

**Maintaining spirit in collaborative communities: Event atmospheres as participation  
architecture for affective commoning**

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**Abstract**

New ways of working in distributed platforms and collaborative communities rely on the ongoing cultivation of a special spirit to facilitate collective action, serendipitous encounters, and knowledge creation. However, depletion of spirit is frequently observed. It results from challenges involved with increasing scale, participatory governance, commodification and care. Compiling six years of ethnographic fieldwork, we examine the role of events to maintain spirit in an open source software community, a network of impact entrepreneurs and a cooperative crowdsourcing platform. Conceptually, we frame spirit as a collection of atmospheres and inquire into its organisation as a process of affective commoning. Our study finds three atmospheric qualities - togetherness, mutuality and dissonance - and illustrates how they rhythmically emerge within certain thresholds of collective feeling. Thereby, we expand the notion of 'architectural control' in distributed and decentralised organising. Next to its functional dimension as a sociotechnical framework, setting up a tiered participation and nested project structure, it encompasses an aesthetic dimension that holds participants and their bodies in resonance. To sustain spirit as a communal resource, participation architectures need to be equally sensible to processes of mindful communication and embodied imitation, enabling the insertion of difference, novelty and playfulness through periodic dissent and distancing.

**Keywords**

affective commoning, atmospheres, collaborative economy, events, participation architecture, platform cooperativism, spirit

## Introduction

Collaborative knowledge creation ‘without organisations’ (Shirky, 2008) - in online communities (Faraj et al., 2011), open innovation platforms (Harhoff and Lakhani, 2016), peer production networks (Benkler, 2006), and creative hubs (Gill et al., 2019) - is accompanied by a new organisational architecture (Fjeldstad et al., 2012). It comprises self-organised *communities* driven by intrinsic motivation and social purpose (Adler and Heckscher, 2006), the move from firms to distributed *platforms* in the wake of falling transaction costs (de Vaujany et al., 2020), and the reliance on shared resources or *commoning* as an apt economic mechanism to organise informational goods (Benkler, 2006). Within collaborative communities, it has been argued that a specific ‘vibe’ or ‘spirit’ (Reckwitz, 2017) serves as the emerging engine in an ‘economy of encounter’ (Jakonen et al., 2017). Here, relational quality and serendipitous encounters can be translated into co-creative outcomes, products, experiences, reputations, lifestyles and learning.

However, these new organisational forms suffer from unresolved issues of how to facilitate scale and participation (Massa and O’Mahony, 2021), how to mitigate precariousness and commodification (Bandinelli, 2020) and how to establish practices of care to avoid burnout and stratified power dynamics (Resch and Steyaert, 2020). To counter the frequently observed depletion of ‘spirit’ (Bousalham and Vidaillet, 2018; Picard and Islam, 2020; Reinecke, 2018; Schneider, 2021) in collaborative communities, Waters-Lynch and Duff (2021) suggested conceptualising this spirit as a pooled atmospheric resource or an ‘affective commons.’ They highlight atmospheres in online and offline workspaces as ‘envelopments’ which “manifest a store of *action-potential* that mediates the dispositions and agencies potentially enactable in these spaces” (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021). Atmospheres enmesh participants into a repertoire of moods that enables them to grasp emergent opportunities, develop individual standing, and work together with multiple peers. We draw on this conceptual lens of ‘tuned spaces’ (Böhme, 1993) that organise sense-perception (Beyes, 2016) to ask how atmospheric qualities conducive to vibrant collaboration emerge, relate and effectuate different ways of working together. Subsequently, we explore how these affective commons function as “a ‘connective factor’ that holds [...] opposites in tension” (De Molli et

al., 2020), such as core and periphery, cohesion and openness, voluntary contribution and income generation or passionate involvement and reflective care.

Empirically we followed affective atmospheres at face-to-face (F2F) events in three collaborative communities. Events offer a particularly promising avenue to study entanglements between space, affects and sensations (Edensor, 2015) in distributed organisational environments. They bring digitally scattered people together for situated encounters, create a touch-and-feel experience (Mauksch, 2017) for idealised narratives, and catalyse tensions. We draw on multi-year ethnographic case studies in an extensive Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS) community, a network of impact entrepreneurs and a cooperative crowdsourcing platform. Untangling the complex mesh of affective atmospheres required us to develop a methodology “of affectual composition, as an ontology of always coming to formation” (Michels and Steyaert, 2017). The analysis was thus conducted through a process of participatory interpretation (De Molli, 2020) both within the research team and with actors in the field to follow the performative effects of affective and aesthetic envelopments in space.

Our contribution is twofold. First, we show how affect becomes communal, how it spatially folds together with sensations, emotions and cognitions to function as a pooled resource. We identify three atmospheric qualities - *togetherness*, *mutuality* and *dissonance* - and illustrate how they created pathways of feeling that generated specific potentials for action (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021). Addressing a gap in the literature on atmospheres, we focus on their ‘relational and processual’ repercussions (De Molli, 2020). We empirically reinforce their conceptualisation as emerging in-between multiple ambiguities (Vitry et al., 2020) - ‘multiple-beings-in-the-world’ (Burø & Koefoed, 2021), both an effect of social practices and the background against which they are recreated. They mediate internal (bodily) and external (environmental) worlds. We show how atmospheres maintain productive tensions and how they semi-consciously draw people into ‘sensory-affective attunement to moods’ (Jørgensen and Holt, 2019: 679). Noticing complex relationships, dependencies and expulsions between the three atmospheric qualities, we theorise affective oscillations and changes in rhythm as ‘thresholds’ (De Molli, 2020) for the insertion of difference, novelty and openness through dissent and distancing.

The second contribution is a more nuanced understanding of collaborative community governance and emerging ethics of affective commoning. Prior studies have highlighted the importance of ‘architectural control’ (Massa and O’Mahony, 2021): the creation of a sociotechnical framework that specifies spaces, roles and types of action without the need for direct authority. We add that every participation architecture encompasses, next to its functional, an aesthetic dimension with equal repercussions for coordination, motivation and collective action. While the functional aspect of architectural control revolves around a politics of communication (purposive action), the atmospheric component points to imitation (semiconscious suggestion) (Borch, 2010). Hence, we argue that a ‘relational embodied ethics of the commons’ (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020) can be thought of in terms of resonance. Through joint atmospheric envelopment participants’ bodies are invited into affective rhythms, narrowing down a specific ‘co-subjective circuit of feeling and sensation’ (Fotaki et al., 2017). Our findings suggest that to preserve the affective commons of a collaborative community sustainably, it is not only important for people to resonate harmoniously but to make space for dissonance. Events served as peak experiences for cultivating a relational repertoire to acknowledge annoying, uneasy and disruptive bodily impulses.

In what follows, we present an understanding of commoning as a relational politics beyond the organisation of physical pooled resources. We then describe our conceptual framework of atmospheres as affective commons and show its relevance for maintaining the spirit of contemporary collaborative communities. Subsequently, we provide an overview of our three case studies and the methodological approach used to explore our research question. Next, along with interview fragments, vignettes and fieldnotes, we present three atmospheric qualities - togetherness, mutuality, dissonance - that emerged in the analysis. Finally, we conclude by theorising an atmospheric politics of imitation, grounded in an ethics of resonance.

### **Achieving common livable relations**

The rise of the networked information society (Castells, 2004) and increased sense of climate emergency led to a resurgence of the commons as a fundamental social process of organisation and production next to the market and the state (Bauwens et al., 2019; Bollier

and Helfrich, 2019; Fournier, 2013). The work of Ostrom (1990), who challenged the long-held paradigm of the ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968), provided evidence on a wide variety of communities that built protocols and rules, ensuring sustainable use of their resources. This spurred a first wave of commons theory rooted in institutional thinking (Cox et al., 2010; Ostrom, 2006; Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021), which expanded the rational choice view of humans in that utility maximisation can encompass concern for the welfare of others.

