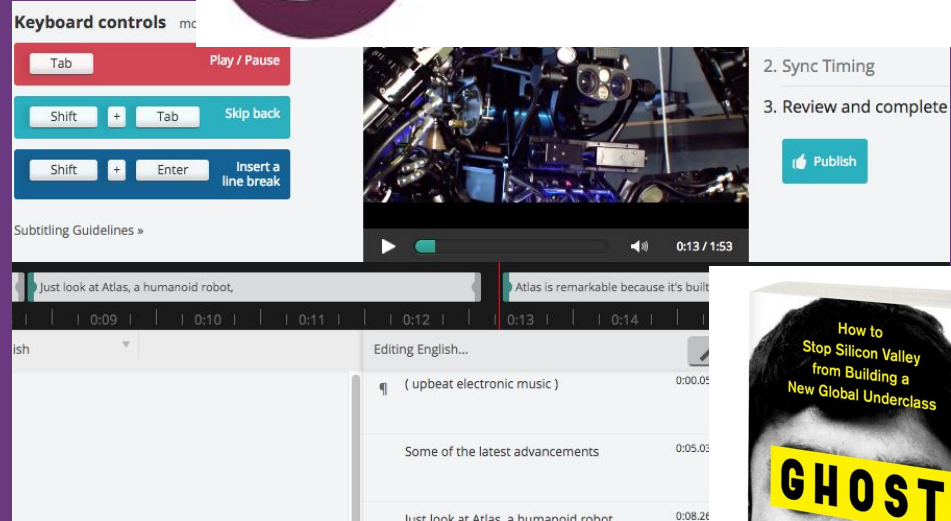
A community of groups and individuals, a DIY collective of social enterprises, ventures, and freelancers

## Peer Governance

Sharing money, control and information via participatory budgeting, decision making, cooperative ownership and open source handbooks

# Amara

- Amara is a crowdsourcing platform for collaborative creation of subtitles.
- From volunteer (TED) to paid labour (AoD)
- Starting in 2015, non-profit, currently approximately 900 linguists (significant growth)
- Organized by language-direction
- “To build a more open, collaborative world”, kindness highest value
- Inspired by cooperative and commoning practices, in contrast to Amazon Mechanical Turk





# Three Waves of Commons Studies

- **Common pool resources:** management of natural resources (Ostrom)  
Rivalrous goods: forests, fisheries and pastures are depleted when used, and thus are sensitive to overexploitation  
Challenge: sustainable consumption
- **Networked information:** internet mediated sharing practices (Benkler, Fuster-Morell)  
Information is nonrivalrous: FLOSS communities, wikis, collaborative art and media production and hacker groups. It rather gets more valuable the more people use it  
Challenge: artful curation of institutional logics that encourage sustainable creation and renewal of knowledge resources.
- **Affective commons:** thinking-feeling, relational aspects of the phenomenon as a blind spot next to the prevailing economic, legal and behavioral concerns. 'Commoning' to emphasize its role as a social and participative process of organizing.  
Challenge: Evaporation rate and maintenance & different forms of valorisation



# Relational Embodied Ethics of the Commons

Mandalaki and Fotaki (2020) carve out a processual and complex understanding of commoning, comprising

- (1) the mutual constitution of communities and resources through shared use,
- (2) reciprocal contributions and
- (3) participatory governance.

These practices result in the cultivation of solidarity, trust and belonging; people producing themselves as common subjects. Commoning thus exercises a convivial biopolitics.





# Methodology: exploring F2F events

- **Crucial role in producing a ‘special vibe’ or ‘community-feeling’ in new forms of organizing, where everyday work is largely happening online (de Vaujany & Aroles, 2019)**
- **Function as peak experiences, enabling new or strengthened connections (Mauksch, 2017)**
- **We compare events in three collaborative-community organizations that have an affinity for commons-based and cooperative ways of working.**
- **We performed a secondary participatory interpretation (De Molli, 2020) of ethnographic material, examining an event-specific sample**



# Characteristics of case studies and events

	Drupal	Enspiral	Amara On Demand
Amount of participants	1.4 million	150-300	Approximately 900 active linguists
Communitarian project	Commons-Based Peer Production community supporting a FLOSS platform	Entrepreneurial social impact network, open cooperative	Crowdsourcing community providing paid on-demand subtitling and captioning services
Communitarian scope	Global	Local/Global	Global
Main platform of collaboration	drupal.org	loomio.org/Slack channels	amara.org
Frequency of events	Very significant	Significant	Very low
Types of F2F events	Very diverse: hundreds of monthly local events, tens of annual national events and two international annual conferences	Diverse: daily interaction during co-working, regular meetups, and bi-annual retreats	Scarce and highly sporadic: organized by project managers when travelling



