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Scaling Up Alternatives to Capitalism

A Social Movement Approach to Alternative Organizing (in) the Economy

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Abstract

In these times of crises, capitalism and the far-reaching marketization of our societies has again become a subject of contestation and critique. Alternative organizing is one response to the critique of capitalism. As an embodied and constructive form of critique it takes place in prefigurative organizations and communities on the ground that experiment with alternative forms of organizing economic exchanges and lives. These prefigurative initiatives are seen as central actors in a social transformation toward an alternative economy. However, they oftentimes remain autonomous and disconnected, questioning their potential to contribute to a broader social change. This paper sets out to explore how and when alternative organizing as practiced in communities and organizations can scale upwards to lead to a more profound social transformation of our societies. Building on insights from scholarship on social movement outcomes, I discuss the collective actions, contextual conditions, and social mechanisms that are likely to allow an upward scale shift of alternative organizing.

Keywords: alternative organizing, critique of capitalism, diffusion, movement outcome, postcapitalism, prefiguration, scale shift, social movement studies, social transformation

Zusammenfassung

In den derzeitigen Krisenzeiten werden Kapitalismus und die weitreichende Vermarktlichung gesellschaftlicher Lebensbereiche erneut kritisch hinterfragt. Alternatives Organisieren gilt als eine konstruktive Form der Kapitalismuskritik. Es zeigt sich in präfigurativen Organisationen und Gemeinschaften, die mit alternativen Organisationsformen ihrer wirtschaftlichen Austauschbeziehungen und zuweilen auch ihrer Lebensweise experimentieren. Sie werden als zentrale Akteure einer sozialen Transformation in Richtung eines alternativen Wirtschaftssystems angesehen. Allerdings agieren diese präfigurativen Initiativen überwiegend autonom und unabhängig voneinander. Dies lässt ihren Beitrag zu einem umfassenderen sozialen Wandel zunächst fraglich erscheinen. Der Artikel befasst sich mit der Frage, wie und unter welchen Bedingungen die alternativen Organisationsformen präfigurativer Gemeinschaften und Organisationen Verbreitung finden und entsprechend eine grundlegendere soziale Transformation unserer Gesellschaften anstoßen können. Auf Grundlage der Forschung zu sozialen Bewegungen werden die kollektiven Handlungen, Kontextbedingungen und sozialen Mechanismen diskutiert, die eine Verbreitung alternativer Organisationsformen in der Gesellschaft ermöglichen können.

Schlagwörter: alternative Organisationsformen, Bewegungsforschung, Diffusion, Kapitalismuskritik, Postkapitalismus, Präfiguration, *scale shift*, soziale Transformation, Wirkungen sozialer Bewegungen

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> Exploring real utopias implies developing a social science of the *possible*, not just of the *actual*. This is a tricky research problem, for while we can directly observe variation in what exists in the world, discussions of possibilities and limits of possibility always involve more speculative and contentious claims about what could be, not just what is. The task is to combine theoretical analysis of normatively desirable institutional designs with the empirical study of real-world cases that prefigure emancipatory alternatives beyond existing institutions. (Wright 2013b, 168)

> What is required is a more open, active, and experimental form of positive critique which brings new things into the world. (Parker et al. 2014, 368)

1 Introduction

These are troubled times. We face many serious issues that affect anybody's chance to live a dignified, "flourishing life" (Wright 2019): global warming, exploitation of natural resources, poverty, precarious employment, long-term unemployment, rising inequality, and an increasing economic, cultural, and social polarization in societies.[1] The persistence of these pressing problems is often related to the functioning of the economy, considered as an outcome of neoliberal policies and economic activities in capitalist markets. While capitalism undoubtly contributed to social betterment in various ways, it also came with severe effects on fundamental moral principles such as equality, democracy, and sustainability (Brown 2015; Dörre, Lessenich, and Rosa 2015; Wright 2019). These effects are nowadays felt by growing parts of society and fuel contestation and critique in and around markets (Schiller-Merkens and Balsiger 2019). While contestation around capitalism and markets is nothing new (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Polanyi 1957), in the wake of the financial crisis in 2008 and the following great recession, markets again became central objects of moral struggles in our societies (Balsiger and Schiller-Merkens 2019).[2]

I thank the reviewers Philip Balsiger and Martin Seeliger, and Martin Höpner for providing helpful advice on how to improve the paper. I also thank the participants in our workshop "Moral Critique in and around Markets: Organizing (for) Alternatives in Troubled Times," Ali Aslan Gümüşay, Amanda Machin, Lisa Suckert, and my colleagues at the Reinhard Mohn Institute for comments on a previous version.

1 And we currently have to add the Covid-19 pandemic to the list of serious problems. The original paper was written before the outbreak of the pandemic.

2 There are numerous definitions of capitalism that, according to Streeck (2016, 1), differ "in line with writers' individual preoccupations or ideologies." In this paper, I build on Wright (2010)

The financial crisis provided social movements with windows of opportunities for mobilizing against capitalism. It marked a turning point after which the neoliberal imaginaries of a bright future for everyone were no longer credible and many lost faith in the current economic system (Beckert 2019; della Porta 2015). New anticapitalist social movements such as the Occupy movement (Graeber 2013; Reinecke 2018) or the degrowth movement (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015) emerged, and movements against austerity measures in Greece, Portugal, and Spain were formed (della Porta 2015). The crisis also made larger parts of society listen to the claims of long-term movements with a history in mobilizing against some of the negative consequences of capitalist markets. Finally, the organizational archetypes of capitalism – multi-national corporations (Davis 2013) – became central sources of popular grievances, and social movements increasingly targeted them directly (Briscoe and Gupta 2016; King and Pearce 2010; Soule 2012).

This ongoing mobilization against capitalism, its principles, consequences, and archetypes, fueled societal and academic debates around alternative forms of organizing (Barin Cruz, Aquino Alves, and Delbridge 2017; Mair and Rathert 2019; Parker et al. 2014; Zanoni 2020; Zanoni et al. 2017). Encompassing models for organizing the economy in alternative ways have gained attention, among them degrowth economy (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015), community economy (Gibson-Graham 2006), or economy for the common good (Felber 2015). Central to these models is the idea of strengthening social-democratic elements in the economy – organizing principles that have also been characterized as alternative (Parker et al. 2014), postcapitalist (Zanoni et al. 2017), and anticapitalist (Wright 2019).[3] The principles include a democratization of decision-making processes, the primacy of moral values over economic values governing economic exchanges, and (oftentimes) a collective ownership of the means of production. These principles of alternative organizing (in) the economy have already become established at organizational and community levels in a variety of forms – in, for instance, coop-

who sees capitalism as a specific type of a market economy. A market economy refers to an economy where markets are central for coordinating economic activities, thus coordination happens through decentralized voluntary exchanges, supply and demand, and prices. Capitalism is a market economy in which capital is privately owned and allocated according to the principle of profit maximization, and in which workers who do not own the firms in which they work are allocated to economic activities through labor markets.

