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The Economy for the Common Good: a European countermovement against the destructive impacts of *laissez-faire* capitalism?

Klara Stumpf (klara.stumpf@uni-flensburg.de)
Bernd Sommer (bernd.sommer@uni-flensburg.de)
Europa-Universität Flensburg, Germany

The paper discusses the Economy for the Common Good (ECG) as a contemporary European grassroots movement against status quo capitalism. Firstly, we show that the ECG aims at fundamentally altering the relationship between economy, society and state, and – within a Polanyian framework – can be understood as a progressive countermovement against the marketization of society. Subsequently, we draw on qualitative interviews with representatives from companies engaged in the ECG. In this part, the paper focuses on the companies' strategies trying to establish alternative modes of production in order to protect the 'fictitious commodities' of labour, money, and nature from the destructive impacts of commodification.

Keywords: Polanyian countermovement, (Protection of) Fictitious commodities, Economy for the Common Good, Alternative modes of production

1. Introduction

In *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) describes how in the 19th and 20th centuries a previously socially embedded economy emancipated itself from cultural, political and moral constraints. Driven by the rise of industrial capitalism and the dominance of a *laissez-faire* economic doctrine, ever more parts of society became commodified. The consequences were disastrous, especially for 'fictitious commodities' such as labour and land (ibid., 137). After the horrors of World War II and fascism in Europe, the development of the Fordist welfare regime led to a re-embedment of the market. The most negative effects of the 'free play of market forces' became mitigated. However, from a historical perspective, this era of "democratic capitalism" (Streeck, 2014) was comparatively short. Today, as a *laissez-faire* market economy has gained momentum again, one can witness the destruction of vital ecosystems on a global scale (Rockström et al., 2009) as well as the (re)emergence of living and working conditions that systematically fall below established social and human right standards along with the exploitation and devaluation of non-market forms of labour (Raworth, 2012; Barth et al., 2018). In reaction to these developments,

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diverse movements aim to 'protect' societies and the natural environment against the destructive impacts of a *laissez-faire* market economy. A current grassroots movement challenging the free market orthodoxy is the Economy for the Common Good movement (ECG). This movement aims at aligning economic activity more strongly with democratic values and social and ecological demands. The movement simultaneously works at two levels: First, the level of predominantly small and medium-sized companies, who commit to orientating their economic activities towards the 'common good', and who inter alia publish a so-called Common Good Balance Sheet. Second, the political level, where the movement aims at changes in the framework conditions and incentive structures for economic activities.

This contribution discusses the ECG as a contemporary European countermovement against *status quo* capitalism, which aims at altering the relationship between economy, society and state. In the second section of this paper, the Economy for the Common Good movement (ECG) will be introduced; its main ideas will be summarised and empirical manifestations of the ECG will briefly be presented. In the third section, Polanyi's concept of countermovement will be elaborated. This reconstruction does not intend to be a mere reflection on *The Great Transformation* (2001 [1944]) and further works by Polanyi but also draws on additional literature of more recent analysts who found Polanyi's ideas useful to understand current developments of global capitalism. In the fourth section, we will discuss how the ideas of the ECG relate to these different interpretations. Finally, in the fifth section, the paper illustrates empirically how enterprises engaged in the ECG movement establish forms of social and ecological production that attempt to emancipate themselves from dominant market forces in order to protect the 'fictitious commodities' of labour, money and nature.

2. The Economy for the Common Good as a European movement aiming at a new economic system

Starting from a small group of Austrian activists and entrepreneurs in 2010 (Felber, 2012, 2015), the ECG movement has grown into an international network. The movement consists of small and medium-sized companies as well as local chapters of civil groups. The vast majority of the participants is from Austria and Germany, but chapters can also be found in further European countries. It is also in Europe, where the ECG achieved to organize some support on the level of institutionalised politics (see below). Only a few chapters exist in both Americas, Africa, and Asia.[1]