# Data collection and analysis

	Drupal	Enspiral	Amara On Demand
Participant observation	Field notes created during offline and online participant observation from October 2013 to November 2016	Field notes created during offline and online participant observation from July 2016 to December 2017	Field notes created during offline and online participant observation from March 2019 to July 2020
Semi-structured interviewing	15 semi-structured interviews to participants involved in vital organizational processes with a wide range of roles: developers, project managers, event organisers, etc.	10 semi-structured interviews with members and contributors	26 semi-structured interviews to members of the community with a wide range of roles: linguists, project managers, co-founder, etc.
Documentary analysis	330 documents (including blog posts, presentations and discussions on the main platform) from a live archive of Drupal Planet	192 blog posts from 'Enspiral Tales' at medium.com, Enspiral and Loomio handbooks, Enspiral Impact Report	22 blog posts from blog.amara.org and transcripts from a two-day session workshop co-organized with linguists



# Atmospheric qualities



**Togetherness**



**Mutuality**



**Attunement**

# Together



'Air condition' (Beyes, 2014) of **social intimacy** and **shared purpose**, which emanated from carefully curated instances of shared vulnerability in social rituals and the construction of a virtuous narrative





# Excerpt (Drupal)

He told the story of his mental illness, and how he overcame it. He explained to us how feeling being part of the Drupal community helped him to do it. During the coffee break, I could then observe how this talk, and particularly the revealing of vulnerabilities, opened a space for reflection. Particularly concerning impostor syndrome from which many Drupalistas suffer. It is something I had experienced myself when entering the community. I realized many of us have felt like impostors, even the so-called 'rockstars'. (Fieldnotes)





# Togetherhness

- Events: important function for atmospheric quality of togetherhness.
- Resonates with activities that create **social intimacy and shared purpose**
- People feel
  - Belong to a group that can realize some form of virtuous potential,
  - Still show up as who they are, not reduced to a role.
- Togetherhness induces co-subjective feelings of passion, commitment
- **(Re)articulates of social relations** towards vulnerability, authenticity and trust

# Excerpt (Amara)

“Nowadays the team is not very knit together let’s say. We maintain a high standard [of quality] but we have lost the team feeling,”  
(interview, core member)





# Togetherness

- Amara shows that value rationality alone is not enough to establish those strong local and global open ties

“[I]f you could just like... spend a day working with the people you work with for the past five years - like just go meet them and ask your silly questions. And realize that they're humans... and realize that they make mistakes... and also have silly questions.” (interview, linguist)



# Mutuality



People discovered **alternative value systems** as they practiced gentle reciprocity or voluntary contribution and got steeped in **dialogic organizing** through distributed decision-making and leadership





# Excerpt (Enspiral)

After a day of participant observation in the coworking space I prepared for a long evening typing field notes. I waited for everyone to leave, but instead a group of people hung out and started ordering vegan burgers. A guy talked about how he had reduced his work to 20 weekly hours and how this suits him. 40 hours would tear him down. At the same time, he sought support for this decision. Then, the lights get dimmed down. Two guys are producing and streaming experimental music with some DIY-devices. The sound reminds me of a mixture between old computer game tunes and drum'n'bass. Others are tinkering around with some electronics. I have been stumbling into an improvised hacker lab. Two participants are having an empathic conversation about how one of them could do something against the disconnection with his father. The music and vibe feels uplifting, I am typing ceaselessly - great flow.





# Mutuality

- Working, creating and producing in community means to recover diverse values, distributed leadership and governance, which lead to shared accountability and ownership
- The reciprocal atmosphere that surrounded the mutual discussing, sharing and learning activities, inspired the participants to find a way of contributing outside the dominant value logic
- Events can help to develop feeling-structures that accompany practices of gentle reciprocity - People's bodies co-subjectively sense that they are psychologically and materially safe. Everybody cares and is well cared for as people are dependent on each other to fulfill their needs.



# Attunement



Quality that immersed participants into exploring **embodied relational noticings** in their collaboration. Emerged from **instances of collective reflection and conflict transformation** – and in permeating the space, participants develop a shared repertoire of **sense-abilities** (Ashcraft, 2018)





# Attunement

- Arises through the experience of **ethical dilemmas**
- Events can offer spaces for **collective reflection** or serve as scenes where conflicts play out, either in a facilitated or spontaneous manner.

# Excerpt (Drupal):

- Collective reflection at events had significantly raised the awareness for the **code-centric value** framework in the community
- **Talk is Silver, Code is Gold [?]**

## Being Human

The Drupal community is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, all of whom bring their own unique life experiences, backgrounds, challenges, and motivations. Rather than focus on toolsets, software, or processes, Being Human invites speakers to explore the personal side of Drupal-- who are we, and what do we care about? Share tools to be the healthiest you when working with others - either in an opensource community or at a job. How do we thrive both personally and professionally, in a world that is aggressively fast-paced, and fraught with conflict and stress?