3 Wright (2019, ch. 4) understands anticapitalism as democratic socialism, or democratic market socialism. It refers to an economy in which economic activities are primarily controlled by civil society, "through institutions that enable ordinary people to collectively decide what to do" (Wright 2019, 69–70). He sees capitalism and anticapitalism as ideal types that, in reality, "interact and mix. To call an economy 'capitalist' is thus shorthand for a more cumbersome expression like 'an economic ecosystem combining capitalist, statist and socialist power relations within which capitalist relations are dominant' […] [A]n economy is socialist to the extent that social power [of civil society] is dominant over state power and economic power" (Wright 2019, 70). He also makes clear that his understanding of an anticapitalist economy should not be confused with a state-directed, communist economy. Instead, democratic socialism's "hallmark is production organized by collectivities directly to satisfy human needs, not subject to the discipline of profit-maximization or state-technocratic rationality. The state may be involved in funding these collectivities, but it does not directly organize them or their services" (Wright 2013a, 17).

eratives, social enterprises, solidarity-based producer-consumer networks, intentional communities, and eco-villages. Many of these initiatives prefigure alternative forms of organizing economic exchange that embody the seeds of an envisioned future beyond capitalism (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013; Maeckelbergh 2011; Monticelli 2018; Parker et al. 2014; Rätzer, Hartz, and Winkler 2018; Wright 2019; Zanoni et al. 2017). Scholars therefore see these local forms of alternative organizing "on the ground" as central in any fundamental social transformation toward an alternative economy. The late Erik Olin Wright (2010; 2019), perhaps the most prolific writer on alternatives to capitalism, underscores the particular role of local initiatives of alternative organizing in the social transformation of societies toward an alternative economic future (also Gibson-Graham 2006; Holloway 2010; Monticelli 2018).

However, initiatives of alternative organizing at organizational and community level oftentimes remain rather insular and unconnected. Against them stands the predominance of capitalism in our societies. Capitalism is deeply engrained in politics, culture, and institutions; it constitutes the "culturally hegemonic public discourse" and shapes the way of life of the majority of people (Streeck 2016). The central question then becomes how these so far dispersed instances of alternative organizing at the organizational and community level can become the collective force "that allow[s] for the mobilization of countervailing power" (Streeck 2016, 225). Wright has written extensively on strategies of social transformation toward a future beyond capitalism. He imagines it as an economy in which democratic, egalitarian, participatory economic relations brought about by civil society are "dominant in determining the economic conditions of life and access to a livelihood for most people" (Wright 2019, 60). However, we still lack more detail about how the collective action of civil society can fuel broader social change toward this imagined alternative future and which conditions might shape this transformation.[4] This paper therefore sets out to explore how and when initiatives of alternative organizing at organizational and community levels can "scale upwards" (Tarrow 2010) to broader societal levels, how and when they can mobilize larger parts of our societies to collectively work toward an alternative economy beyond capitalism.

I argue that a social movement approach is particularly suited to address this question. Regarding the pervasiveness of capitalist values and practices, organizing toward an alternative economic future is a contentious collective challenge that requires sustained

4 In this paper, I talk about social change and social transformation. From a practice theoretical perspective, the former refers to changes in social practices as a condition to and an outcome of changes in rules (collective beliefs, values, norms, regulations) and resources (Giddens 1984). Social change can take place at various levels of society, from the micro level of groups, organizations and communities, the meso level of organizational fields and markets, to the macro level of the economy. I use the term social transformation as a particular type of social change, namely one encompassing changes at the macro level that are variously denominated as fundamental, broad, or major. Social transformation thus extends beyond the boundaries of particular markets and economic sectors but indicates changes of practices, rules, and resources in all societal arenas in which economic exchange and relations take place.

collective action. Such a fundamental social change supposes the collaboration of a plurality of actors with different demands and identities, among them social movements that mobilize against capitalism, organizations and communities that already practice alternative ways of organizing, and elites from the political and the business arena. In other words, a broader societal movement is needed for making our economies more democratic, egalitarian, and sustainable. Social movement scholarship has a long tradition in studying the interrelations of a diverse set of actors (e.g., civil society actors, activists, politicians, political agencies, courts, firms, managers) in social change processes, the cultural and political opportunities for collective action, and the variety of ways through which these actors collectively open (or close) further opportunities for change to ultimately achieve their aims. An extensive body of research provides insights into the outcome of movement activism or, more precisely, into the kinds of collective action, contextual conditions, and mechanisms shaping movement outcome (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016; McAdam and Tarrow 2019; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Snow et al. 2019). I build on this research to derive theoretical insights on how and when alternative forms of organizing on the ground might eventually scale upwards to lead into a more profound social transformation of our societies.

The paper contributes theoretically to scholarship on alternative organizing, social transformation, and prefigurative social movements. It is written in the sense of a "social science of the possible" (Wright 2013b). It means that claims about how and when alternative organizing initiatives can work toward a broader social transformation necessarily remain "speculative and contentious"; we cannot know in advance whether social transformation will actually be achieved that way. Nevertheless, to address the serious problems that we face today, it is important to write in the sense of a more constructive and "positive critique which brings new things into the world" (Parker et al. 2014, 368; comparably, Davis 2013; Zanoni et al. 2017). It is the kind of science that can support processes of continuous experimentation and learning, thereby creating the openness and ability to find answers and approaches to the interwoven crises of our times. In the following, before introducing and discussing the social movement approach to alternative organizing, I will describe the underlying critique of capitalism and social movement activism against it, particularly social movements' involvement in building alternatives to capitalism, provide a definition of alternative organizing, and address the role of local alternative organizing initiatives for social transformation.

2 The critique of capitalism and movement activism against it

The moral consequences of capitalism and markets have been widely discussed in the social sciences (see for the following, Brown 2015; Dörre, Lessenich, and Rosa 2015; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Wright 2010). One stream of work looks at the role of the state and how neoliberal policies of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization fur-

ther facilitated the expansion of market principles such as growth, profit orientation, and competition to formerly non-economic spheres of social life. The literature also provides insights into how neoliberalism transformed existing markets, with far-reaching consequences for the environment and for the social fabric of societies. Regarding the latter, scholars have pointed, for instance, to the destruction of moral values such as solidarity, social protection, and equality (Sandel 2012; Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2015). They have also described how the encompassing deregulation of financial and labor markets caused precarious employment, job insecurity, and increasing levels of economic inequality. Scholars have further argued that neoliberalism gave way to an unprecedented globalization of economic processes, allowing economies in the global North to continually grow by exploiting people and natural resources in the global South (Banerjee and Linstead 2001; Lessenich 2019).

The environmental consequences of capitalism have come to be discussed in relation to the constant striving for efficiency, novelty, and innovation that designates capitalist production. For producers "[t]o survive in the competitive world of the capitalist economy, [they] must seek new products, higher productivity, lower costs, new forms of production, and new domains of investment to create ever more value" (Beckert 2016, 269). Creating economic value requires consumption, and producers have to continuously shape consumers' wants and desires ("needs"). This not only implies overconsumption and waste production, making capitalist markets appear as "gigantic waste-producing engine[s]" (Fourcade and Healy 2007, 291). Capitalist consumption has also been shown to cause greed, insatiability, and social rivalry among people as they feel obliged to conspicuously consume positional goods in the expectation of thereby achieving superior social status (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Hirsch 1976; Schor 2004; Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2015; Streeck 2016; Veblen [1995] 1899).

These moral consequences of capitalism are a central driver for social movement activism. In the past, long-standing movements such as the environmental movement or the labor movement did not necessarily openly attack capitalism as a whole, but they mobilized against issues seen as being caused by it: pollution, environmental destruction, sweatshop-like working conditions, or precarious employment. Since the 2000s, however, social movements more overtly mobilize against capitalism and neoliberal policies. It started with the global justice movement that directly campaigns against developments related to the global expansion of capitalism (della Porta et al. 2006). In the 2010s, social movements against austerity economic policies emerged in countries such as Spain, Greece, Italy, and the U.S., opposing the liberalization of markets and the privatization and downsizing of social services (della Porta 2015). This shift toward an explicit framing of concerns in terms of neoliberalism and capitalism was accompanied by a shift in the target of activism. Social movements (re)discovered the important role of market actors in achieving an impact on the economy. While movements continue to target the state to attain government regulation that should impede harmful consequences of capitalism, nowadays they more often directly intervene in markets. Multinational corporations in particular have become central sources of popular griev-

ances and are now an important target for social movement activism (see overviews by Briscoe and Gupta 2016; Giugni and Grasso 2019; King and Pearce 2010; Soule 2012).