The growing relevance of informational products as non-rivalrous goods (Lessig, 2001), which cannot be depleted but rather become more valuable with broader use (Weber, 2004), led to an array of new sharing practices enabled by the Internet (Fuster Morell, 2010; Hess, 2008; Hess and Ostrom, 2007). They were accompanied by a second wave of commons studies invested in phenomena such as FLOSS communities (e.g. Coleman, 2013; Shaikh and Henfridsson, 2017), wikis (e.g. Aaltonen and Lanzara, 2015; Forte et al., 2009; Jemielniak, 2014), collaborative art and media production (e.g. Deuze, 2011), open science and design, peer funding, as well as new urban commons in the form of, i.e. coworking, gardening, hacking or making (e.g. Kostakis et al., 2015; Müller, 2012; Salcedo and Fuster-Morell, 2014). Research found that these often large, less close-knit, and globally distributed communities could be organised through a mixture of architectural (Massa and O’Mahony, 2021) and normative control (Pentzold, 2020). On the one hand, communities implemented a tiered participation infrastructure setting apart core and peripheral members, a gradual increase in standardised processes, rules and roles, accompanied by decentralised decisions and a nested project structure (Rozas and Huckle, 2021). On the other hand, the success of community governance relies on the motivation of its members embedded in norms that are practised and imitated by newcomers. Frequently observed problems in these collaborative communities include a tendency of increasing rules, centralised authority and bureaucracy (Dahlander and O’Mahony, 2011), unspoken cultural code and reputational ‘superstar dynamics’ that can lead to ‘implicit feudalism’ (Schneider, 2021), oppressive gender dynamics and lack of female participation (Toupin, 2020) as well as overwork (Resch et al., 2021) with people dropping out (Reinecke, 2018).

Critical and feminist scholars offer a fresh perspective to tackle these issues. They reclaim the relational and socio-political aspects of commons and collaborative community governance as a blind spot next to economic, legal and behavioural concerns (e.g. Bollier and Helfrich, 2014; De Angelis, 2017; Federici, 2018; Fournier, 2013; Linebaugh, 2008). They emphasise the role of ‘commoning’ as a social and participative process of organising: “a politics of commoning is not a mere technical management of resources (in space) but a struggle to perform common livable relations (in time)” (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 55). Theoretically, this view is grounded in an ontological shift in our understanding of subject production through embodiment as well as a critique of the institutionalist’s ideal view of communication, which is much less based on rationality than assumed. It can thus lead to oppression, othering and homogeneous, inward-facing communities.

In this view of ‘bounded selves’ (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 55), our self-understanding is constantly changing, resulting from ongoing encounters that are enmeshed in a multitude of relations and histories steeped with trauma and semiconscious behaviour. Since we are continuously ‘produced’ as subjects in exposure to mutual dependencies and at the same time ‘reproduce’ those relations, these authors call for an imaginative, reflective, and conflictual politics of fundamental relationality. Such ways of organising openly acknowledge our shared vulnerabilities, perpetually problematic entanglements and partial blindness about ourselves (Butler, 2009). They call for increasing attention to how organising is also an intercorporeal endeavour and for scholarship to bridge the body/mind dichotomy (Poldner et al., 2019). Thus, there is a growing need for studies of commoning to analyse how collective affective attunement to moods (Katila et al., 2019) and the organisation of sense-perception as the “prime the pump of life [...] govern, modulate and change the ‘knots’ of what can be sensed, felt, expressed and acted upon” (Beyes, 2016). On one hand, research needs to understand better how collaborative communities can foster “commoning processes based on reciprocity and relationality” (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020: 11), which result in the cultivation of solidarity, trust and belonging. On the other hand, it is underexplored which practices allow groups to face conflict and tensions to harness the generative aspects of incompatible differences (Brekke et al., 2021) in terms of a recurring openness to the uncertain, unknown, strange and new.

Having framed commoning research beyond the dichotomies of body/mind, consent/dissent and capitalist/alternative, we will now turn to the concept of atmosphere and its constitution as a pooled affective resource in collaborative communities.

### **Atmospheres as affective commons in the collaborative economy**

The digital economy is oriented towards a logic of collaboration. From start-up ecosystems, open innovation and agile tech firms to coworking spaces, open-source software and skill-sharing, hierarchical bureaucracies have been challenged by communities, commons and platforms. As forms of association, they are better aligned to facilitate a sense of virtuous purpose (Adler and Heckscher, 2018), dialogic relationships (Diefenbach, 2019) and encounters as the new drivers of innovation, success and community. “[T]he new economy demands constantly new ideas, concepts, solutions, knowledge and other immaterial artefacts based on creative work” (Jakonen et al., 2017: 236) and, therefore, the performing of organisational space (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012) in ways that trigger engagement and motion towards shared goals.

The fundamental ambivalence in collaborative communities between those who sustain the relational quality and aspirational ethos - the buzz, vibe, or spirit as core resource - and those who profit from it in material terms has been discussed in light of ‘good’ community management encompassing the tasks of curation, hospitality, and ambience maintenance (Gregg and Lodato, 2018). It is related to invisibilities associated with the gendered production of care and the increasing precarisation of knowledge work (Bandinelli, 2020; de Peuter et al., 2017). Studying volunteer contributions to online community management, scholars observed seemingly ‘given’ network dynamics, like the ‘90-9-1 rule’ (Balestra et al., 2017; Wilkinson, 2008): 1% very engaged, 9% moderately engaged, 90% lurkers. Waters-Lynch and Duff (2021) offer an alternative approach on this tension between the creation of value and its valorisation by considering community spirit as a pooled resource and its sociomaterial production as a process of commoning. The atmosphere’s “affective tone can be depleted, modified or recharged” (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021: 9) continuously in the course of embodied encounters, while it is simultaneously and recursively channelling people’s subjectivation (Julmi, 2017).

Research on atmospheres as an organisational phenomenon looks at the interplay of sensations, emotions and actions in time and space. Spaces are, first of all, experienced by embodied thinking-feeling beings (Escobar, 2016), who are gripped by visceral forces; affects that resonate between them, creating collective rhythms or ‘co-subjective circuits of feeling’ (Fotaki et al., 2017). Our study is rooted in a non-dualistic understanding of atmospheres (Julmi, 2017) as the “primary ‘object’ of perception” (Böhme, 1993: 125) situated between the environment (object) and internal states (subject). Thibaud (2015) describes atmospheres as a ‘medium’ that enables perception in the first place. You will, for example, experience a mountain vista differently through misty fog or in bright sunlight. “The medium is the intermediate place starting from which an object becomes perceptible, visible, audible” (Thibaud, 2015: 41).

Theoretically, the notion of atmosphere is rooted in an “aesthetic and spatial understanding of affect as a transindividual force of organising that emerges from, is worked upon and experienced in the encounters of human and non-human bodies” (Michels and Steyaert, 2017: 82). Moving through space is a multi-sensory experience linked to material properties and their intra-action (Barad, 2007), i.e. mutual processual constitution with humans. Böhme (1993) outlines atmospheres as ‘ontologically indeterminate’, ‘quasi-objects’ that envelope subjects and objects in a continuous process of encounter and transformation. In this sense, they communally transmit affective states in an organisation (de Vaujany et al., 2019). Along the dimension of atmosphere, it becomes possible to analyse how “the prepersonal or transpersonal dimensions of affective life and everyday existence” (Anderson, 2009: 77) produce structures of feeling and how these are linked to a specific ‘action-potential’ (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021) that is emotionally and reflectively connoted.