We invite speakers to share their stories, strategies, and solutions related to themes such as:

- Health and Well-being;
- Personal and Professional Growth; and
- Empathy and Communication

(Documentary analysis)

[https://events.drupal.org/nashville2018/tracks#being\\_human](https://events.drupal.org/nashville2018/tracks#being_human)



# Attunement

- Led to the introduction of structured initiatives to nourish affective commons.
- These groups acted as a means to monitor their communities' emotional well-being and introduced conflict resolution mechanisms
- As people move through ethical dilemmas, they become more aware of their own perceptions, feelings, and needs regarding others

# Excerpts (Drupal):

Drupal CWG (originally for code of conduct): “[whose] role becomes much more about training, much more about the capacity of building people's understanding from another person’s point of view. [...] Let's say prevention, rather than reactive,” <https://www.drupal.org/community/cwg>

E.g. Mentorship programs



<https://www.drupaldiversity.com/>

Drupal Diversity & Inclusion

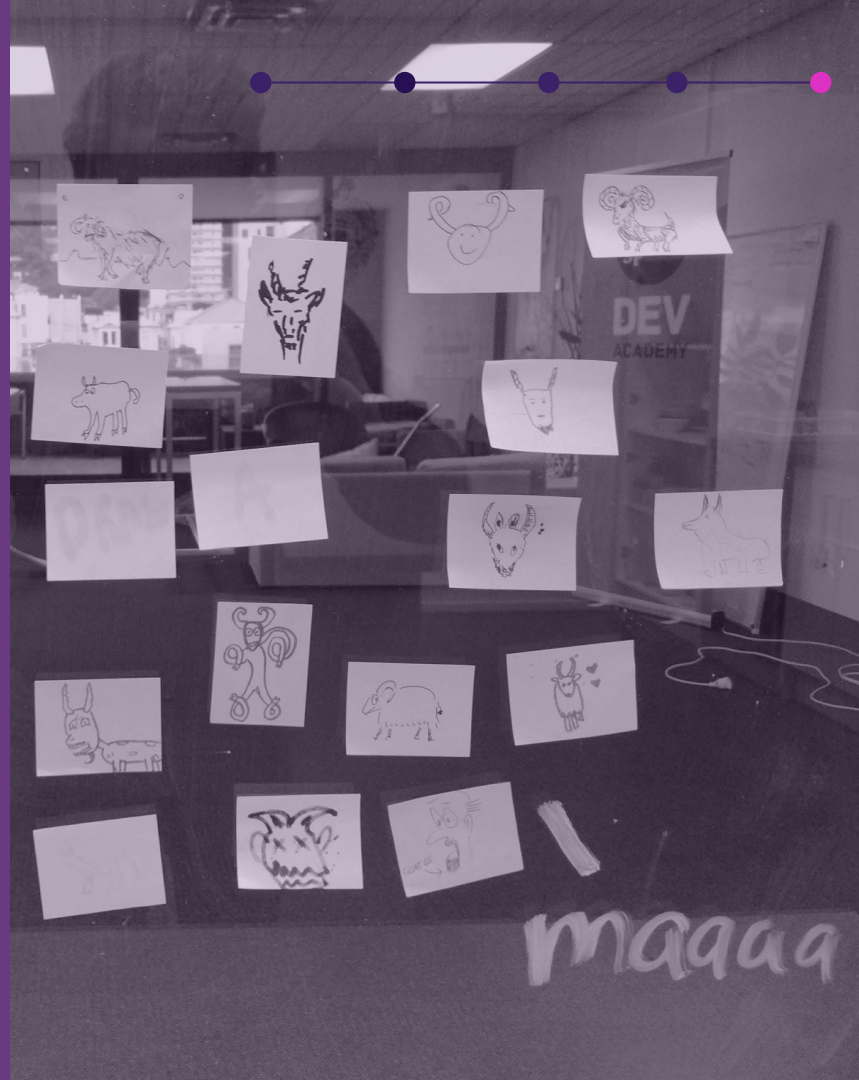
# Contributions

1. Show how **affect** becomes communal, how it folds together with emotions and sensations to function as a **pooled resource**.

Encounter of human and non-human bodies, objects, affects and ideas → atmospheric qualities → autonomy, belonging, passion, potentiality for something practical to happen

2. Show how an **ethics of shared corporeal concerns** can prepare a recharging climate for affective commons.

Experience of vulnerability, purpose, participation & interdependence at events → atmospheric qualities → pathways of feeling → embodied ethical action





# Future Work & Questions

1. Do you know any literature that gives methodological advice on how to use several ethnographic case studies in one paper?
2. Are you aware of any good empirical studies of affective atmospheres?
3. From a phenomenological point of view, how are atmospheres composed and how do they interact with our thinking-feeling apparatus?





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