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CONSUMERS AND CITIZENS IN THE POST-GROWTH ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

The paper starts with the observation that in the Post-Growth Economy the difference between the role of consumer and the role of citizen can vanish as consumers – similar to citizens – increasingly take a broader view on the mission and function of business. Becoming conscious of environmental and social issues, consumer-citizens require ecological, prosocial, and ethical functioning from companies. The paper argues that in the Post-Growth Economy businesses and other organizations should develop close collaboration with the consumer-citizens to harness their support for their functioning. The paper presents innovative cases of community-based enterprises to show the beneficial effects of the active involvement of consumer-citizens in business functioning. The paper concludes with some suggestions for businesses for developing deep collaboration with the consumer-citizens to change their business models fitting in the Post-Growth Economy.

01/ INTRODUCTION

In his book on “The Economy of the Earth”, Mark Sagoff (2007) made a sharp distinction between the role of the consumer and the role of the citizen. Consumers express economic desires while citizens express political views. In the role of the consumer, individuals act to get what they want for themselves. In the role of the citizen, individuals act to achieve what they think is right or best for the society as a whole.

In the Post-Growth Economy the difference between the role of the consumer and the role of the citizen can vanish as growing numbers of consumers take a broader view on the mission and functioning of businesses, similar to citizens. Consumers are not any more passive receivers of goods and services, rather they want to influence the decisions and policies of organizations with which they interact. Becoming more conscious of environmental and social issues, consumer-citizens require ecological, prosocial, and ethical functioning from companies.

Boda and Gulyas (2006) emphasize that ethical consumption connects personal consumption with environmental and social concerns while ethical consumerism is a political movement by which people seek to consciously influence economic and social institutions. Today ethical consumer movements go beyond the logic of single-issue movements. Boycotts are still launched against companies, and “specialized” NGOs exist which focus their activities on particular topics. But, more and more conscious consumer organizations emphasize complex objectives promoting social and environmental sustainability, global justice and fairness. Ethical consumerism might significantly contribute to raising the ethicality of business, because consumers are supposed to be the most important stakeholders of firms, on which the companies’ survival largely depends.

In their book on “The Collaborative Enterprise” Tencati and Zsolnai (2010) argue that enterprises should build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with all their stakeholders and produce sustainable values for their whole business ecosystem. Tencati and Zsolnai also suggest that “the strength and sustainability of enterprises come from their ability to fit into the environmental, social, and cultural context in which they operate. By creating values for all stakeholders, enterprises can involve them and gain deep support based on their commitment. This may lead to superior performance from a multiple-bottom-line perspective.” (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2009: 367)

The central aim of this paper is to demonstrate that business and social enterprises can involve the consumer-citizens in their functioning in meaningful ways to create ecological and human well-being in the Post-Growth Economy.

The paper proceeds as follows. After this introduction, Section 2 presents innovative cases of community-based business and social enterprises which work in fields related to basic human needs such as food, water, shelter, clothes, energy, transportation, health, education, art and regeneration, tourism, banking, and technology. Section 3 discusses the learnings from the presented cases and shows the virtuous circle of the functioning of community-based enterprises. Finally, Section 4 concludes with some suggestions for businesses and other organizations for developing deep collaboration with communities to change their business models fitting in the Post-Growth Economy.

02/ **COMMUNITY-BASED ENTERPRISES**

Peredo and Chrisman (2006) developed the concept of “community-based enterprises” which represent a strategy for sustainable local development. This type of enterprises is typically rooted in community culture and integrates natural and social capital in economic considerations. Community-based enterprises transform the community into an entrepreneur and an enterprise.

Sanna (2018) speaks about community-based initiatives. She observed that community-based initiatives are increasingly promoting systemic transition towards sustainability, and as leading the Post-Growth transformation. They deliver essential services, often contribute to creating jobs within their communities, and contribute positively towards community development.

Celata et al. (2019) studied the contribution of community-based or grassroots initiatives to a transition towards a low-carbon society. These authors characterized and quantified the impact of activities across many different domains of community engagement, such as community gardens, solidarity purchasing groups, community-supported agriculture, alternative food networks, recycling, sustainable mobility, and renewable energy.