Empirical studies exploring the relational-processual effects of atmospheres are still scarce but have already made significant contributions. Jørgensen and Holt (2019), examining the work of architects, highlight participation, both ex-ante as they ‘co-design’ atmospheres with their clients and ex-post as the atmospheres ‘co-evolve’ with the everyday lives of their inhabitants. The atmospheric ‘tone of territories’ (Thibaud, 2015) cannot be imposed at once but takes hold through a process of ‘impregnation’ (Thibaud, 2015) that demands ongoing attention to unfolding of habits and multiple aesthetic codes. Organisationally, this marks a



mindset shift from planning and controlling to relating and curating (Beyes, 2016) and an attentiveness to unplanned encounters and unanticipated events (Michels and Steyaert, 2017), which emphasise the need to develop projects through experimentation and improvisation. Once a particular atmosphere becomes dominant, i.e. ‘confidence’ in workplace meetings (Vitry et al., 2020), it lingers in the air between bodies, even if the actual interactions were not confident at all. Looking at how start-up teams in an entrepreneurial accelerator were collectively pulled into an ‘upbeat’ mood, Katila et al. (2019: 1324) theorised how “affecto-rhythmic order [...] entails sensory openness to order and submission to ongoing bodily dressage.” Affective attunement is accomplished through perceptual familiarisation, intercorporeal learning and mutual judgment.

Building on the conceptualisation of community spirit as a form of commoning (Burø and Koefoed, 2021), we will compare atmospheres at events in three collaborative communities as ‘centres of (spirit-)experience’ (De Molli et al., 2020) in these case studies. We aim to push the boundaries of existing literature in that we not only further an understanding of how “the mediation of sensory stimulation and emotional expectation” (Jørgensen and Holt, 2019: 679) enacts behaviour, relations and values, but also carve out an ethics of resonance that supports the sustainable sociomaterial reproduction of community spirit as a pooled affective resource. We will now provide an overview of our study design and methodological approach.

### **Attuning to the messy atmospheric middle**

F2F events play a crucial role in producing community spirit in new forms of collaborative organising. Everyday work is largely happening remotely, online or in the silence of open spaces (de Vaujany and Aroles, 2019). Events function as peak experiences in a space-time-bound context, enabling new or strengthened connections as well as the embodied performance of ideals (Mauksch, 2017). We examine events from a theoretical perspective between practice and process, interested in “bodily immediacy, enhanced reflexivity and practical accomplishment of social order” (Mauksch, 2020: 372) and in affective “moments of density that enable new connections between indeterminate things” (ibid.). Our study design encompassed F2F events in three collaborative communities with an affinity for commons-based and cooperative ways of working. The data - participant-observational field notes, qualitative interviews, vignettes and contents generated by the communities -

emphasise the emotional experience of the researchers and those researched. We compiled it from three separate, broader organisational ethnographies comprising a total of approximately six years of fieldwork (for an overview, see Table 1).

	Drupal	Enspiral	Amara On Demand
Participant observation	Fieldnotes created during offline and online participant observation from October 2013 to November 2016	Fieldnotes created during offline and online participant observation from July 2016 to December 2017	Fieldnotes created during offline and online participant observation from March 2019 to July 2020
Semi-structured interviewing	15 semi-structured interviews with participants involved in vital organisational processes: developers, project managers, event organisers, etc.	10 semi-structured interviews with members and contributors	25 semi-structured interviews with community members 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 <sup>1</sup>	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

Table 1: Overview of data collection for each case study.

First, *Drupal*, a FLOSS community developing a platform that powers approximately 1.5% of websites worldwide<sup>2</sup>. The Drupal community started as a small amateur project in 2001 and has gathered more than 1.4 million collaborators worldwide<sup>3</sup>. The main motto, “*come for the software, stay for the community*”, is actualised in a wide range of events, ranging from

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<sup>1</sup> The first author developed a set of scripts to automate the collection of links containing posts from Drupal Planet: a popular RSS feed within the Drupal community whose contents are curated according to communitarian guidelines. This archive allowed us to access information beyond the official platform. The script continues automatically collecting links and is available at [https://davidrozas.cc/lab/drupal\\_planet\\_archive.php](https://davidrozas.cc/lab/drupal_planet_archive.php). The source code is under a FLOSS license and available at [https://github.com/drozas/drupal\\_planet\\_archive](https://github.com/drozas/drupal_planet_archive).

<sup>2</sup> See “Usage statistics and market share of Drupal”—<https://w3techs.com/technologies/details/cm-drupal/all/all>.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics self-reported by the Drupal community at <https://www.drupal.org/getting-involved>.

local informal gatherings to national *DrupalCamps* and global *DrupalCons* conferences (Rozas and Huckle, 2021). Second, *Enspiral*, a grassroots social impact network with a fluctuating membership between 150 and 300 people, focussed on enabling “*more people to work on stuff that matters*”. It has been characterised as an ‘open cooperative’ (Pazaitis et al., 2017), in which people practice resource-sharing, collaborative decisions and collective ownership. Enspiral is a collection of different ventures, communities, online channels and a coworking space punctuated by regular meetups, assembly sprints and biannual retreats. Third, *Amara On Demand* (AOD), a crowdsourcing platform for subtitling and translation with a mission to “*build a more open, collaborative world*”. AOD was launched in 2015 as a result of the success of their not-for-profit organisation Amara, where a community of volunteers create open subtitles in various languages for socially beneficial videos, such as Khan Academy courses. AOD is organised as a non-profit organisation and its culture is inspired by cooperative and commoning practices (Gray and Suri, 2019). In AOD, we observed relatively few F2F organised events, during a period in which the community has been significantly growing and becoming more physically distributed. Table 2 provides an overview of the characteristics of the case studies and events studied in each of them.

	Drupal	Enspiral	Amara On Demand
Amount of participants	1.4 million <sup>4</sup>	150-300	Approximately 900 active linguists <sup>5</sup>
Communitarian project	CBPP community supporting a FLOSS platform	Entrepreneurial social impact network, open cooperative	Crowdsourcing community providing paid on-demand subtitling and translation services
Communitarian scope	Global	Local/Global	Global
Main platform of collaboration	drupal.org	loomio.org/Slack channels/coworking space	amara.org
Frequency of events	Very frequent	Frequent	Infrequent
Types of F2F events	Very diverse: hundreds of monthly local events,	Diverse: daily interaction during	Scarce and highly sporadic: organised by

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the number of registered users in the main collaboration platform in September 2020. It is important to note that this does not imply that all Drupalistas will become active contributors, or active in a similar way. See Rozas & Huckle (2021: 18–20) for further details on the different degrees of participation as well as the growth of this case study over time.

<sup>5</sup> Figure self-reported by several interviewees responsible for the management of the project as of August 2019.

	tens of annual national events and two annual international conferences	co-working, regular meetups, and bi-annual retreats	project managers when travelling
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Table 2: Characteristics of case study organisations and respective events.

We performed a secondary participatory interpretation (De Molli, 2020) characterised by exchanges and workshops, in which we retold the stories of our research, combined a comparative, event-specific sample of the three ethnographies, and reflected on emotionally gripping moments and emerging patterns together. We borrow from Michels and Steyaert’s (2017: 100) ‘methodology of affectual composition’ that invited us to enter the field in the ‘messy middle’ of a “ceaselessly recomposing affective experience”. As researchers-with-bodies, we sought to unsettle taken-for-granted experiences (Emerson et al., 2011) and hidden relational, emotional and political dimensions of organisational life (Ybema et al., 2009), reflecting how we were affected by discourses, bodies, materialities and intensities in the field in often unexpected and unintentional ways.