The ECG's main goal is to re-orientate economic activity towards the 'common good' and away from profit-orientation (Felber, 2012). Currently, about 100 companies as well as some Non-Governmental Organizations (such as *Greenpeace Germany*) (Heidbrink et al., 2018, 59f.) are compiling a so-called Common Good Balance Sheet to measure their contribution to the 'common good'. The Common Good Balance Sheet is generated on the basis of the so-called Common Good Matrix (see Table 1), which describes "20 common good themes" that consist of the intersections between the values of the ECG ("human dignity", "solidarity and social justice", "environmental sustainability", "transparency and co-determination") and the stakeholder groups ("suppliers", "owners, equity- and financial service providers", "employees", "customers and business partners", and the "social environment") (ECG 2018b). Every contribution to the 'common good', which extends beyond legal obligations is evaluated positively using a scoring system (the maximum score is 1,000 points; ibid.). "Common good themes" include, for example, "human dignity in the

[1] In 2018, local chapters could be found in Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Germany, Ghana, Great Britain, Greece, Honduras, Italy, Kenya, Luxemburg, Macedonia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Philippines, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and Uruguay (ECG, 2018a).

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supply chain", "self-determined working arrangements", "reduction of environmental impacts" or "ownership and co-determination" (ibid.). Additionally, negative criteria such as the violation of international labour standards, hostile takeovers, dumping prices or the prohibition of work councils result in negative scores. Before publication, the Common Good Balance Sheet is peer-reviewed or audited by an external consultant. While voluntary at present, in the long term, the movement aims to achieve a legal obligation for companies to report on their 'common good' performance as a complement to the financial balance sheet.

VALUE / STAKEHOLDER	HUMAN DIGNITY	SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	TRANSPARENCY AND CO-DETERMINATION
A: SUPPLIERS	**A1** Human dignity in the supply chain	**A2** Solidarity and social justice in the supply chain	**A3** Environmental sustainability in the supply chain	**A4** Transparency and co-determination in the supply chain
B: OWNERS, EQUITY- AND FINANCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS	**B1** Ethical position in relation to financial resources	**B2** Social position in relation to financial resources	**B3** Use of funds in relation to the environment	**B4** Ownership and co-determination
C: EMPLOYEES	**C1** Human dignity in the workplace and working environment	**C2** Self-determined working arrangements	**C3** Environmentally friendly behaviour of staff	**C4** Co-determination and transparency within the organisation
D: CUSTOMERS AND BUSINESS PARTNERS	**D1** Ethical customer relations	**D2** Cooperation and solidarity with other companies	**D3** Impact on the environment of the use and disposal of products and services	**D4** Customer participation and product transparency
E: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	**E1** Purpose of products and services and their effects on society	**E2** Contribution to the community	**E3** Reduction of environmental impact	**E4** Social co-determination and transparency

Table 1: The Common Good Matrix (Version 5.0), ECG 2018b.

The political goals of the ECG include advantages for companies contributing disproportionately to the 'common good': The higher the score of the Common Good Balance, the more legal advantages a company shall receive. These include tax cuts, better borrowing terms from public banks, and privileged access to public contracts (Felber, 2012, 47). The goal is to reverse the incentive structure within the economic system by offsetting higher costs resulting from ethical, social and ecologically sustainable activities (ibid., 35). Apart from the compulsory compilation of the Common Good Balance Sheet for companies and the institutionalisation of the accompanying legal advantages for high-scoring companies, the ECG seeks to bring about further changes to current legislation. The ECG's political agenda includes the introduction of a 'solidarity income' for the jobless and people unable to work (Felber, 2012, 67), radical limitation of inheritance rights (ibid.: 83ff.) and of profit-making for banks and insurances (ibid., 69ff.), as well as the extension of current representative forms of democracy by elements of direct democracy such as referendums (ibid., 125).

ECG activists have been successful in gaining attention in the political arena, including at the European level: In September 2015, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)[2] adopted an official opinion on "The Economy for the Common Good: a sustainable economic model geared towards social cohesion" (EESC, 2015). It recommends "that the Economy for the Common Good (ECG) model is conceived to be included both in the European and the domestic legal framework in order to advance towards the Single European Market through a more ethical economy based on European values and achievements of social responsibility policies, moreover establishing synergies that reinforce them" (ibid.,

[2] The EESC is a consultative body of the European Union (EU) composed of representatives of employers' and employees' organisations and other interest groups (such as farmers' or consumers' organisations).