In grassroots initiatives and innovations (Middlemiss & Parrish, 2010) citizens mobilize capacities and resources to collectively define and carry out actions which aim at providing public goods or services for their community, and they control the aims, the means, and the actual implementation of their activities (Edelenbos et al., 2021: 1692).

Hidayat and Stoecker (2018) and Veress (2025) use the term “community-based organizations” for organizations which substantially

and meaningfully involve the communities of people in their activities and harness the power of the communities in their functioning. These community-based organizations are as meso-level entities where the sustainable behavior of consumer-citizens can be impacted by their socioecological-oriented way of operation (Veress et al. 2024).

We selected twelve cases of innovative community-based enterprises which prioritize basic human needs. These examples of business and social enterprises show the viability of community-based functioning in the Post-Growth Economy.

We used the methodology of the “requisite variety” (Ashby, 1963) to select the cases to be as diverse as possible in the terms of industry, geography, organization form, and size. FIGURE 3.1.

	INDUSTRY	COUNTRY	ORGANIZATIONAL FORM	SIZE
Green Monday	 Food	 China	Social enterprise & business enterprise	500 employees
Water Temples of Bali	 Water	 Indonesia	Religious-based, informal network of communities	Thousands of people
Mietshäuser Syndikat	 Shelter	 Germany	Association and Limited Liability Company	3800+ residents
Swappis	 Clothes	 Hungary	Limited Liability Company	4 people
Lumituuli	 Energy	 Finland	Customer-owned Limited Liability Company	1200 shareholders
Riversimple	 Transportation	 UK	Private limited Company	24 employees

	INDUSTRY	COUNTRY	ORGANIZATIONAL FORM	SIZE
Buurtzorg India	 Health	 India	Private Limited Company	Hundreds of people
SEKEM	 Education	 Egypt	Holding company	2000 employees
Echigo-Tsumari Art Field	 Art & Regeneration	 Japan	Cooperative	100 employees
Fairbnb	 Tourism	 Italy	Cooperative	Thousands of properties listed
Grameen Bank	 Banking	 Bangladesh	Members-owned corporation	23000+ employees
OpenBionics	 Technology	 USA	Open-source initiative	Thousands of people

Source: Authors' own construction

Figure 3.1. Characteristics of Selected Community-Based Enterprises



2.1/ **FOOD – GREEN MONDAY**

Green Monday, based in Hong Kong, is a multi-faceted ecosystem of social and business enterprises producing and distributing plant-based food dedicated to being a global change maker for a sustainable future, aiming at tackling issues of climate change, food insecurity, public health crisis, planetary devastation, and animal suffering.

David Yeung and Francis Ngai, economists and Zen Buddhist practitioners, founded Green Monday on the Earth Day in 2012 with the mission of revolutionizing the ecosystem of future food. Green Monday promotes low-carbon, sustainable, plant-based lifestyles, and local and global community building parallelly implements triple-bottom-line approach. As an innovative platform of social and economic businesses it guides individuals, communities, a variety of companies and educational institutions, and brings together their efforts to advance social and environmental responsibility and feasible lifestyle change around the world. Green Monday emphasizes the beneficial impacts of vegetarianism, but does not expect people to make a sudden and drastic dietary transition, but instead inspires and empowers all stakeholders to contribute to a global impact through seemingly small but easy-to-implement steps.

Green Monday supports a green and healthy lifestyle both in terms of demand, providing information for consumers and partner companies and driving awareness-raising campaigns, and the supply side, through active market participation to provide solutions to increase supply of sustainable and ethical choices by ways of food retail and distribution, food technology innovations, corporate consulting, and impact investing.

To make real social change happen, Green Monday is committed to serve the common good and the well-being of all stakeholders and capitalize on the power of community via accumulating efforts of individuals, communities and businesses that share the same core values (Green Monday, 2025; Ócsai, 2023).



2.2/ WATER – WATER TEMPLES OF BALI

The Water Temples of Bali is an ancient but still living, spiritual-based, community centered practice of water management. For centuries, a complex system of water temples, watched over by Buddhist priests, governs a system separate from government efforts (Chamberlain, 2019).