### **A participatory analysis of movement and sensation**

To familiarise ourselves with each other’s ethnographies, we initially followed an ethnographic content analysis approach (Altheide, 1987), which involved a constant process of discovery and cross-contextual comparison (Mason, 2002) between the three different case studies. The analysis unfolded in three steps.

Firstly, we compiled the data concerning all F2F events from our three cases and compared them on functional aspects, like size, duration, frequency, content, place, and participants. Then, we contrasted the organisational purpose of various events. We shared field notes, quotes, blog posts and photos to understand the mood of these gatherings, the most critical activities, as well as their material composition and values defining the broader environment. As a result, we started to “speculate on how an atmosphere forms” by understanding “how a diverse grouping of things and people come together” (Anderson, 2014: 152).

Secondly, drawing on literature that had already conceptualised relationally-embodied aspects of commoning (Bauwens et al., 2019; Bollier and Helfrich, 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Fournier, 2013; Ostrom, 2006; Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021), we were able to create a set of first-order categories of activities (yet untheorised, hence the language of “vibe” instead of

“atmosphere”): (1) *hooking a vibe*, helped people to (2) *tune into the vibe* and contribute (3) *keeping the flow*. To better grasp “how moods and feelings were revealed and considered from within everyday situations” (Jørgensen and Holt, 2019: 679) by researchers and respondents, we collated analytical categories, interview quotes and field notes according to these three categories.

Thirdly, by switching back and forth between data and the second round of literature review of collaborative communities and commons governance (Adler and Heckscher, 2006, 2018; Burø and Koefoed, 2021; Daskalaki et al., 2019; Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020; Massa and O’Mahony, 2021), we were able to identify three specific atmospheres present at the events. By arranging and rearranging empirical material along with the atmospheric qualities of togetherness, mutuality and dissonance, we successively carved out how they were assembled in a heterogeneous mingling of moving materialities, sensible bodies, and affective intensities. Finally, we were able to theorise their role in sustaining a relationally-embodied affective commons.

## Findings

We identified three atmospheres and their related commoning activities, which played a key role in nourishing affective commons: (1) *togetherness*, (2) *mutuality* and (3) *dissonance*. Our analysis reveals how different ways of event-making play into each other to maintain affective commons as the lifeblood of communities (Singh, 2017). Large events engaged participants in a periodic ‘heartbeat,’ that created virtuous momentum, affirmed different social relations and generated reciprocity. Smaller events translated these peak experiences into a mundane rhythm that consolidated affective intensities into an ‘affecto-rhythmic order’ (Katila et al., 2019). Ultimately, our analysis highlights that it is crucial to repeatedly break harmonious rhythms around relationality and reciprocity to keep a playful and experimental collaboration climate. If the expression of unease, conflict and distance is avoided, tacit norms and power dynamics threaten to deplete the community spirit. Next, we discuss the constitution of the three atmospheres that arose in our comparative study (for an overview, see table 3).

Atmosphere	<b>Togetherness</b>	<b>Mutuality</b>	<b>Dissonance</b>
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Event activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating social intimacy</li> <li>• Affirming shared purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting diverse contribution</li> <li>• Fostering interdependence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective reflection</li> <li>• Conflict transformation</li> </ul>
Tension	Homogeneity-difference	Contribution-benefit	Confrontation-avoidance
Affirmative relational consequences	Generating trust across difference, inspiration, authenticity	Recognizing value diversity, gentle reciprocity, relationality	Facing emergent inequalities, fostering emotional competence & care
Challenging relational consequences	In-group/out-group dynamics, groupthink, tacit norms & power structures	Overwork, freeriding, people leaving	Endless meetings, ruptures, torn relationships

Table 3: Overview of atmospheres, related event activities and organisational consequences.

### **Togetherness: An atmospheric nexus of social intimacy and shared purpose**

The following vignette depicts the first day of the so-called ‘Enspiral Summer Fest’, an annual four-day event at a rural location that brings together the network for a retreat.

In a welcome ritual the ‘Enspiral members’ welcome all newcomers with a song. Then, the two groups form two nested standing circles. The newcomers get the opportunity to greet everyone by slowly moving around clockwise. Soon the scene turns into an extended series of hugs and small talks. Later, the entire group - about 100 people - is coming together in the main meeting hall. Everyone who has been born or currently lives in New Zealand is encouraged to move to the centre. As they introduce themselves and their hometown, a constellation in the form of a map emerges. Then all the participants from abroad get the chance to say hello, outlining why and how they have come here. As everyone gets ready for dinner, one member steps forward and intricately intones a Māori song as a food blessing. After dinner and before we head off to a sharing circle, where some Enspiral members would disclose parts of their background, how they have grown in the organisation and their past emotional experience of Summer Fests, we queue up to wash our dishes. In a do-it-together sequence, we plunge our plates into soapy water, get rid of the foam by swiping them through clean water and put them on a rig to dry (Vignette, Enspiral, February 2017).

The first afternoon and evening of the event are carefully designed around a range of introductory rituals and sharing opportunities to lift people’s anxiety and feelings of social

awkwardness. In contrast to traditional conferences, initially, topics and keynotes do not play the central role. Instead, singing, hugging, eating and gathering are curated as ‘participatory collective acts’ by facilitators to settle people and build more-than-human relationships. A connection to the land is woven through references to indigenous culture, the exchange of origin stories, and gratitude for local and healthy food. Hand signals and cooperative dishwashing, for example, nurture a feeling of collective care for each other and the environment. In his introductory speech, one of the two main facilitators framed Summer Fest as a participatory, spontaneous event that thrives on people’s openness to sharing, listening and chance encounters. “This is an imperfect event. It is in continuous emergence,” he emphasised, readying the space for serendipity and impartiality.

A session with the title ‘Mental Health and Open Source’ at a ‘DrupalCamp’ in London observed by the first author of this article further demonstrates how intimate sharing can reflect one’s own insecurities and contribute to mutual understanding.

He told the story of his mental illness and how he overcame it. He explained to us how feeling as a part of the Drupal community helped him do it. During the coffee break, I observed how this talk, particularly the revealing of vulnerabilities, opened a venue for reflection. Notably concerning impostor syndrome from which many Drupalistas were explaining to have suffered. It is something I had experienced myself when entering the community. I realised many of us have felt like impostors, even the so-called ‘rockstars.’ (Fieldnotes, Drupal, February 2015)

Here, an event is used as a platform for courageous life-storytelling, which triggers more sharing and reflection among the attendants. Disclosing vulnerabilities can be seen as a less visible form of contribution that strengthens the human aspect of the community and is equally valuable as writing and maintaining source code (Rozas et al., 2021). In a massive community, like Drupal, a plethora of locally, self-organised events - ‘Drupal Beers,’ ‘Drupal Show and Tell’ or ‘Drupal Coworking’ - served to expand the meaning of Drupal from its initial connotation as ‘a piece of software.’ During an interview, a Drupal member highlighted that in attending these meetups: “you realise there are people behind the source code, right? There are people behind the modules. And you meet people that can tell you a kind of personal story. [...] And then, it stops being something anonymous, it becomes

something yours.” Attending F2F events was generally reported as a crucial means to build relationships, feel part of a shared initiative, and become more actively involved. We also found the relevance of local events to scale up the sense of community in Drupal. In the words of a veteran Drupalista, when reflecting on the role of local events:

“Because the community is growing, then you have less of a sense of community. But I think the solution to that is to have smaller local communities. So, you know, as the worldwide community grows, then you start finding, like whereas before it might have been 50 people worldwide, now you have like 50 people in your part of London, or wherever.” (Interview, Drupal, August 2014)

Amara On Demand has also experienced a significant growth over time: from a few linguists when the project was launched in 2015 to more than nine hundred at the time of writing. This growth in size has led to a smaller degree of closeness. “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,” a foundational AOD member stated during an interview. There have been attempts to organise F2F events by members of the core team, which worked well in terms of ‘humanising’ the community. However, in the interviews, linguists commonly expressed the lingering desire for sustained local gatherings: “[I]f you could just like...spend a day working with the people you’ve worked with for the past five years - like just go meet them and ask your silly questions. And realise that they’re humans... and realise that they make mistakes... and also have silly questions.” Although the organization is growing and its virtuous purpose of ethical crowdsourced work and commons-based subtitling is still thriving, our respondents are missing relational density and a sense of community in their digital work environment.