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2). Additionally, the government of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg (Germany) has declared its support of 'common good economies' in its coalition treaty and is planning a model project compiling a Common Good Balance Sheet in a state-owned company, with the corresponding aim to support companies who wish to re-orientate their entrepreneurial practices with the help of the Common Good Balance (Grüne & CDU, 2016). At the communal level, for instance, the municipalities Nenzig and Mäder (Austria) as well as Miranda de Azán, Carcaboso, and Orendain (Spain) have decided to become "common good municipalities" (ECG, 2018c). However, up to now, the Common Good Balance Sheet for companies remains the ECG's most popular and effective instrument.

3. Polanyi's work and its reception: the relationship between economy, society and state

In *The Great Transformation,* Karl Polanyi describes the idea of a self-regulating market as a 'stark utopia': "Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944], 3). Therefore, in Polanyi's view, phases of economic liberalism and free trade are necessarily accompanied by countermovements that seek to check the impact of market forces, functioning as a "self-protection of society" (ibid., 136). This has become known as Polanyi's concept of the 'double movement': "What we think of as market societies or 'capitalism' is the product of *both* of these movements; it is an uneasy and fluid hybrid that reflects the shifting balance of power between these contending forces" (Block, 2008, 2).

Polanyi shows in his analysis that labour, land (nature), and money, though essential elements for industrial production, "are obviously not commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944], 75). By turning labour, nature and money into objects for sale on self-regulating markets as if they were commodities like any other, they are, according to Polanyi, doomed to erode, and consequently, the very foundations of production and exchange are undermined (ibid., 137). "Accordingly, the countermove consisted in checking the action of the market in respect to the factors of production, labour, and land. This was the main function of interventionism" (ibid., 137). As examples for protective interventions, Polanyi mentions "factory legislation and social laws" with regard to labour, "land laws and agrarian tariffs" with regard to natural resources, and "central banking and the management of the monetary system" with regard to money (ibid., 138).

According to Fred Block, Polanyi suggested "that there are different possibilities available at any historical moment, since markets can be embedded in many different ways" (Block, 2001, xxix). In a 1922 article, Polanyi argues that no larger economy can be completely free from market exchanges (Polanyi, 1922, 379). In this article, Polanyi develops ideas for a 'socialist accounting', a numerical oversight over a socialist economy. Referring to accounting on the level of an entire economy, he argues that the design of the accounting system should match the goal of the economic system. A democratic socialist society, for Polanyi, aims at 'technical productivity' and 'social justice' (in German: 'das soziale Recht'[3]). The latter includes the just distribution of labour and goods, and the social direction (or common good contribution, in German: 'Gemeinnützigkeit')[4] of production – i.e. production evaluated from the perspective of society, not just from the perspective of individual consumers or groups (Polanyi, 1922, 415). Polanyi criticizes the capitalist economy for not achieving these goals to a sufficient extent (Polanyi, 1922, 388f.). In the "Common Man's

[3] While 'das soziale Recht' literally translates to 'the social right', Polanyi himself suggested to translate it to 'social justice'. See the remarks by the translators of Polanyi's text from German to English (Bockman et al., 2016, 402, footnote 31).

[4] 'Gemeinnützigkeit' may be translated to 'social utility', 'public welfare', 'common good', etc. See the remarks by the translators of the text from German to English (Bockman et al., 2016, 404, footnote 36).

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Masterplan", a book draft from 1943, Polanyi names some steps for a democratic and social transformation after World War II. These include regulated markets – i.e. markets "with no supplementary markets for labor, land and money" (Polanyi, 1943, 2; see also Polanyi, 2015 [1943], 127) – the limitation of profits and support for "public spirited forms of enterprise" (ibid.).

Generally, political constraints for markets and social embedding can refer to at least two dimensions: (1) Excluding areas of life which shall be kept free from market mechanisms, and (2) the potential to shape markets which are socially desired (Herzog, 2014, 26). In what Gareth Dale calls the 'soft Polanyi' interpretation, the goal is a regulated form of capitalism, in which markets remain dominant coordination mechanisms, "albeit complemented by redistributive and socially protective institutions" (Dale, 2016, 4), such as in Germany's 'social market democracy' (ibid., 5). In the 'hard Polanyi' interpretation, the goal is the transformation beyond the market society towards "a mixed economy governed by redistributive mechanisms" (ibid., 5), including "the complete subjugation of economic life to democratic control and the full decommodification of land, labour and money" (ibid., 6). According to Michael Brie, Polanyi demands to take these 'fictitious commodities' out of the market (Brie, 2015, 80).