Social movements not only seek to disrupt capitalism through adversarial protest action but also engage in more constructive and in embodied forms of critique. They do so by participating in creating and living alternative forms of organizing economic relations at various levels of society. At the level of fields, they are involved in the rise of moral markets to which they contribute fundamental cultural and material resources (Balsiger 2014; Lounsbury, Ventresca, and Hirsch 2003; McInerney 2014; Schiller-Merkens 2017; Schneiberg 2013; Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008). Social movements further engage in more localized prefigurative practices that reflect alternative forms of organizing production, exchange, and consumption at community and organizational level. Examplary communities include eco-villages, degrowth communities organized around alternative economic principles such as solidarity and self-sufficiency (Trainer 2012), alternative producer-consumer networks (Forno and Graziano 2019), and alternative organizations (Parker et al., 2014) such as post-growth organizations (Rätzer, Hartz, and Winkler 2017), worker-recovered/recuperated enterprises ("empresas recuperadas," Vieta 2020), and common good organizations (Felber 2015). In these communities and organizations, participants engage in prefigurative politics. The notion of politics here refers to the members' collective attempt to bring about social change at various levels, while prefiguration relates to the experimentation with practices that "anticipate or enact some feature of an 'alternative world' in the present" (Yates 2015, 4). It refers to the reproduction of the values and relations actors aspire to in their everyday practices, whereby alternative ways of living in the present are created (Maeckelbergh 2011; Monticelli 2018; Reinecke 2018). It is through these changes in everyday practices that actors attempt to bring about broader societal change (Reinecke 2018). Scholars therefore also talk about prefigurative social movements, defined as "initiatives that are developing within capitalism and are striving to prefigure a post-capitalist society" (Monticelli 2018, 504).[5]

5 Bosi and Zamponi (2015, 369) propose the term direct social action that should describe the same set of phenomena as prefigurative politics. They define it as "forms of collective action that aim at directly changing, by means of the very action itself, some specific aspects of society without being primarily oriented toward securing the mediation of public authorities or the intervention of other actors." So the term is explicitly chosen to denominate forms of collective action that concentrate on self-organizing change in everyday practices. Change through political claim-making directed at state authorities and other power holders is seen as being only of minor importance to direct social action (if at all). In this paper, I use the term prefigurative politics as it is more common across different social sciences and also already referred to in organization studies (e.g., Reinecke 2018).

3 Defining alternative organizing (in) the economy

As an embodied response to the critique of capitalism, prefigurative social movements reproduce alternative forms of organizing economic exchange and relations in their daily practices, thereby prefiguring an alternative future economy. However, the phenomenon of alternative organizing (in) the economy is broader than what we currently see realized mainly in organizations and communities, but crosses various levels in society. In its most general sense, it refers to forms of organizing that arise in opposition to capitalism. Alternative organizing includes organizing types at different levels, including broader forms at societal and field levels that reflect how to reorganize the economy and particular markets, and more local forms in which communities and organizations are organized in alternative ways (see Table 1). Some forms of alternative organizing are encompassing in that they presume changes in the everyday lives of its members (as witnessed in some intentional communities and eco-villages), others only consist of changes in people's economic exchanges and relations (alternative production-consumption networks, worker-owned enterprises, common good organizations).

What makes these forms of organizing alternative, aside from embodying the critique of contemporary capitalism? Mair and Rathert (2019), for instance, position alternative organizing as an alternative to the corporate archetype. They see it as a form of organizing organizations that intend to address multiple economic and social goals, attend to local needs, consider the limitation of resources, and are governed by democratic ways of decision-making. As examples, they mention social enterprises, sharing economy

Table 1 Alternative forms of organizing (in) the economy

alternative organizing of the *economy*	economy for the common good (Felber 2015) economic democracy (Schweikart 2011) sharing economy (only if pursuing certain values, e.g., Schor 2016) degrowth economy (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015) participatory economics (Robin Hahnel and Michael Albert) community economy (Gibson-Graham 2006) social solidarity economy
alternative organizing of *fields* (markets)	moral markets moral market niches
alternative organizing of *communities*	intentional communities eco-villages transition towns direct producer-consumer networks (e.g., community supported agriculture) peer-to-peer collaborative production community and urban gardens local and community currencies
alternative organizing of *organizations*	worker-recovered/recuperated enterprises (empresas recuperadas) common good organizations fairtrade organizations post-growth organizations social enterprises cooperatives B-corporations non-profit platform organizations sustainable community movement organizations (Forno and Graziano 2019) alternative action organizations (Bosi and Zamponi 2015)

or platform organizations, cooperatives, and B-corporations. While this definition includes many of the alternatives that we currently witness, it is restrictive in the sense of focusing at the level of organizations and of excluding those forms that take a more radical stance toward capitalism by, for instance, rejecting economic principles like profit maximization altogether. In this paper, I build on a definition of alternative organizing that allows considering these varieties in alternative organizing, where alternatives can exist at various levels and can take a more or less opposing stance toward capitalism. The definition of alternative organizing builds on Wright (2010; 2019), who proposes three sets of principles that centrally inform moral struggles around capitalism and that constitute the moral values according to which any alternative can and should be assessed. Alternative organizing then refers to forms of organizing that aim at realizing or are designed according to the principles of equality/fairness, democracy/freedom, and community/solidarity (Wright, 2019; see also the moral principles of democracy, equality, and sustainability that he defines in Wright [2013a], and the principles in scholarship on alternative organizations – autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility, Parker et al. [2014]). This definition is broad enough to subsume varieties in the forms of alternative organizing, or what Wright (2019) refers to as "varieties of anticapitalism."

Wright differentiates various anticapitalisms in terms of their underlying strategies of social transformation: these can be revolutionary and disruptive, reformist and incremental, or escapist. We can apply these strategies to look into the ways participants in alternative organizing initiatives collectively seek to contribute to social change toward an alternative economy. Many social enterprises, for instance, strive for transforming the economy from within, in incremental ways, through participating in the daily processes of the current economy. This reformist strategy can also be found in other types of alternative organizing such as in common good organizations and B-corporations. Thus we see that the kind of transformative strategy is not exclusive to a particular type or form. However, some strategies can be found more often in particular forms of alternative organizing, such as the strategy of escaping capitalism. Among eco-villages and intentional communities, there are several communities that dedicatedly escape from capitalism and build their "own micro-alternative in which to live and flourish" (Wright 2019, 51). Its members oftentimes avoid contact to the world outside and create alternative forms of organizing their (not only economic) lives within the confines of a secluded community.[6] This strategy of escaping is sometimes also pursued by cooperatives.

6 Some actors also follow a strategy of escaping capitalism as an "individualistic lifestyle strategy" (Wright 2019). But, as Wright (2019, 52) puts it, "[i]t is hard to treat the wilderness hiker who flies into a remote region with expensive hiking gear in order 'to get away from it all' as a meaningful expression of opposition to capitalism." The alternative forms of organizing (in) the economy addressed in this paper only include those initiatives that actively and collectively strive for social change, be this broader change at the field level (e.g., social enterprises with the aim to change the values guiding economic exchange in their market), at the level of the economy (as common good activists oftentimes envision), or change at the local level that reflects the aim of many alternative communities.