Nevertheless, to establish an atmosphere of togetherness in a collaborative community, the affective experience of intimacy is not enough. Being “enmeshed in a sublime atmosphere that feels humble, accepting and settling,” as the second author scribbled in his field notes during the Enspiral Summer Fest, also entails the continuous actualisation of a shared purpose as an aspirational narrative connecting people. In the following vignette, an Enspiral member, who had struggled “publicly” with her motivation of renewing her membership in the online channels, facilitated an open space session titled “Theory of Change.”



The workshop revolves around the question: Why do you want to be together when you have such different ideas for societal change? We move through various discussion formats: dyads, breakouts, whole group circle, post-it clustering. Supported by the graphic facilitation of the workshop callers, three main personal motivations for joining emerge: ‘self-management,’ ‘commons’ and ‘helping each other in a tribe.’ In the end, Enspiral is reaffirmed as content-agnostic, which means that it is not dedicated to a single cause (e.g. environmental regeneration). Its purpose is purposefully not spelt out. Moreover, Enspiral is envisioned as a space where you can be yourself, a space that honors diversity. (Fieldnotes, Enspiral, February 2017)

At the event, a participant was able to bring a personally pressing question to the group, which triggered a strategy codesign workshop. The episode illustrates how events provide a platform where people can contribute freely to the ongoing cultivation of a legitimately perceived shared purpose, which can lead to embodied experiences of authenticity, trust and inspiration. Relatedly, in the Drupal case, a project manager (Nunamaker, 2014) expressed in a blog post how large events were crucial for him to recognize that Drupal was not merely a FLOSS framework to build websites, but a community that cares for and nourishes their platform and those who contribute to it: “[T]he experience came together for me during several discussions both in the sessions and on the side. Drupal is about community. The community builds, maintains, advocates, cautions and develops the platform.”

In sum, our study reveals that in collaborative communities, where much of the daily work happens on digital platforms, F2F events have a vital function in generating the atmosphere of togetherness. It precipitates activities that create social intimacy and shared purpose. The events made room for hospitality, ceremony and vulnerability, creating safe and playful spaces where people felt included and sufficiently comfortable to open themselves to others. The resulting sense of social intimacy enables people to voice personal visions and values, while becoming less judgemental about individual differences. The *mélange* between relational closeness and shared virtuous potential (in our cases: freedom in software, conscious entrepreneurship, and accessible content) creates a hotbed for inspired encounters, new relationships and potential projects. Comparatively, Amara exemplifies that value

rationality alone is not enough to establish those solid local and global open ties emphasised in the literature (Adler and Heckscher, 2006).

The analysis thus highlights how the quality of togetherness unfolds through a tension between homogeneity and difference. As an affective condition, it triggers collective feelings related to a ‘community to come’ (Arvidsson, 2018); co-subjective circuits of passion, commitment and concern, which encourage the (re)articulation of social relations towards vulnerability, authenticity and trust. The challenge is to maintain togetherness, while avoiding slipping too much towards a uniform collectivity, which encompasses the danger of in-group/out-group dynamics and limiting norms. Since collaborative knowledge creation is dependent on the interaction of different experiences, domains and perspectives, it is vital to maintain the organisation’s appeal to people from various backgrounds and their distinct skill sets. We will now turn to the second atmospheric quality in event-spaces, which was equally important in nourishing the respective affective commons through creating excitement for different forms of contribution and reciprocal exchanges, leading to the recognition of diverse economic values.

### **Mutuality: Nourishing interdependence and diverse forms of contribution**

Next to the atmosphere of togetherness, we identified an affective envelopment of mutuality that emerged from event-based activities, where participants could discover their interdependence and experience how diverse forms of contribution generate value. Historically, in the case of Drupal, F2F events helped to incrementally question the strong code-centric character in the community (Sims, 2013; Zilouchian Moghaddam et al., 2011): the shared belief that the most valuable type of contribution by participants in FLOSS is source code (Rozas et al., 2021). Drupalistas with no coding skills, for instance, describe how their participation in events helped them overcome barriers, such as impostor syndrome, and helped them find alternative reciprocal contributions according to their talents (Nunamaker, 2014):

“Walking in the door, I didn't feel like a part of the community. I wasn't sure where I fit in since I wasn't a developer, designer, or vendor. I wasn't sure what to expect at the NYC Camp [...]. [After participating in the event] I never got a sense of feeling inferior for lack of experience or an inability to code. We had really engaging and

valuable sessions. [...] For me, this triggered the idea of giving back to the community in a way that made sense for us” (Blog post, Drupal, March 2014)

In this reflection of a DrupalCamp the reciprocal atmosphere that surrounded the discussing, sharing and learning activities, inspired the participant to find a way of contributing outside the dominant value logic. He felt that his different experience and skills were valued despite the controversial nature of some conversations. An encounter on equal footing became possible, which fostered intrinsic motivation and an ethics of contribution. Here, an atmosphere of mutuality attuned people to step into a form of reciprocity, where exchanges are not quantified and an immediate return contribution is not expected. The following accidental observation of a ‘hacker meetup’ in Enspirial’s coworking space further illustrates how diverse forms of value can be mundanely embraced at small, informal events.

[...] a group of people hung out and started ordering vegan burgers. A guy is talking about how he has reduced his workweek to 20 hours, seeking approval for his unusual decision. [...] Then, the lights are dimmed down. Two guys begin making and live-streaming experimental electronic music on some DIY devices. The tune reminds me of a mixture between early computer game scores and drum’n’bass. Others are tinkering with obscure electronics. I stumbled into a hacker meetup. Two participants are having an empathic conversation about how one of them could do something to confront the estrangement from his father. The music and vibe feel uplifting; I am typing ceaselessly - great flow. (Field note, July 2017)

As an after-work activity, some hobbyists and makers came together to tinker, chat and indulge in their passion. They adopted several alternative forms of value creation. First, they were sharing matters of personal concern, food and knowledge. Second, they cared for the emotional needs of others. Third, they were contributing bits and pieces of electronics. The resulting atmosphere of mutuality in the nightly coworking space cooked up amidst the smell of food, club music, screwing and soldering. In their meetups, this group of people created a space to practice relationality and interdependence instead of relying on an institutional, commercial offer. Comparably to Drupal, with its dominant form of contribution as code, at Enspirial entrepreneurial activity was the most cherished form of value-creation. At the hacker

meetup people could experiment with different notions of value and experience the embodied consequences of diverse economic practices.