When Polanyi wrote *The Great Transformation* (at the end of World War II), he believed that "the world had come to recognize the folly of organizing human society around self-regulating markets. He imagined a new era in which humanity collectively chose to subordinate markets to political control" (Block, 2008, 10). Contrary to Polanyi's anticipation, market fundamentalism has gained new momentum starting in the late 1970s. After the decay of the Soviet empire, a capitalist economy emerged virtually on a global scale and the implementation of neoliberal policies led to the destabilisation of economies as well as nature and entire societies. Nancy Fraser highlighted the structural similarities between today's crisis and that of the 1930s, described by Polanyi:

> *"Now, as then, a relentless push to extend and de-regulate markets is everywhere wreaking havoc—destroying the livelihoods of billions of people; fraying families, weakening communities and rupturing solidarities; trashing habitats and despoiling nature across the globe. Now, as then, attempts to commodify nature, labour and money are destabilizing society and economy—witness the destructive effects of unregulated trading in biotechnology, carbon offsets and, of course, in financial derivatives; the impacts on child care, schooling, and care of the elderly. Now, as then, the result is a crisis in multiple dimensions—not only economic and financial, but also ecological and social" (Fraser, 2013, 119).*

However, Fraser also points out an important difference between the crisis described by Polanyi and that of today: Historically, despite all differences, political classes in various countries converged "on at least this one point: left to themselves, 'self-regulating' markets in labour, nature and money would destroy society. Political regulation was needed to save it" (ibid.: 120). Indeed, Polanyi emphasized that protective measures could be put into effect "under the most varied slogans, with very different motivations [by] a multitude of parties and social strata" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944], 154). Today, however, no such convergence exists anymore among the political elites (Fraser, 2013, 120). Besides resistance movements from the political left, the impacts of global market forces have also evoked "various forms of religious and ethnic fundamentalism that are often reactionary in their political preferences" (Block, 2008, 5). Nancy Fraser notes "that social protection is often ambivalent, affording relief from the disintegrative effects of markets *upon* communities, while simultaneously entrenching domination *within* and *among* them" (Fraser, 2013, 129). Fraser therefore suggests to speak of a triple movement rather than a double

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movement, to include struggles for the emancipation of marginalized groups.[5] In her analysis, the market can sometimes have an emancipatory function, "to the extent that the protections it disintegrates are oppressive" (Fraser, 2013, 129). As Michael Brie argues, however, Polanyi saw neither the market nor social protection as unambiguously emancipative or progressive (Brie, 2015, 51). Integrating Polanyi's and Fraser's positions, Brie suggests that there are in fact four possible directions of movement (ibid., 48ff.): movements towards marketization versus social protection on one axis, and movements towards emancipation versus authoritarian domination on another axis (Figure 1). Brie further argues that, more precisely, on should speak of a "room of alternatives" (ibid., 53ff.),[6] within which actual social movements take different places.[7]

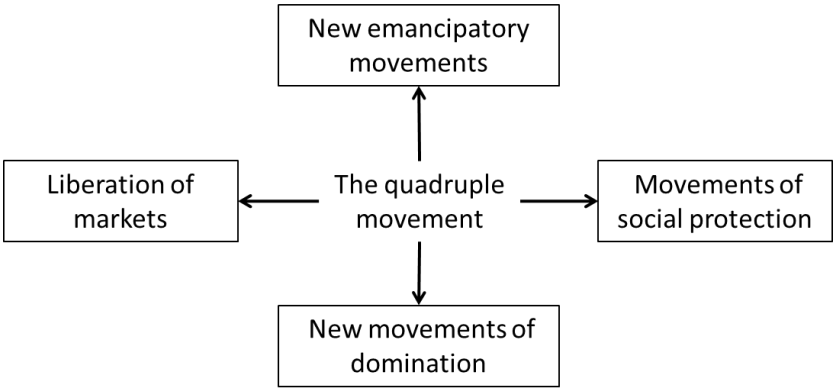

Figure 2: The quadruple movement, after Brie (2015).