Furthermore, variety in alternative organizing also exists when it comes to the domains and arenas of activities, the causes being served, and the clientele being addressed. Cooperatives, for instance, come in many different types such as worker cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, credit cooperatives, or housing cooperatives (Wright 2019, 75–76). The same form of organization or community can also vary with regard to its core values and organizational identity. Social enterprises oftentimes focus on a particular moral value (Dacin, Dacin, and Tracey 2011) – social ones like equality and solidarity, or ecological ones like environmental protection and natural habitat preservation – as do eco-villages and intentional communities. Diversity can also be found between the more encompassing models for an alternative economy. When it comes to specifying the prescriptions of what alternative organizing should look like they diverge, for instance, on the role of markets versus the state for organizing economic exchange (e.g., Hahnel and Wright 2016). In brief, there is a great diversity in alternative organizing. It cuts across the different forms at different levels, and there are many more characteristics on which forms of alternative organizing might diverge. What unites them and makes them alternative is the general unifying characteristic of being designed according to a set of moral principles.

4 Mobilizing toward alternatives to capitalism

The role of communities and organizations for social transformation

Alternative organizing is currently mainly practiced on the ground, at the level of communities and organizations. Writers on the social transformation toward an alternative economy underscore the crucial importance of these prefigurative initiatives that engage in alternative organizing and thereby prefigure the alternative in the present. Such grassroots initiatives oftentimes develop in the spaces, cracks, and niches of capitalist societies (e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006; Holloway 2010; Trainer 2012; Wright 2010). Wright (2019, 63; 2010) coined the term "real utopias" to denominate the initiatives as "pieces of emancipatory destination beyond capitalism within a society still dominated by capitalism." He sees them as central elements in processes of social transformation. The reason is that these prefigurative initiatives represent models and building blocks that reflect how an alternative economy could look like, thereby challenging capitalism and holding the potential to cumulatively generate a qualitative shift in the dynamics of the economy: "The central theoretical idea is that building alternatives on the ground in whatever spaces are possible serves a critical ideological function by showing that alternative ways of working and living are possible, and potentially erodes constraints on the spaces themselves" (Wright 2013a, 20). Scholars such as Holloway (2010) and Trainer (2012) believe that this strategy is enough to lead to "a systemic collapse (without rupture) after which alternative modes of living and organizing that now are marginal will become prevalent" (D'Alisa and Kallis 2020, 3).

However, considering that prefigurative organizations and communities mainly develop at the margins of societies, in free spaces and niches, casts doubt on their potential to shift whole societies toward an alternative economy. Since prefigurative initiatives are still mostly seen as fringe alternatives but not as viable alternatives for organizing economic activities on a broader scale (Gibson-Graham 2006), it is not at all clear how these alternatives on the ground can contribute to realizing an alternative economy at a larger scale. How do their visions, models, and practical embodiments of an alternative economic future become more widespread in society? How do these scale up to broader societal levels? Particularly in the light of capitalism's deeply institutionalized character, scaling up alternatives would be a contentious collective challenge supposing sustained collective action of a variety of actors against the prevalence of capitalist values and practices. Such a fundamental social change seems to be unthinkable without the formation of a broader social movement toward an alternative economy. The numerous prefigurative initiatives on the ground would have to collectively engage in continued social mobilization to become the "robust collective actors" (Wright 2019) needed "to form a coherent alternative to a politically, economically, and culturally institutionalized system like capitalism" (Parker et al. 2014, 363).

Elements of a social movement approach

The contentious collective challenge of scaling up alternatives to capitalism suggests looking into the insights of social movement scholarship. Research on movement outcomes (see contributions in Snow et al. 2019) is particularly useful for discussing when and how alternative organizing on the ground can become part of a broader movement toward an alternative future of the economy.

Social movement studies consider the outcome of movements related to movement activism (agency) and the context in which it takes place (structure), as well as to the dynamics in the interplay of agency and contextual structures over time. Movement activism involves mounting collective challenges through a variety of actions against cultural codes or groups like elites and authorities (Rochon 1998; Tarrow 1998). The actions traditionally involve contentious and collaborative tactics (King and Pearce 2010), and increasingly also prefigurative practices of alternative organizing. To mobilize others to join these actions, movements have to engage in framing: they talk about the issues in need of change, about who or what is to blame for them, about solutions to these issues, and about the urgency to act now (Benford and Snow 2000). Thereby, they collectively construct frames – schemata of interpretation that provide meaning to events and occurrences (Goffman 1974) – that should allow adherents to recognize common interests and purposes and to participate. Through framing, activists also create collective identities and a sense of solidarity among those who already participate, which is important for sustaining collective action over longer time periods. Sustaining effective collective action further hinges on mobilizing structures. These include formal

hierarchical organizations, the organization of collective action at the point of contact with opponents, and connective structures that link leaders and followers, center and periphery, and different parts of a movement sector (Tarrow 1998).

Whether movements achieve their objectives and attain an intended outcome also depends on the context in which activism is embedded. Contextual structures can provide opportunities for collective action, suggest some movement activities being more appropriate than others, and mediate the outcome of the applied set of tactics, frames, and mobilizing structures (McAdam and Tarrow 2019; Tarrow 1998). Research on the role of the context for movement impact has mainly concentrated on political opportunities such as the openness of the target to new actors and movements, the existence of influential allies and supporters, and cleavages or splits within the targeted group. Cultural opportunities refer to favorable cultural contexts where prevailing and emerging meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, and narratives can be applied as cultural resources to render movements' framing activities more resonant and meaningful (Benford and Snow 2000). Opportunities for collective action change over time – also due to the sustained collective action of social movements (agency-structure dynamics) – and it is particularly in these times of shift that activists become aware of the potential for change (McAdam and Tarrow 2019). Disruptive events also cause changes in opportunities. Events can facilitate movement mobilization by rendering prevailing cultural symbols, ideologies, and frames problematic (as witnessed after events such as Fukushima and Chernobyl or, more recently, the financial crisis). They can give credence to the claims of movement actors, and challenge the opposing claims of opponents and authorities (Zald 1996). Events can shift prevailing definitions of the situation, and can change the perception of injustices, and of costs and benefits of public policies and programs. They can open a "policy window" (Kingdon 1984) that provides the opportunity to gain resonance for claims challenging the prevailing generalized beliefs and understandings.

Besides the classical social movement agenda that addresses the role of agency and structures for movement impact, scholars recommend a dynamic relational analysis of social change that identifies the underlying mechanisms and processes. The initiators of this "episodes, processes, mechanisms turn" (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016) in social movement studies, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), describe various robust processes – understood as recurring combinations of mechanisms – that figure prominently in a wide variety of collective attempts to create social change. One of these processes is scale shift in political contention from local to translocal, national, or even transnational arenas. It implies "a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions to a different focal point, involving a new range of actors, different objects, and broadened claims" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 331). Scale shift starts with two, sometimes linked, mechanisms: direct/relational diffusion and brokerage (mediated diffusion), both of which lead to scale shift through mechanisms of attribution of similarity and of emulation.

The process of scale shift is particularly interesting for discussing how local alternative organizing activities at organizational and community level can open up further avenues toward an alternative economy (on diffusion and scale shift, see also Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010; Soule and Roggeband 2019; Tarrow 2010). How can the local prefigurative initiatives become part of a broader movement of social transformation and how can these mobilizations at the local level lead to "broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 331)? Related to this strand of social movement theory, we can argue that two paths are particularly important to shift the prefigurative initiatives of alternative organizing on the ground to broader levels of society: a direct or relational path of diffusion through interpersonal networks and a mediated path where third parties or brokers help formerly unrelated sites to connect. Both of these paths also benefit from the indirect channel of non-relational diffusion via news media, social media, and the internet (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010).[7]

7 The idea of scaling up alternatives is also discussed in research on social innovation/social entrepreneurship and in transition studies. In the social entrepreneurship literature, scaling up refers to "the process in which a social entrepreneur, who has validated a way to take care of a social problem locally, designs a way to spread this service to benefit other beneficiaries in other geographical locations" (André and Pache 2016, 660). It thus refers to a process of spatial diffusion and "quantitative growth" (André and Pache 2016). The focus is usually on particular social enterprises, on conditions that foster or impede their diffusion or growth, and on the effects of scaling up on the organization (e.g., mission drift) and its social entrepreneur(s) (e.g., deviation from ethical values of care). Transition studies pursue a broader research perspective by looking at long-term and fundamental changes of (industrial) sectors and its socio-technical systems. The focus is on technological changes but, following a systemic perspective, these are seen as being interdependent with changes in infrastructures, organizational structures, and policies (Markard 2017). Most prominent is the multi-level perspective by Geels and colleagues (e.g., Geels and Schot 2007) that looks into the scaling of socio-technical innovations across societal levels.