Looking at a co-design workshop at Amara, it becomes apparent that mutuality as an atmospheric quality emanates both from the affirmation of diverse forms of contributions and the realisation of interdependence through participatory modes of organising. The two-day event was organized by a group of researchers, involving the first author of this paper, to co-create commons-oriented tools together with a group of linguists at Amara.

The goal was to identify alternative models to allocate tasks on the platform. The current logic is a ‘first-come, first-served’ policy, which leads linguists to compete and continually check for available work online. We conducted focus groups and design sprints, drawing on online whiteboards to identify alternative models for the distribution of tasks. Beyond the ingenious ideas the linguists came up with, an unexpected outcome of the workshop was the joy, high degree of participation and even thankfulness expressed by the participants. All of our field notes described, firstly, the happiness of the linguists for ‘putting a face to each other.’ Some of them have been collaborating on the same platform for three or four years. They have reviewed each other’s work and were familiar with their names and nicknames on the platform. However, they had neither seen nor heard each other in a personal encounter. Furthermore, they all expressed a sense of joy and empowerment for being able to have a say on the logic of the platform (Fieldnotes, Amara, June 2020).

Based on these linguists’ comments, during and after the workshop, it was obvious that such participatory design processes are crucial to feel a sense of ownership of the platform. At AOD, which is currently on its way to address the lack of events and atmosphere of togetherness, the need for social intimacy comes to the fore in this field note. At Drupal and Enspiral, we could similarly observe interactive process management at events of all sizes, which allowed for the exercise of distributed leadership, dialogic organising and a changing division of labour. Drupal, for example, adapted organising principles from academic conferences. All presentations were subject to peer review, which allowed for the co-creation of intellectual contributions in relation to existing threads of discussion. It also safeguarded a high quality of conversation and feedback in the room. Enspiral, in turn, organised larger

events in the open space format. These ‘unconferences’ start with a rudimentary agenda and plenty of free spots that participants fill according to their immediate concerns. Following a marketplace of workshop ideas, the open space principles favor emergence, curiosity and serendipity.

Building on the experience of diverse values and participatory change, F2F events can mobilise an affect of mutuality. People’s bodies co-subjectively sense that they are in a space that allows for psychological and material interdependence to be expressed. In a way, the events we participated in prototyped instances of caregiving and receiving, turning the negative connotation of ‘dependence’ around through the joy, trust and imaginative interactions evolving from generous acts of contribution, collection and reception. Over time, these feeling structures associated with sustainable mutual need-fulfilment can grow into a climate of gentle reciprocity. The atmosphere of mutuality evolves between the poles of selfless contribution and individual benefit. In self-organised settings, people can experience high degrees of self-efficacy quickly, nourishing others or leading projects. Consequently, engaged members are tempted to neglect their boundaries by feeling personally responsible for every problem that emerges. In the worst case, they overstretch themselves and successively become frustrated with other people, who are less engaged, seemingly ungrateful or opposed to their initiatives. To avoid a downward spiral with people leaving, our case study organisations established smaller, regular events that fostered mutuality beyond singular peak experiences, which gave a broader set of people opportunities to practice accountability and ownership. Another route we observed was to remunerate certain recurrent contributions to the community (e.g., reporting activities via newsletters and videos) and to foster a culture of recognition and celebration for small acts of support, care, and voluntarism without quantifying them. However, conflict and opposing needs are inevitable and require space to be expressed, which leads to the third atmospheric quality that we found to support the sustainable re-creation of an affective commons.

### **Dissonance: Breaking rhythms through collective reflection and conflict transformation**

In a one-on-one walk, a member of Enspirale pointed out that the Summer Fest was enabling him to “leave behind the ball of bad feelings” that keeps accumulating throughout regular working life. Working in this new relationally dense way is not an easy process, he

emphasised: “You know, first everything is light and happy, but then you have to share heavy stuff as well and to live through conflicts openly.” In his view, the danger is to lose yourself in over-activity for a consuming network. “Individual actions can have a real impact quite fast and some people get hooked on that feeling,” he stated.

He put his fingers on several challenges. First, living through togetherness and mutuality in this event-space-time may be energising, but how do you translate these atmospheres and related practices to everyday work? In an interview, another Enspiral member reflected: “Coming out of the Summer Fest, I’m thinking: I’ve got so much energy for Enspiral. This is great. I’m gonna work on all these things. Come back to the real world and there’s a little bit of a crash, where you think: What have I signed up for?” Second, there was a lot of invisible work going on behind the scenes that had been voluntarily taken over by enthusiastic leadership figures, who in many cases slid into burnout. Enspiral had consciously addressed this problem area with an online ‘thanks channel’ and emotional support groups. However, decentralising affective labour remained challenging. Third, Enspiral had managed to establish a culture that celebrated success, but people were less avid to talk about problems and hurtful instances, as some members observed.

What our analysis sees arising from such meddling of counteracting expectations, unrecognised contributions and unintended consequences is the need to process them. We found that events can offer spaces for collective reflection, where people have the chance to consider their involvement, identify emerging tensions in the peer governance, or monitor the health of the community. How are people contributing? How are projects, leaders and newcomers doing? How can hidden contributions be acknowledged? As researchers, we recurrently observed - and were affected - by an atmosphere of dissonance during such occasions. It allowed people to question the prevailing harmonious vibe at the events without discarding it entirely. In everyday work life insults, grudges and emerging structural power dynamics are easily avoided, projected or talked about in small circles. If events allow sensitive and emotional matters to come up, dissonance emerges - an affective intensity akin to a collective clenching of jaws, the tense anticipation of bursting out and the urge to run away all at once. If people learn to express their emotional impulses and to treat themselves and others with compassion, it is often followed by a sense of relief and a more complex

understanding of problems in the community. Within Drupal, collective reflection at events had significantly raised the awareness to tackle excessive code-centrism. Ideas, proposals and critiques moved from local events ‘up’ to global DrupalCons. When analysing the peer-reviewed presentations selected over time<sup>6</sup> for DrupalCons, for example, we noticed how the issue of the “health of the community” gained more visibility and relevance. The Drupal community shifted to acknowledge not only the technical and productive side but also the communitarian and reproductive one (Hestenes-Lehnen, 2021) - its affective commons. Eventually, these topics filled dedicated conference tracks, like “Being Human,”<sup>7</sup> where peer-reviewed presentations tackled issues like mental health and wellbeing, lack of diversity and empathy and communication, to name a few.

On some occasions, collective reflection was not enough or turned into interpersonal turmoil. In such instances, the embodied immediacy of events can help preserve relationships through conflict and support the maintenance of a culture of care and social responsibility. In the following episode from a so-called ‘Work-a-thon’ addressing governance issues at Enspiral, an emotional outburst laid bare dormant tensions and provided a sense-making space for possible solutions.