4. Interpreting the Economy for the Common Good in a Polanyian framework

Where does the ECG fit into this characterisation of Polanyi's analysis and its different interpretations? The mode of production – including working conditions as well as the protection of the natural environment – lie at the heart of the ECG's concerns. For instance, the Common Good Balance Sheet rewards measures improving workplace health and safety, the implementation of fair employment and payment policies, the reduction of overtime, the elimination of unpaid overtime, the reduction of total work hours, compliance with minimum and maximum wages etc. Alike, the Common Good Balance Sheet entails numerous indicators and sub-indicators that aim at reducing environmental impacts of production and consumption on an absolute level, addressing environmental protection measures that exceed legal obligations. One can therefore say that the Common Good Balance Sheet aims at shielding the 'fictitious commodities' of labour and land (nature) from an unregulated exposure to market mechanisms.

At the political level the ECG calls for the reduction of income inequalities, a guaranteed basic income and for limitations to financial speculation. Among the principles of the ECG movement is that profits may be re-invested in the company or used to ensure the income

[5] Kemp et al. (2016) also argue for the conceptualisation of a third movement, directed at "the humanization of the economy".

[6] Taking up Fraser's observation that markets can sometimes increase individual liberties (Brie, 2015, 50), Brie places the assertion of individual (negative) liberties on one side, and the access to basic goods on the other side of the horizontal axis of the 'room of alternatives'. On the vertical axis, he places struggles for solidary emancipation versus authoritarian tendencies. While the vertical axis describes an either/or decision, the horizontal axis refers to a continuum of two desirable but sometimes conflicting goals.

[7] 'Trumpism' can probably be seen as a current example of a more reactionary or authoritarian version of a protective countermovement. By campaigning against immigration and the 'Washington establishment' as well as free trade agreements, Donald Trump has managed to become President of United States – largely supported by white males without a college degree (New York Times, 2016), and authoritarian-minded voters (Weiler & MacWilliams, 2016).

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of owners and employees over the long term, but should not serve the interests of externals. The political demands of the ECG thus at least hint in the direction of a decommodification of the 'fictitious commodities' labour and money. Moreover, demands such as the limitation of inheritance rights and profitmaking, the extension of democratic control and an emphasis on fostering cooperation and solidarity over competition also position the ECG's economic model beyond a merely 'regulated capitalism'. In the words of Eric Maskin, the ECG approach aims at a "thorough overhaul of our capitalist system" (Maskin, 2015, xi). However, the ECG does not call for the abolishment of the market economy altogether; instead it strives towards an economic model, where "sustainable companies have an advantage on the market" (ECG, 2018e). Market activities and profitmaking shall no longer be ends in themselves, but rather means to promote the 'common good' (Felber, 2012). Polanyi also argues that no larger economy can be completely free from market exchanges (Polanyi, 1922, 379). Though the ECG's focus lies on the accounting on the level of individual companies (via the Common Good Balance Sheet), the movement, like Polanyi in his article on 'socialist accounting' (Polanyi, 1922), also demands measuring the success of an economy with regard to its actual goals, by means of a so-called Common Good Product (Felber, 2015, 20). Having the ECG's general political demands in mind (such as the introduction of a general basic income, the limitation of heritage rights or democratic control of the economy) as well as considering aspects of the Common Good Balance Sheet concerning ownership, income distribution or co-determination, the ECG-approach could be described as a countermovement that rather fits to what Gareth Dale called the 'hard Polanyi' interpretation (see above).