I prefer a social movement approach and its notion of scale shift. In contrast to social entrepreneurship studies, the social movement literature provides conceptual tools for analyzing broader social change processes. It allows looking into scale shift not restricted in a geographical sense (spatial diffusion) and to particular social innovations, but taking place across societal levels. Transition studies also look at social transformation and processes of scale across societal levels, and several of their conceptual categories are comparable to the ones in social movement studies. The difference is an ontological one. Most transition scholars (here the multi-level perspective) adopt an evolutionary approach to change that neglects the role of agency, collective action, and power dynamics in social transformation (for an extended critique see Garud and Gehman 2012; Schiller-Merkens 2008; however, note recent developments as summarized by Köhler et al. 2019). In contrast, social movement studies provide a social constructivist, relational approach that allows considering processes of meaning creation and the collective construction of the social underlying social transformation. It includes seeing the environment as a condition for and an outcome of continuous collective action, emphasizes the role of connections or social relations among diverse sets of actors, and provides a lens on the ongoing power struggles surrounding social transformation.

5 Scaling up alternatives to capitalism: Applying insights from social movement studies

In the following, I draw both on the classical agenda of social movement studies and on its insights on social mechanisms to discuss when and how alternative organizing as practiced in organizations and communities can shift to broader levels of society or, in other words, scale upwards.[8] "[U]pward scale shift is an important component of diffusion and differs from horizontal diffusion because it brings new actors and new configurations to conflict into an episode of contention" (Tarrow 2010, 219). It means new coordination at a higher level, involving new actors and institutions beyond the prefigurative initiatives of alternative organizing that already exist. Some of the alternative organizations and communities are already horizontally connected such as, for instance, eco-villages in the Global Ecovillage Network or common good organizations in the economy for the common good (ECG) community. These institutionalized network structures can facilitate the *direct horizontal diffusion* of alternative organizing practices within a particular prefigurative social movement, via mechanisms including the *attribution of similarity* and *emulation* (whereby activists consider themselves as similar to other activists and start imitating their actions, Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010).

Targeting the state for social transformation

However, to have some broader impact on the organization of the economy requires the mobilization of new actors, and these particularly include political actors. According to Tarrow (2010), upward scale shift depends on support by political, rule-setting institutions as they provide activists with important resources for broader mobilization and change. While some scholars – mainly in the anarchist tradition – disagree on the role of the state for social transformation, from social movement studies we know that the state is generally involved in fundamental social change. Writers on social transformation support that view. Wright (2019), for instance, asserts that a fundamental transformation of our economies toward an alternative economy cannot happen without the state: "[F]or these various kinds of civil society-based collective actors to have a sustained efficacy in changing the rules enforced by the state, they need to somehow be connected to progressive political parties capable of acting directly within the state. Ultimately, then, the strategy of eroding capitalism depends on the existence of a web of collective actors anchored in civil society and political parties committed to such a political project" (Wright 2019, 121). Young and Schwartz (2012, 234) write that "successful liberation requires building complex organizations that unite prefigurative liberatory movements into formations capable of engaging dominant institutions, particularly the state." D'Alisa and Kallis (2020, 7) argue that "a transition [toward an alter-

8 The social mechanisms involved in scale shift are in italics.

native economy] requires a cultural change of common senses through the creation of new alternative spaces and institutions and the generalization of these changes through intervention at the level of political institutions."

Social movement scholars have extensively studied the role of the state for movement outcome by looking at political opportunities (McAdam and Tarrow 2019). One central opportunity lies in the openness of political elites for the alternative claims of prefigurative movements or, more generally, for alternative forms of organizing the economy. It becomes more likely when there are contextual conditions favoring their openness. These include the salience of an issue in broader society – a cultural opportunity opening up space for political contention (Amenta and Poletta 2019; Benford and Snow 2000). The salience of an issue is related to sustained former movement activism (but also to ongoing activism and destabilizing events). Particularly the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and later the global justice movement contributed to an increasing salience of moral principles like environmental preservation and protection, fairness, or equality in public discourse. Over time, numerous social practices such as recycling, upcycling, collaborating in multi-stakeholder initiatives, or fair trade emerged, reflecting an increasing institutionalization of these principles in various spheres of societies. When activists for an alternative economic future draw on these existing cultural meanings, or build on this cultural legacy of earlier movements, and frame their concerns and demands accordingly, they can sound more "natural and familiar" to their political targets (Benford and Snow 2000). Such resonant framing makes it more likely that the political actors listen to them and perceive the visions, models, and practices of alternative organizing more as opportunities than as threats *(attribution of opportunities and threats)*.

Disruptive or destabilizing events and periods also influence the openness of political actors (McAdam and Tarrow 2019). By rendering prevailing beliefs and understandings problematic, events can provide the opportunity to gain resonance for alternative claims and ideas (Mair and Rathert 2019). The framing of the claim-makers now becomes empirically more credible, as the events make their claims more believable (Benford and Snow 2000) *(altering perceptions)*. The central destabilizing event that made many people – not only political actors – listen to alternative ways of organizing the economy was the financial crisis in 2008 and the following great recession. According to Parker et al. (2014, 365), this recession was "an especially apt time to consider alternatives." We can add global warming as an environmental crisis whose significance has become palpable through an increasing frequency of environmental catastrophes, and the current Covid-19 pandemic that is related to a severe economic crisis. Movements' claims that these crises should be seen as consequences of neoliberalist policies and the pervasiveness of capitalist principles in our societies now become more credible. Wright (2019) regards crises as crucial for alternative organizing initiatives to gain state support – he mentions in particular global warming and the increasing precariousness and marginalization of workers in the digital era. When these crises become more apparent, it will be likely that the state starts intervening to prevent social conflicts and to generate societal stability. He supposes that even political actors who pursue a rather

capitalist agenda will become supporters of socialist state interventions when these crises become perceived as significantly threatening the capitalist economy (which very much reflects what we experience today). While state interventions may strengthen capitalism by resolving potential threats to it, they also provide space for alternative economic actions that in the long run can dilute the dominance of capitalist principles.

The role of the media in scaling up alternative organizing (non-relational diffusion)

The media plays an important indirect role for the scale shift of alternative organizing. By making issues related to economic and environmental crises known to a broader audience, it increases the salience of these issues in societies and contributes to creating a favorable cultural context in which political actors can become more interested in alternative models. Since the financial crisis and the environmental crisis of climate change, the media increasingly reports about social scientists who relate these crises to the current state of the economy and raise a moral critique of capitalism (e.g., Dörre, Lessenich, and Rosa 2015; Jackson 2016; Lessenich 2019; Mason 2015; Rosa 2013; Streeck 2016, 2017; Wright 2010, 2019). This media coverage contributes to *delegitimizing the current capitalist economy*, thereby creating cultural opportunities for the diffusion of alternatives. The media also increasingly reports about activist "theorists" who have developed alternative ways to organize the economy, thereby supporting the *cultural legitimation* (Strang and Meyer 1993) of alternative visions, concepts, and ideas (examples include Christian Felber, initiator of the economy for the common good movement, and Tim Jackson, an economist popular for his publications on degrowth economy). Finally, the media also reports more often about existing alternatives on the ground, and writes about exemplary initiatives of alternative organizing that already prefigure a future beyond capitalism.