After the day had started with some high-level mapping of the governance and engagement problems within the network, one long-standing Enspiral member opted out: “I feel like I’m in the wrong room. There are just so many issues of shrinking responsibility in big groups that I’m not interested in solving right now.” Another member joined him. [...] Both obviously had different expectations for the day. Before lunch, we performed a short improv exercise to ‘get back into our bodies’ after this intense morning. To me the atmosphere felt lighter, released and more playful. Everyone was still standing in the room, committing to group work in the afternoon, as one member’s voice collapsed. She burst into tears: “It’s not your fault, but I feel totally wrong here. Things are overwhelming me; I think I just want to go home.” Abashed, I offered to bring her home with my car, but otherwise we finished the

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<sup>6</sup> Concretely, 46 out of the 330 documents selected for analysis in the case of Drupal summarised in Table 1.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the Call for Sessions for DrupalCon Dublin 2016 (<https://events.drupal.org/dublin2016/news/lets-be-human-drupalcon>) and the “Being Human” track during the last Global DrupalCon 2020 ([https://events.drupal.org/global2020/sessions/accepted?track\\_tid\[\]=228#topofview](https://events.drupal.org/global2020/sessions/accepted?track_tid[]=228#topofview)).

round of commitments. Only then, two people hugged her. (Vignette, Enspiral, July 2017)

Afterwards one member shared that he felt Enspiral is still hardly capable of addressing emotional issues. “Going on with our work, while someone has an emotional breakdown...,” he shrugged. Both the strict boundary-setting earlier and the emotional breakdown were signs of unaddressed tensions in the network. While some were fed up with inertia in the broader community, others longed for soft spaces to foster relationships. However, the stern reaction - no one being able to stop the workflow and to give immediate comfort - catalysed reflections around the need to improve a culture of care within the organisation. In the following months, emotional support and peer learning groups, so-called ‘pods,’ became a major new initiative to address these challenges. This episode also illustrates that atmospheres are never coherent and sensed in the same way by everyone. We experienced a dissonant affective rhythm, a clash of at least three different sets of expectations and even more moods.

Zooming out of such micro-intra-actions and to our other two cases, we see how the atmosphere of dissonance at events can lead to structured long-term transformation projects. Amara, for instance, is progressively introducing an initiative to develop a stronger sense of community: the ‘Linguist Progression Program’. In the words of a core member of AOD:

“When it was just 200 that was easy. Everybody knew everybody. So again, the whole Linguist Progression [Program] is about getting back to that feeling and getting back to literally making a community that everybody feels a part of. And, even more important, feels ownership of. That’s... for us, that’s the ideal. [...] And so it really fueled our fire [...] We’re not here to just create subtitles.” (Interview, Amara, June 2019)

Looking at Drupal, a ‘Community Working Group’<sup>8</sup> was established, 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,” in the words of a member. Another example is the ‘Drupal Diversity and Inclusion Group’<sup>9</sup>, which introduced a mentorship program for Drupalistas from underrepresented groups. The

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.drupal.org/governance/community-working-group>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.drupaldiversity.com>.



atmospheric quality of dissonance arises through the embodied experience of ethical dilemmas, in which people navigate the tension to either confront or avoid conflict. Events can offer spaces for collective reflection and serve as arenas where conflicts play out, either in a facilitated or spontaneous manner. In our cases, this led to the introduction of structured initiatives to nourish affective commons through greater care, acknowledgement of differences and individual support. The communities successively learned to monitor their emotional well-being and introduced conflict resolution mechanisms. More importantly, moving through dissonance made participants think about their roles and contributions in the space. Many respondents in our studies highlighted that over time people had expanded their emotional vocabulary and repertoire considerably. As an affective intensity, dissonance enhances mutual attunement to different experiences of a situation, leading to individual and collective awareness about embodied relationality in the group. As people navigate ethical dilemmas, they build emotive muscles through conversation, reflection and mimicking, thereby reducing the ‘danger’ of endless meetings, tacit norms, emergent inequalities, ruptures and torn relationships. Ultimately, increasing trust in a polyrhythmic culture of experimentation rather than a desire for control through centralisation.

## **Discussion**

In our comparative ethnographic study of events in three collaborative communities, we examined how a spirit - “the sensation of being lifted collectively by being in the presence of something ‘larger’ than oneself” (Burø and Koefoed, 2021: 181) enables self-organisation, fluid leadership and peer collaboration. Focusing on the processual constitution of spirit as an ‘affective commons’ (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021), we asked how it is produced through a dynamic interplay of activities, spaces and their atmospheres to enable novel ways of working. We further inquired into relational and ethical accounts of spirit, how it can be sustainably stewarded, valorised and consumed as a common resource through behaviour and values shaped in embodied experiences.

Our analysis revealed three atmospheric qualities that place affects, bodies, spaces and ideas in vibration and resonance. First, togetherness, emanating from activities that created social intimacy and shared purpose. Its spatial diffusion enveloped heterogeneous constellations with affective intensities around belonging, safety and courage to meet each other with shared

vulnerability. Moreover, it fostered feelings of excitement for a form of virtuous potential which bound the community together and strengthened people's openness for unfamiliar, generous and playful encounters. Second, we observed a co-subjective affective experience of mutuality, which was produced by activities that invited diverse forms of contribution and fostered interdependence through participatory process design. It induced a culture of gentle reciprocity, in which people were compelled to make voluntary contributions, experiencing self-efficacy and aliveness as their voices were heard and actions had an organisational impact. The third atmosphere, dissonance, was present when tensions and conflicts either emerged or were reflectively addressed. It facilitated spaces that felt safe to disagree, where participants could question norms, allowing marginal perspectives into the conversation.

### **The rhythmic composition of spirit within thresholds**

We applied an atmospheric lens to organising that bridges the mind-body dichotomy, in which “cognition and sensemaking are seen as intertwined with and shaped by affect, sensation and feeling” (Beyes, 2016: 118). This perspective lends attention to the fact that our sense perception - the things we hear, see, smell, taste and touch - is always already configured and classified. Groups are held together by a specific band of perceptual awareness and sensori-emotional experiences, operating as a medium through which the vast canvas of the world becomes actionable. Atmospheres can be seen as an instrument of the aesthetic organisation of bodies via the training of perceptive faculties and habituation to collective moods, but also a more subtle creation and transmission of affective states, inducing biochemical processes of entrainment and imitation (Borch, 2010). It is important to note that “atmospheres are not conceived as modulations in *actually* observed agencies of bodies but their *potential* capacities to act” (Vitry et al., 2020: 279); what Michels and Steyaert (2017) called ‘moments of potentiality and promise.’

Our examination of affective commons in collaborative communities confirms prior conceptualisations of atmospheres (Vitry et al., 2020), conceived both as an effect of social practices (i.e., emanating from specific event activities) and a cause or background condition that inspires organising (i.e., embodied values, ways of being, and tastes, exercising a certain degree of agency over event design). Focusing on the relational consequences of this recursive enactment, we fleshed out spirit as a ‘multiple-being-in-the-world’, both ‘intangible

and touching' (Burø and Koefoed, 2021). In our cases, spirit continuously emerged through fluctuations between the three atmospheres of togetherness, mutuality and dissonance. Our event atmospheres were positioned between the boundaries of what is traditionally deemed work and private lives. In breaking the seals between colleagues and friends, voluntarism and earnings or leisure and labor, the atmospheres needed to maintain the productive tensions of homogeneity and difference (togetherness), contribution and benefit (mutuality) as well as confrontation and avoidance (dissonance). Affect emerges as a relational vibration in human and more-than-human encounters. If the rhythm leans too much into one direction, some elements inevitably break the connection. In conceptual terms, extreme amplitudes represent 'thresholds', "where this affect ceases, whereby a new atmosphere is generated, or a previously marginalized atmosphere can grip those bodies" (Vitry et al., 2020: 280).

Borch's (2010) approach to frame relational atmospheric dynamics as a 'politics of imitation' is promising to us. We add to his theory of co-subjective, semiconscious suggestion through affective intensities, perceptual socialisation and collective moods a rhythmic component. The spirit of collaborative communities surges and sinks within atmospheric rhythms, in the dynamic territory between opposing poles and concurring atmospheres, i.e. thresholds. As Pallesen (2018) highlighted, one has to be invited into a rhythm; it cannot be imposed: "[a] repetitive pattern only becomes rhythm in the tension between invitation and response" (Pallesen, 2018: 198). Order and a capacity to act do not emerge through cause and effect but in what she calls 'moments of suspense,' where "a collective sense of potential in the present workflow emerges" (Pallesen, 2018: 199). Consequently, people can be motivated or even seduced by sensory experience, influencing behaviour and values (De Molli et al., 2020). But the moment before our response to changes in rhythm represents an inflection point to insert newness and difference through embodied closeness to the potential trajectories in the intra-actional flow. In the second part of the discussion we will turn to the embodied ethics of commoning as an ethics of affective resonance that flourishes in moments of dissonance and distancing.