Just because the movement refers to the 'common good' as the ultimate purpose of economic activity, the ECG *cannot* automatically be labelled as progressive or emancipatory. The notion of the 'common good' is – and always has been – a highly arbitrary concept (Offe, 2001, 459). On the one hand, the 'common good' is closely linked to republican ideas, including the definition of virtues and obligations (Offe, 2001, 460f.). Yet, referring to the 'common good' inherently entails the danger of paternalism (who defines what exactly the 'common good' is?). However, a liberal perspective on the 'common good' is also possible. In this perspective, the market is seen as an order under which individuals, by following their self-interests, contribute to the 'common welfare'. Karsten Fischer and Herfried Münkler call this idea – to serve the 'common good' by following private interests – "the semantic coup of liberalism" (Fischer & Münkler, 1999, 247). Due to the ECG's participatory approach to decide on the goals of the movement as well as the development of the Common Good Balance Sheet, the danger of paternalism appears to be mitigated. Given the openness of the concept the social reference unit for the concept becomes crucial: Who exactly are the people who are addressed by the 'common good'? Who is potentially excluded? In its Common Good Balance Sheet, as mentioned before, the ECG refers to a wide range of stakeholders as addressees for the consideration of the movement's 'core values': "suppliers", "owners, equity- and financial service providers", "employees", "customers and business partners", but also the "social environment" including civil society, future generations, and nature. This inclusive approach corresponds to the ECG's vision according to which the Economy of the Common good is supposed to enable "the common good society" that "offers citizens the right framework to: interact with each other with tolerance and mutual respect for diversity and diverse lifestyles" and "actively engage in politics, making democratic decisions and thus helping shape their own future" (ECG, 2018e). So in terms of the "quadruple movement", respectively the "room of alternatives" defined by Brie (2015), the ECG moves in an emancipatory rather than authoritarian direction.

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5. How do enterprises engaged in the ECG position themselves with regard to the relationship between market, society and state?

Generating a Common Good Balance Sheet does not necessarily mean that compliant companies already orientate their business practices towards the 'common good'. Therefore, in the following chapter we draw on empirical findings generated from research on companies engaged in the ECG movement and illustrate how these actors do business in line with the ECG's ideas.[8] In compliance with these ideas, the companies in our sample do not see mere profit maximisation as their main objective. In order to guarantee decent working conditions and prevent environmental degradation, all investigated companies apply increased social and/or environmental standards in their production and management practices. However, more interesting for our discussion of the ECG as a protective countermovement might be examples of companies that even more fundamentally try to emancipate their economic activities from dominant market mechanisms in order to protect the 'fictitious commodities' of land (nature), labour and money. For instance, in order to promote traditional seeds (and avoid industrial seeds and biodiversity loss), an organic bakery from Berlin sources them directly from local farmers. In round tables, prices for their harvest are agreed on, which the bakery does not contest. This procedure guarantees that grain can be grown according to the highest ecological and social standards and that the farmers are not caught in a quote-driven cutthroat competition from which farmers and biodiversity suffer alike (Tsiafouli et al., 2015). The interviewed representative from the bakery explains:

> *"We are completely decoupled from the market. That's what we want. Already many years ago, we left this system where prices for agricultural commodities are based on stock exchange. This makes no sense – neither for us nor for the farmers. We agree on a price that is valid infinitely. And only during the next negotiation round we discuss if a higher or lower price is needed."*[9]

In other words, the bakery does not only promote higher regulatory standards for commodity markets but aims at excluding nature from the sphere of free markets altogether. Free market exchange is replaced by deliberation between the group of producers and the bakery – considering aspects of ecological sustainability and social aspects alike.[10]

Since the bakery does not seek to maximise their profits, they can sell their pastries at comparatively low prices. They pursue the goal to produce bakery products of a high quality that do not harm the environment and – at the same time – are affordable to the whole population. However, because they do not want to threaten the existence of other (organic) bakeries they avoid dumping, and financial resources are invested alternatively:

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[8] The paper draws on qualitative interviews with representatives from eleven enterprises engaged in the ECG movement. The sample covers companies from all major economic sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary): food makers, production companies but also a retirement home and a national newspaper.

[9] Own translation of the following sequence from our interviews: „Also wir sind komplett abgekoppelt dann vom Markt. Das wollen wir auch so. Also mit den ganzen aktienbasierten, rohstoffbörsenbasierten Preisen, da sind wir vor vielen Jahren schon ausgestiegen, weil es überhaupt keinen Sinn machte, also weder für uns noch für die Bauern. […] Wir legen praktisch einen Preis immer fest und die Bauern legen einen Preis fest, der […] unendlich lang gilt. Und in der nächsten Runde wird wieder überlegt: Kann der so stehen bleiben oder brauchen wir mehr oder brauchen wir weniger?"