Besides creating a favorable cultural surrounding that can influence the openness of political actors for movement claims on alternative organizing, continued media reporting can also instill the *non-relational diffusion* of alternative models and ideas to actors in the economy. The coverage of alternative models can be seen as providing cultural resources or templates for alternative economic practices that are an important means for the rise of alternative, moral market niches (Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008). One can imagine that actors with an interest in alternative, more moral practices in the economy become more attentive to the local prefigurative initiatives and their practices of alternative organizing about which the media reports. Those with a general interest in starting a business might be inspired by the ideas related to social entrepreneurship *(attribution of opportunities)*, and among existing social enterprises already committed to environmental and social purposes some might realize that the concepts described are similar to their own ideas and practices *(attribution of similarity)*, identify with the alternatives proposed in these concepts, and (re)model their actions accordingly

(emulation).[9] Overall, it suggests that media reporting after destabilizing events and the coverage of alternative models can be an important driver for the diffusion of alternative ideas, values, and practices to a broader audience, including not only members of the political arena but also economic actors.

Building mobilizing structures across and beyond prefigurative movements (relational diffusion)

Media reporting thereby furthers cultural change that is seen as a fundamental prerequisite of social transformation. According to D'Alisa and Kallis (2020, 7), "little would change, unless there was a common sense cultivated in society that steady state or post-growth is the way to go. Without such a culture, even the most enlightened leaders would find quickly their policies undermined by uncooperative administrations and resistant populations. Of course to end up with such leaders, the society itself must have changed. Transformation then involves a coevolutionary change between civil and political society." Media coverage can further instigate cultural change in society by helping different prefigurative initiatives to first hear about each other, particularly when connective structures among them do not yet exist. Actors from different communities and organizations who are broadly committed to a common cause or who seem to share a set of moral values might start contacting each other and organizing meetings and workshops to come together. In the long run, this might even result in building organizing structures that allow them to more regularly connect. While we see that some prefigurative initiatives like ECG, eco-villages, or post-growth organizations already have connective structures and formal organizations that allow coordination among each of their locally dispersed communities and organizations, established mobilizing structures across those diverse prefigurative movements rarely exist. However, a scale shift of alternative organizing would require a broader social movement that integrates the plurality of prefigurative organizations and communities (Young and Schwartz 2012). Particularly, more formalized organizational forms could support sustained collective action over longer timespans (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Young and Schwartz 2012) and foster coalition-building and cross-fertilization within the movement sector, which are important drivers in fundamental social change processes (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016).

The *brokerage* role of such organizations could make it possible to create the "instances of cross-spatial collaboration" among the dispersed communities and organizations that Tarrow (2005, 122) considers crucial for an upward scale shift. Furthermore, the costs of communication and coordination among the alternative groups would be reduced, and the participating organizations and communities could more easily exchange resources, information, and even personnel (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Such brokered forms of coming together would be an important platform for the struggles over mean-

9 As happened, for instance, with social enterprises that have become certified ECG organizations.

ing that are relevant for, over time, developing a sense of interconnectivity and at least a broadly shared understanding of the deficiencies of capitalist markets. In the long run of ongoing conversations, meetings, and workshops, the members might more clearly see their points of connection and start to collectively refine alternative ways of organizing economic relations, firms, and markets. Wright (2013a, 18) describes the role of these organizations with the example of cooperatives: "[I]f individual cooperative firms join together in larger associations of cooperatives - perhaps even a cooperative-of-cooperatives, collectively providing finance, training, and other kinds of support – they begin to transcend the capitalist character of their economic environment by constituting a cooperative market economy." Uniting under the umbrella of such brokering, network-building organizations – that can also be perceived as meta-organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2008; Berkowitz and Dumez 2016) – could ultimately help the alternative organizing practices to spread among participating actors from a variety of prefigurative initiatives *(direct horizontal diffusion)*.[10] However, in the light of the plurality of ideas, beliefs, and practices of the participating communities and organizations, it has been considered as important that the brokering organizations do not negate but rather represent the diversity of alternative organizing projects. Roelvink (2016) sees such organizations as particularly important in bringing about what she calls "alternative economies." She argues that they can be considered as "concern groups" that – instead of developing a clear collective identity – represent various issues of concern that are broadly related in their critique of the current neoliberal state of the economy and in their shared values of democracy, equality, and sustainability.

Coordination by such meta-organizations (and also by meta-meta-organizations that unite meta-organizations across different alternative organizing movements) can also allow campaigning more effectively together (Tarrow 1998). According to Tarrow (1998, 124), "the most effective forms of organization are based on partly autonomous and contextually rooted local units linked by connective structures, and coordinated by formal organizations." (Meta)-meta-organizations can be stronger units for confronting opponents in the economy and the state as they facilitate a combined use of dispersed resources for strategic action (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; comparably, Berkowitz and Dumez 2016). Furthermore, state actors who are attentive to alternatives that provide solutions to economic and ecological crises more easily connect to a few organizations that collectively represent issues related to alternative organizing than to numerous prefigurative initiatives on the ground. Thus the *brokerage* by (meta)-meta-

10 There are already various meta-organizations that mobilize for alternative organizing. Examples include RIPESS – a global network of continental networks that is committed to the promotion of the social solidarity economy (http://www.ripess.org/?lang=en); GEN as the global eco-village network of regenerative communities of various types (https://ecovillage.org/about/about-gen/); or the ECG (economy for the common good) movement that unites local chapters, associations, and common good organizations (https://deutschland.ecogood.org/en/movement/). I argue in this paper that these meta-organizations are important but that connective structures between them are crucial for an upward scale shift, at best formally organized under the umbrella of meta-meta-organizations (see Ahrne and Brunsson 2008, 16–17) to allow sustained interactions.

organizations between alternative organizing communities and organizations of multiple prefigurative initiatives also facilitates interactions and, eventually, alliances with political actors, thereby broadening the political opportunities for further collective action toward an alternative future of the economy.

Having said this, sustained collective action is also facilitated by continued relations to external allies, public authorities, and even opponents. Formal units that broker relations among prefigurative organizations and communities can also support *brokerage* between more heterogeneous actors outside the movement. Shaw et al. (2018), for instance, describe the essential role of such organizations for an upward scale shift of alternative practices in the food sector, calling them "multi-scalar organizational vehicle[s]." The brokering organizations can provide a platform for organizing "hybrid forums" (Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe 2009), thereby eventually supporting the *direct diffusion* of alternative practices, values, and beliefs to diverse actors such as activists, politicians, corporate managers, journalists, community organizers, and social entrepreneurs. Ferraro, Etzion, and Gehman (2015; also Roelvink 2016) build on this idea of hybrid forums to argue that such venues are important elements to develop the kinds of participatory structures that are necessary to organize toward the elimination of serious problems of global reach, among them climate change, poverty, or inequality ("grand challenges"). The aim of these structures is not, however, to reach consensus – which is rather difficult given the heterogeneity of actors and values – but to ensure continuous engagement among its members. While reaching consensus will be unlikely, continued membership in such forums nevertheless might change how actors reciprocally perceive themselves (maybe as less opposing) *(reciprocal perception)*, educate participants about the relevance of opposing standpoints and worldviews *(education)*, and even convince a few of the "conventional" actors to start supporting initiatives of alternative organizing *(persuasion)*.[11]

To conclude, we see that the dynamics between the agency of alternative organizing initiatives and contextual conditions as sketched above can make politicians more susceptible to the claims and demands of the prefigurative movements and even to becoming allies who support alternative forms of organizing.[12] Their openness is fostered in par-

11 In the discussion, I have focused on one particular political opportunity because it is essential for gaining further support from the political arena and thus for scale shift: the openness of political actors for prefigurative movements and their claims. Another political opportunity for mobilizing toward an alternative economy includes the existence of influential or powerful allies in the political arena. However, these opportunities are not independent of each other. Influential allies can act as legitimators of movement claims; their support can make the claim-makers' issues more credible to other political actors, making them more open to listening (Benford and Snow 2000). Thus when elite allies already exist, they can mediate the outcome of movement activism in the political arena (and beyond). Ongoing movement activism can also make some political actors who are at first only open to listening to movement claims become allies in the long run.