### **Architectural control and an ethics of affective commoning**

In reflecting on our findings and the literatures on collaborative communities governance, affective commoning and atmospheric organising we are able to provide novel insight on the

sustainable stewardship of spirit as a pooled resource in the digital economy - “inflecting bodies with novel capacities, new modes of interaction, new insights, tendencies or habits, new creative opportunities, a different experience of work” (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021: 8). We draw on Massa and O’Mahony’s (2021) concept of ‘participation architecture,’ as a means to ‘passively’ foster control and coherence by shaping a sociotechnological surrounding. Our findings stress that participation architectures comprise a functional as well as an aesthetic dimension. We conceptualise their interplay between a relational politics of communication through deliberate, cognitive action and a politics of imitation through the affective attunement of spaces (Böhme, 1993) and partitioning of sensation (Beyes, 2016). Discussing the dynamics of these two architectural components along our three atmospheres of affective commoning enables us to further outline a ‘relational embodied ethics of the commons’ (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020).

The atmosphere of togetherness is intertwined with the quest for individual reputation and a virtuous ‘community to come’ (Arvidsson, 2018)). It is held together by ties of vulnerability and a sense of belonging that facilitates knowledge sharing, intrinsic motivation, and collective action (Adler and Heckscher, 2006)). On a functional architectonic level, this calls for a partitioning between core and periphery, empowering the few, while offering participation opportunities for the many (Dahlander and O’Mahony, 2011) as well as a model of ‘scaling across’ a network of nested and interrelating communities (Pentzold, 2020) to provide a scaffolding for relationships to grow, as the case of Drupal illustrated (Rozas and Huckle, 2021). The aesthetic dimension calls for a reconceptualisation of vulnerability as a generative force of organising and open-ended boundary work (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 55). At our events we observed rituals, spaces, and social technologies that fostered the embodied experience of learning from the insecurities, struggles and traumas of peers to expand the emotional repertoire of the organisation. The co-subjective experience of being heard and seen - the “mutual recognition of difference beyond normative expectations” (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020: 11), creates an affect of intense aliveness that fosters people’s capacity for serendipity, experimentalism and responsiveness.

Mutuality emerged in a recursive relationship with activities that invited various forms of contribution beyond transactional exchanges. This led to a recognition of diverse forms of

value and an expanded understanding of economic practices, encompassing care, contribution and sharing (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The resulting cultural climate of gentle reciprocity was further deepened in activities of continuous participatory change (Resch and Steyaert, 2020). In terms of the functional architectural aspect, our findings suggest consolidating participatory design and facilitation capabilities as well as establishing shared knowledge commons (Fjeldstad et al., 2012) and pluricentric experimentation between consent (Rothschild, 2016) and direct action (Leach, 2016). Building on Ostrom, Waters-Lynch and Duff (2021) recommend a system to monitor the wellbeing of the community and to acknowledge diverse contributions without rigorous quantification. In our cases, we also saw that paid and rotating community management roles (e.g., internal/external communication, matchmaking and endorsing) could have a beneficial effect on a shared feeling of interdependence. Regarding its aesthetic architectural dimension, mutuality as a ‘spatially discharged quasi-objective feeling’ (Böhme, 1993) or ‘spectral being’ (Burø and Koefoed, 2021) spread a sense of becoming with others and othernesses. Associated with affects of satisfaction but also frustration, such a fundamental ontological understanding of relatedness triggered accountability for embodied needs, “a non-exclusionary and non-traumatising embodied ethical relationship with the other” (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020).

Finally, the atmosphere of dissonance surrounded episodes of collective reflection, where people explored emerging, sometimes marginal, sensible perceptions in their collaboration to counter looming power dynamics. Additionally, the eruption of conflict spelled out the varying situational experience of affects, feelings and emotions. On the functional side of participation architectures, our findings point to the importance of acknowledging the generative role of dissent in participatory democratic processes (Brekke et al., 2021). Activities that invite dissent include circling practices, such as check-ins and retrospectives from agile methodology, regular retreats to rekindle and strategise, but also peer-mentoring relationships and mutual support groups as well as the appointment of working groups for sensitive topics. Aesthetically dissonance is required for sustainable affective commoning to establish the possibility for a distancing from the conventional ways the sensible is organised.

We propose a ‘relational embodied ethics of the commons’ (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020) as an ethics of resonance. It can be conceived as an embodied discipline of cultivating relational

awareness to how collaborative communities are engrossed in affective intensities and collective moods. Thus, increasing care and responsibility involves to be attentive to uneasy and disruptive impulses of our bodies and clenched postures of those around us: “transforming social praxis implies changing what can be felt and experienced – a kind of rupture of sensation and affectivity that messes up seemingly self-evident correspondences between perception and signification” (Beyes, 2016: 122). An affective commons moves back and forth within specific thresholds of affects, sensations and emotions, setting bodies, practices and places in vibration and resonance. Thereby, it nurtures cohesion and sustainability in the community but is also recurrently threatened by breakdown as passionate involvement exceeds its boundaries. An ethics of resonance for affective commoning implies sensitising our bodies’ relational awareness for ethical dilemmas (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020), enabling rhythmic distancing from and disruption of the sensible to make room for marginal potential, generosity and experimentation (Burø and Koefoed, 2021).

## **Conclusion**

In this study, we examined the role of affective commons in the collaborative economy, in which platforms, communities and commoning have emerged as new forms of decentralised and distributed association. Our findings contribute a deeper understanding of how spirit as a common resource is composed in the dynamic interplay of distinct affective atmospheres. It acts as a medium that connects bodies, materialities and spaces in vibration and emerges in the tension between relational opposites. Spirit can thus be conceptualised as a sensori-emotional circuit in ongoing oscillation, that is further dynamised through processes of coalescing, friction and repulsion between its atmospheric qualities. We have outlined how collaborative communities employ events and activities to sustainably maintain their spirit by practicing increased embodied awareness for shared vulnerability, fundamental relatedness and productive discord. The notion of ‘participation architecture’, as a means to foster coherence and control in these new forms of organising, can be expanded from its functional focus on ‘good communication’ to an aesthetic aspect of ‘good encounter,’ sensitive to the affective, sensible and perceptual dimensions of organisational life. A relational embodied ethics of affective commoning can be seen as a discipline of tuning into each other, enhancing

attention for seemingly invisible signals. It encourages moments of dissonance and distancing to insert new, foreign, marginal and imaginative rhythms.

Future research interested in the relational-processual emergence of organising as an atmospheric phenomenon could explore how atmospheres are perceived differently and thus branch out variously. More studies are needed that inquire in the politics of how atmospheres colonise spaces and influence each other, or more affirmatively, how they can be co-designed and maintained as a participatory aesthetic surrounding. Furthermore, the relationship of atmospheres and practices over time is an area that deserves thorough attention. Zooming out of our immediate cases, we see an opening for research to contribute to an organisational architecture for the collaborative economy that places wellbeing and thriving livelihoods at the center of productive processes. To close with a voice from our field: “I served a start-up for the past five years. Now, I want an enterprise that serves me.”

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