[10] Here, again, the observed practices show a striking similarity to Polanyi's ideas: According to Bockman et al., "Polanyi's understanding of the market was novel. In a functionally organized socialist economy, 'in a certain sense buying and selling at negotiated prices, and therefore if you will a »market«, also exist' (SA, 378). Such a system would have fixed prices and negotiated prices, or, in other words, 'exchange' prices negotiated by the production associations and the commune. In contrast to Mises' markets of isolated individuals negotiating prices, Polanyi's market has groups representing different 'subjects' with different 'motives' negotiating prices. Therefore, producers and consumers as institutions, not as individuals, negotiate prices. Polanyi demonstrated quite innovatively how markets could be embedded in, or even constituted of democratic institutions controlled by producers and consumers" (Bockman et al., 2016, 393).

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> *"Or then the prices, where we say: 'We don't need a price increase.' And here, we have to be careful, because we also don't want to destroy the baking industry in Berlin. […] And that's why we considered to […] try to enter community catering, that means old people's homes, hospitals, kindergartens, schools. Where a healthy diet is actually needed […] And then we considered that maybe we shouldn't give this buffer we have to reduce regular selling prices any longer, but to pass it on into conditions for structures which can only buy cheaply. That way, we try to get into these structures, without jeopardizing the baking industry, the organic baking industry here. […] That means, theoretically, we could be even cheaper, but we don't want that."*[11]

The same enterprise also bypasses a market-based pricing mechanism for their labour forces. Since it does not sell its products directly to the end customer but supplies wholefood shops, kindergartens and retirement homes, they depend on carriers. In this economic sector, pressure from competition leads to comparatively low wages in Berlin. Before the introduction of the minimum wage in Germany in 2015, the bakery agreed with their contracted carriers to pay drivers above the regular level, the bakery covering resulting extra costs. Finally, it also campaigns against the policies of marketization of nature and free trade. They regularly publish a customer magazine that mainly deals with political topics related to agriculture and food production but also topics such as biodiversity loss or the situation of refugees. A recent issue informs about the planned Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and the European Union (EU) as well as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU, including about how these free trade agreements will probably erode standards for agricultural and food production.

Within our sample, this bakery most radically challenges dominant market mechanisms, thus shielding the 'fictitious commodities' of labour and land (nature) from an insufficiently regulated exposure to market mechanisms. However, similar practices can be found among further companies investigated. A representative from a media agency discusses an idea for a network of 'common good' oriented companies with the aim of keeping money within this network:

> *"And in effect it would be pretty easy, if I could with every economic transaction, every purchase and every order and every bid, just attach the instruction to the money: please stay common good oriented. Then the one to which I give the money, from whom I buy something, can only pass the money on this way, and when I get this money as a company, I also get the instruction: please only spend it in a common good oriented way. This for me has pretty big implications. This requires a network of companies which does not only serve as a platform for self-promotion but where one has accounts to transfer money. Where one ideally also has capital, which is created exclusively in this network and stays exclusively in this network and is employed inclusively there, in a common good oriented way."*[12]

[11] Own translation of the following sequence from our interviews: „Oder eben die Preise, wo wir sagen: ‚Wir brauchen keine Preiserhöhung.' Und da müssen wir aber aufpassen, weil wir auch ja die Bäcker-Branche hier nicht kaputt machen wollen in Berlin. […] Und deswegen haben wir uns überlegt, dass wir […] versuchen, so in die Gemeinschaftsverpflegung einzusteigen, also Altenheime, Krankenhäuser, Kindergärten, Schulen. Wo eigentlich gesunde Ernährung benötigt wird […] Und da haben wir uns überlegt, dass wir vielleicht diesen Puffer, den wir haben, nicht mehr in der Reduzierung der normalen Verkaufspreise geben, sondern in Konditionen für Strukturen, die sowieso nur billig einkaufen. So versuchen wir, in diese Strukturen zu kommen, ohne die Bäcker-Branche, die Biobäcker-Branche hier zu gefährden. […] Also wir könnten noch günstiger werden theoretisch, das wollen wir aber nicht."