12 State support can come in various forms, and would reflect the normative (regulative, institutional), relational (structural), and cultural outcome that movements can achieve in the political domain. Examples include changes in the program of political parties and in speeches of politi-

ticular by a favorable cultural context that is shaped over time by destabilizing events and by continuous movement activism as well as by media coverage of the events and actions. Movement actions thereby most basically consist in the numerous prefigurative initiatives that represent "real world examples" (Hahnel and Wright 2016, 112) and reflect the viability of alternative organizing. They further include framing in resonant ways, gaining ideological support from influential "theorizers" (e.g., social scientists, popular movement leaders), and connecting to like-minded other organizations and communities which is further facilitated by the creation of meta-organizations or even meta-meta-organizations that allow relationships beyond the boundaries of any single prefigurative movement. These factors can make elite support from the political arena more likely and eventually allow a scale shift of alternative organizing to higher levels of society. Such an upward scale shift could ultimately lead into what Wright (2019, 64) considers as the most promising strategy of social transformation: the erosion of capitalist principles in the economy through combining the use of "the state in ways that sustain spaces for building emancipatory alternatives with a wide range of initiatives from below to fill those spaces."

6 Major obstacles to a scale shift of alternative organizing

In this paper, I concentrate on factors that can favor an upward scale shift of alternative organizing. However, there are also obstacles to it. Whether alternative organizing practices, values, and ideas diffuse widely in society will also depend on counteracting forces. In the following, I briefly discuss two major barriers to scaling up alternative organizing: (1) the heterogeneity of actors and opposing strategies of social transformation, and (2) the rise of countermovements.

One of the central arguments of the paper is that scaling up alternatives to capitalism would be a contentious collective challenge that requires sustained collective action of a plurality of actors. It would be a process of social change toward strengthening socialist against capitalist principles in the economy and thus rife with contestation, critique, and struggles around morality (Balsiger and Schiller-Merkens 2019). The formation and diffusion of alternatives to capitalism is fundamentally a political process, "politically charged from beneath (i.e., by those supporting alternatives) and politically contested from above (i.e., by powerful incumbents)" (King and Pearce 2010, 258; Schneiberg 2013). Thus moral struggles around alternative organizing will most likely arise among those who already practice alternative forms of organizing and between challengers and incumbents. I will come to each of them in turn.

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cal actors, subsidies and financial support for alternative organizations and communities, provision of platforms for cooperation, and more fundamental changes in public policies, legislation, or governmental agencies.

Heterogeneous actors and opposing strategies of social transformation

Given the plurality of forms and the heterogeneity of alternative organizing initiatives, it would be a difficult task to unite them under a common umbrella. There is a great variety of ideas, beliefs, collective identities, and practices between the communities and organizations of alternative organizing which can cause disagreement, contestation, and critique between them. Contestation can also arise in relation to the strategy of social transformation that reflects the underlying ideas about how social change toward a future beyond capitalism should be realized (see again Wright (2019) on varieties of anticapitalism). Some initiatives see an active role of the state and seek to influence state policies while others consider the state as being fully corrupted by capitalism and generally mistrust its institutions. Particularly the latter oftentimes follow a strategy of escaping capitalism and try to insulate themselves from it. They will be likely to show reluctance to any effort of targeting the state for support. Furthermore, among them one often finds communities with an anarchist identity who are likely to reject an attempt at formally mobilizing through meta-organizations, seeing it as a way toward authoritarianism that threatens their liberative ideals (Young and Schwartz 2012). However, as Reinecke (2018, 4) puts it, "if activists focus on enacting these ideals only among themselves, they risk building isolated, inward-looking communities that escape rather than change wider society." Such an extreme localism or parochialism would hinder the diffusion and ultimately scale shift of alternative organizing (Tarrow 2010). That is why I argue in this paper that a scale shift of alternative organizing would be hard to achieve without institutionalizing some kind of connective structures among the diverse prefigurative organizations and communities.

In the light of this challenge, how brokering or meta-organizations engage in the task of building the networks across different prefigurative movements will be essential. As mentioned before, they should act as platforms that allow alternative organizing initiatives to regularly meet and discuss. In particular, being organized around the looser concept of "concern groups" (Roelvink 2016) can be a way to convince diverse organizations and communities to participate and to engage in deliberative "high-quality discourse […] to find solutions to common problems" (della Porta 2015, 217). And indeed, although actors may be highly diverse on a number of aspects, all of them are more or less directed at overcoming common problems that they see as related to the current economic system. Thus it seems that there is much less, if any, controversy when it comes to the problems addressed and the central aim behind all of the initiatives of alternative organizing: to create "real utopian" alternatives and to demonstrate their viability. Furthermore, the moral values of alternative organizing – equality/fairness, democracy/freedom, and community/solidarity (Wright 2019) – are central to all of them, despite being filled with meaning and locally translated in different ways. If the different prefigurative initiatives manage to perceive their commonalities with regard to the causes and underlying aims and generally agree on the broad set of values, they may be more inclined to connect to each other and to join even more formalized mobilizing structures such as (meta-)meta-organizations and concern groups. To make them envi-

sion their commonalities, the social skills of those who try to build the networks, organize concern groups, and represent meta-organizations in the public will be of great importance (Fligstein and McAdam 2012).

Countermovements

Contestation is also likely to arise from actors outside of the organizations and communities of alternative organizing. The prefigurative initiatives represent embodied forms of capitalist critique; they are based on moral principles whose broader realization in society would affect the current distribution of income, wealth, and status. In this respect, they could be perceived as posing an existential threat to incumbent actors in the economy. The more successful the mobilization for alternative organizing becomes and the more an upward scale shift is already taking place, the greater is the likelihood that incumbents react by forming a countermovement (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). And indeed, the mobilization for alternative organizing already shows signs of success.

First, there is the increased media attention for and reporting about critical voices and alternative forms of organizing which raises the public profile and salience of the underlying issues. Second, and more importantly, alternative organizing is already affecting the economy by what Tarrow (2010) considers as the most successful outcome of an upward scale shift: the creation of new identities. Various prefigurative initiatives contribute to the collective creation of new market categories that ultimately allow the formation of moral market niches. For instance, the emergence of categories such as community supported agriculture (CSA) or economy for the common good (ECG) reflects the development of collective identities that allow producers to become recognized as alternatives to conventional firms and to more easily connect to like-minded others (Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008). Furthermore, several communities and organizations use these categories to label their products in economic exchanges with consumers, thereby creating a social boundary to conventional markets and a basis for the formation of alternative, moral markets. These emerging moral market categories signal a shift in scale by reflecting that alternative organizing ideals have left locally bounded spaces of single alternative organizing acts by dispersed individuals and groups and have become institutionalized in recognizable collective identities (Berger and Luckmann 1966). As these categories can also allow for further scale shift,[13] they constitute a credible threat to established interests in conventional markets.

As a reaction to these signs of success, it is likely that incumbents in the current capitalist economy start countermobilizing. Given their substantial mobilization potential – if we only think of their institutionalized connections among each other and to political

13 Actors who are interested in alternative forms of organizing (in) the economy more easily recognize categories than single, dispersed acts.

actors and regulative agencies, coupled with the amount of financial and cultural resources – such a countermovement would change the contextual conditions for alternative organizing, reducing most likely the political opportunities for an upward scale shift. In general, such movement–countermovement dynamics (the alternating actions of and interactions between movement and countermovement, tactics and mobilizable resources by both movement and countermovement) shape the trajectory of a mobilization process and ultimately the success of a movement. Whether we can expect an upward scale shift of alternative organizing or not is thus dependent on these dynamics but also on the context in which the dynamics unfold, to which we come next.