[12] Own translation of the following sequence from our interviews: „Und eigentlich wäre es ganz einfach, wenn ich bei jedem Wirtschaftsakt, bei jedem Einkauf und bei jedem Auftrag und bei jedem Angebot einfach dem Geld, den Auftrag mitgeben könnte: bitte bleibe gemeinwohlorientiert. Dann kann derjenige, dem ich das Geld gebe, bei dem ich einkaufe, kann es auch nur so weiterreichen und ich, wenn ich das Geld bekomme als Unternehmen, kriege eben auch

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This idea, if implemented, would exclude financial speculation and therefore contribute to the decommodification of money. Money would, in compliance with the ideas of the ECG, be used as a mere means of exchange between 'common good' oriented companies.
Though not directly related to the 'fictitious commodities' of land, labour and money, more company practices undermining the free play of market forces can be identified within our sample: For example, a textile producer introduced a premium program for small retailers in order to support small businesses, in contrast to the dominant logic of granting big wholesalers better conditions due to their large order volumes. A newspaper offers its articles online open-access. Readers are asked to pay a price for the content they regard as appropriate. Similarly, an investigated printing press charges prices from their customers according to their financial power: While better-off customers have to pay the regular prices (or even more), customers in a financially precarious situation (especially from civil society) have to pay considerably less.

6. Conclusion

Let us summarise some of the findings of this paper: According to Polanyi's concept of the 'double movement', the rise of free market capitalism is necessarily complemented by the emergence of protective movements against the destructive impacts of 'self-regulating' markets. The ECG movement, which was founded in Austria and – up to now – found most support in Europe can be seen as a current countermovement for the protection of the 'fictitious commodities' of land, labour and money. The movement simultaneously works on the level of small and medium-sized companies that compile so-called Common Good Balance Sheets, which account for the degree to which they act corresponding to certain core values (such as 'human dignity', 'ecological sustainability', 'solidarity and social justice'), as well as the political level where the movement aims at changes in the regulatory framework and incentive structures. The Common Good Balance Sheet entails numerous themes and indicators that aim at increasing working and social standards, exceeding legal obligations as well as reducing environmental impacts of production. At the political level, the political demands of the ECG also hint in the direction of a decommodification of the 'fictitious commodities'. For instance, the ECG calls for the reduction of income inequalities, a guaranteed basic income and for limitations to financial speculation.
Protective countermovements against the marketization of society and nature can manifest themselves in a reactionary or authoritarian manner, but also in more progressive or emancipatory forms. On a theoretical level, this contribution shows that the ECG is a social movement which aims at embedding economic activity within democratic values and at aligning it with social and ecological concerns and, therefore, can be regarded as a progressive Polanyian countermovement. Though the 'common good' is a highly ambiguous concept, the ECG draws on republican and democratic traditions and in order to define its core values. Additionally, the 'commonality' addressed by the ECG is highly inclusive.
Political constraints for markets and social embedding can be realized by excluding certain societal areas from market mechanisms, and by the regulation of markets that are socially desired. Researching companies engaged in the ECG shows that increased social and/or environmental standards in their production and management practices are applied in order to guarantee decent working conditions and prevent environmental degradation. Some of the companies in our sample even more radically try to keep the 'fictitious commodities' – especially land (nature) – out of the sphere of 'self-regulated' markets. By doing

den Auftrag mit: bitte gebe es nur gemeinwohlorientiert wieder aus. Das hat für mich ziemlich große Implikationen. Da braucht es ein Unternehmensnetzwerk, was nicht nur als Plattform zur Selbstdarstellung funktioniert, sondern wo man Konten hat, mit denen man Geld transferieren kann. Wo man idealerweise auch Kapital hat, was genau nur in diesem Netzwerk entsteht und genau nur in diesem Netzwerk bleibt und genau nur dort, eben gemeinwohlorientiert, eingesetzt wird."

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so they achieve the protection of land, biodiversity and working forces involved in cereal production.
Overall, the ECG movement can thus be interpreted as a Polanyian countermovement in the progressive, or emancipatory, sense, which aims at changing the relationship between the market, the state and society. By setting higher social and environmental standards in production and by shielding certain 'fictitious commodities' from dominant market mechanisms, actors in the ECG movement may be able to contribute to a re-embedding of the economy so that it no longer destroys the very foundations on which it depends.

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