Signs of hope

Despite these two major obstacles that will most likely arise in processes of scaling up alternative organizing, there are also signs of hope that an upward scale shift can happen, and that a social transformation toward a democratic, egalitarian and sustainable economy will not remain an utopian dream but the "real utopia" that Wright (2013a) had envisioned. As just mentioned, the formation of new collective identities associated with alternative organizing will certainly allow its further diffusion, thereby increasingly institutionalizing the underlying moral values within the economy. Furthermore, in several capitalist countries, we witness an increasing politicization of the youth, most visibly in the mass protest of the Fridays for Future movement. While this movement does not directly mobilize against capitalism, it addresses issues that are seen as severe outcomes of the current economic system (and it has recently started to also target corporations). Its more confrontational tactics of capitalist critique – as well as the protest actions of other movements – complement the constructive tactics of alternative organizing initiatives as they raise the public interest in and awareness for alternatives, or at least underscore the urgency to act. While not offering alternatives themselves, protest movements produce important cultural work on which prefigurative initiatives can build in their own activism for alternative organizing.

Furthermore, the current pandemic crisis can provide a chance for a more fundamental transformation of our economy – although in the face of people's suffering, it appears rather inappropriate to speak of a crisis as a sign of hope. As mentioned above, crises are destabilizing events that can alter the political opportunities for social change (McAdam and Tarrow 2019; Wright 2019). We currently see many initiatives that perceive the crisis as such – as a chance for change – and mobilize accordingly through online meetings and debates on, for instance, transformative responses to the crisis, the need for a social transformation of the economy, or responsible capitalism. Many of them point to the role of neoliberal austerity policies in the severeness of the crisis, and also question the rudimentary public engagement when it comes to issues around education, unemployment, and care work. Social scientists also raise their voice and call for a fundamental rethinking of the state's functions and duties, asking for rediscovering its

role for creating value for society.[14] And indeed, the public spending and injections into the economy since the Covid-19 pandemic have risen to a scale that has been formerly unthinkable. Even strong supporters of capitalism nowadays favor state interventions.

We currently also witness an increase of collective action based on principles of solidarity and mutuality which demonstrates the crucial role of civil society mobilization for coping with deep crises (della Porta 2020). It reflects what already happened in the aftermath of the financial crisis, namely an increase of organizing relationships in alternative ways through direct social action (Bosi and Zamponi 2015; della Porta 2015). While the current collective action mostly develops in the private sphere of neighborhood relations, there are also campaigns in the economic realm that focus on supporting local commerce that suffers from the lockdown. In the long run, these immediate reactions to the crisis can be a basis for reforming economic relations around ideas of local production and consumption, and therefore an opportunity for prefigurative organizations and communities to raise awareness for such ideas and practices. However, it remains to be seen whether these troubled times will provide the window of opportunity for a greater social transformation. At least, the people now perceive the future as more uncertain than before, and this has already made state actors to also listen to the alternative claims and ideas of actors who challenge the capitalist system or, more moderately, call for far-reaching socialist interventions into the economy. Whether this political opportunity will lead into a greater social change toward a more just economy will depend on the potential of the alternative organizing initiatives to mobilize a broader movement and to effectively counter any countermobilization by opposing actors in the economy.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to discuss how and when alternative organizing at the level of communities and organizations can scale upwards and become part of a broader movement toward an alternative economy beyond capitalism. Starting from the premise that such a scale shift (1) would be based on the current and past activism of a variety of social movements that more or less directly mobilize against capitalism, and (2) could initiate what is a center of social movement studies, namely a contentious social change process on a broader scale, I have proposed a social movement approach to address this question. Building on social movement studies allows to more systematically discuss how (by which activities and through which social mechanisms) and when (un-

14 See Mazzucato's and other economists' short essays in New Statesman (https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/economy/2020/05/top-economists-warn-uk-not-repeat-austerity-after-covid-19-crisis), or Reckwitz's call for a "liberal regulatory paradigm" or an "embedded liberalism" (https://taz.de/Ein-neuer-Paradigmenwechsel/!170712/).

der what contextual conditions) prefigurative communities and organizations are more likely to shift their ideas, models, and practices to broader levels of society.

This paper relates to the growing debate across the social sciences about the fundamental environmental, social, political, and economic crises of our times. In organization studies, this has led to an increasing demand for more relevant and critical scholarship that seriously addresses the fundamental challenges in our world. This paper contributes to the question of how to tackle grand challenges effectively (Ferraro, Etzion, and Gehman 2015). In line with this research, it underscores the importance of connective (participatory) structures, of concern groups in which multivocal inscriptions can be developed, and of distributed experimentation in multiple alternative organizations and communities on the ground. It goes beyond that research by looking into the kinds of contextual conditions that allow alternatives to scaling up and into the mechanisms of an upward scale shift. The paper further speaks to scholarship that combines a critique of capitalism with a discussion of alternative ways of organizing (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2018; Barin Cruz, Aquino Alves, and Delbridge 2017; Mair and Rathert, 2019; Parker et al., 2014; Rätzer, Hartz, and Winkler 2018; Zanoni 2020; Zanoni et al. 2017). The social movement framework underscores the importance of relationships for organizing alternatives to capitalism and allows to look into the mechanisms through which these can evolve across levels of society. It thereby contributes to Barin Cruz, Aquino Alves, and Delbridge's (2017) call for more research on the relations and connections of alternative organizations that allow them to prosper and develop.

The paper is also of interest to scholars who work at the intersection of organization studies, social movement studies, and economic sociology (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; King and Pearce 2010; Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2017; Soule 2012). Prefigurative politics and forms of alternative organizing are increasingly being studied by both organization and social movement scholars. This paper provides insights into the embedded dynamics of alternative organizing (practices, beliefs, values) across levels of society. It also directly contributes to social movement studies, particularly to the call to pay greater attention to the enabling and constraining effects of capitalism and to bring capitalism back into social movement studies (della Porta 2015; Hetland and Goodwin 2013). The paper starts from the observation that the critique of capitalism and its neoliberal turn play a central role in the rise of several of the more recent social movements (della Porta 2015). The Occupy movement, movements in Southern Europe against austerity politics, or the latest outburst of the student movement in Chile, are united in their critique of the detrimental effects of neoliberal capitalism that expanded markets to ever more social spheres. According to Burawoy (2017, 2019), these movements are all marked by their economic origins; they respond to different forms and dimensions of marketization of societies and are commonly inspired by seeing democracy as being threatened by capitalism. Criticizing the intricate, interwoven linkages between capitalism and politics, these movements directly target the state to work against the influence of capitalism on state institutions. However, while each of them more or less powerfully revolt against "market fundamentalism" (Burawoy 2017, 2019), there is a

lack of connections and common mobilizing efforts and structures across these protest movements as well as to and across the multiple prefigurative movements that already practice alternative forms of organizing economic relations. One of the paper's main arguments is that to give them the strength to "add up to a counter-movement" (Burawoy 2019, 31) and to prepare the ground for a social transformation, the alternative organizing practices, beliefs, and values of prefigurative movements have to scale up to broader levels of society. Scale shift requires to move contention beyond local boundaries, to unite under a common project (Burawoy 2019), and to mobilize new actors in the political arena and beyond. It is only possible when the nowadays dispersed and unconnected alternative organizing communities and organizations start joining forces. This paper set out to explore how and when the prefigurative movements are likely to achieve such a scale shift.

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