In the rice terraces of Bali, a water ecosystem is functioning. Carefully using the 170 rivers and streams flowing down the slopes of sacred volcanoes, the system conserves water while also controlling pests: conservation by cooperatives, called “subaks,” planting at different time, but pest control by every farm going fallow at the same time; the pests are then starved of food (Chamberlain, 2019).

Such a complicated schedule and communal management demands a spiritual discipline of the communities. The people consider the flow as sacred; its management is through the decisions of the priests. A regional hierarchy exists among the various “subaks” and local water temples which finally are under the direction of the high priest at the Temple of the Goddess of the Lake (Zurik, 2002; Lansing, 1987).



2.3/ SHELTER – MIETSHÄUSER SYNDIKAT

The Mietshäuser Syndikat (MHS) was established in 1992 in Freiburg, Germany. It is a federation of housing commons that has effectively decommodified housing by removing 167 apartment buildings from the real estate market. Each building is managed through an innovative legal structure that prevents properties from returning to market speculation. (MHS, 2025).

The key to MHS's success lies in its distinctive socio-legal arrangement. Each property is owned by a limited liability company with exactly two owners: the residents' association for that specific housing complex and the Mietshäuser Syndikat itself. This structure creates a mutual veto mechanism that ensures "capital neutralization" (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019). While residents maintain full self-determination over their daily affairs, any fundamental changes affecting property ownership require agreement from both parties, preventing unilateral decisions to sell or convert buildings into condominiums. MHS's governance remains volunteer-driven, with only minimal paid administrative support (MHS, 2025).

The MHS model redefines ownership in fundamental ways that challenge conventional property relations. The syndicate's structure creates a form of property stewardship where residents have secure, permanent use rights to their specific living spaces while participating in the collective governance of their building through the residents' association. At the same time, they belong to the broader federation of housing projects, where solidarity transfers connect established and emerging communities. Through this arrangement, residents develop allegiances not just to their immediate housing community

but to the entire network of projects, creating an environment where individual and collective interests naturally align rather than compete (MHS, 2025).

Residents pay monthly contributions which reflect actual maintenance costs rather than market prices. As mortgages are paid off, surplus revenues flow into a Solidarity Fund that finances new housing projects—implementing a pay-it-forward approach that helps the federation to expand. (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019).



2.4/ CLOTHES – SWAPPIS

Swappis (its Hungarian name is “Ruhaforgó”) is a small vintage clothing shop that operates in the city center of Budapest, Hungary. The shop is run by its founder and aims to build a sustainable clothing operation. Its business model is serving social aims and integrating business into the community (Edőcsény & Harangozó, 2021). This small business serves not only ecological aims with its operation but also serves social sustainability as a small-sized enterprise. The business model of this store is to build a community in the urban context to “swap” clothes. The ecological reasons behind its aims are to reduce the consumption of new clothes and promote the sharing and swapping of “preloved” clothing instead of buying new ones. With this, they suggest reducing waste generated by clothes and reducing the environmental and social harm of the fashion industry by reducing consumption and demand for their products.

The small shop builds a community base, and their customers become not consumers but members of the community. Customers were encouraged to join this community for better prices. Members

bring their “preloved” products to the store and can buy things at reduced prices from its supply. In this way, the business helps local citizens in swapping, by organizing the space and the community for this sharing. The store secures the standard quality for the products and controls it during the process. The unsold products will also be in circulation as they give them to charity and recycling in a transparent way (Swappis 2025).

The members of the community are engaged not only with pricing, but also pushing messages on sustainable fashion, sharing or renting instead of buying new things. In its communication and social media presence, the store raises awareness of the social and environmental dangers of the current fast fashion industry and thus informs its community members about its impact. It also offers its members an alternative way of living that emphasizes the circular economy model in clothing products with a community feeling (Swappis, 2025).



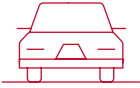
2.5/ ENERGY – LUMITUULI

Lumituuli Ltd. was established in 1998. It represents Finland’s first nationwide, customer-owned wind power producer. It emerged following the liberalization of Finland’s energy market, which enabled consumer choice among electricity suppliers and challenged centralized generation systems (Jalas & Makinen, 2018). With approximately 1,200 shareholders—primarily private citizens, firms, associations, and municipalities—Lumituuli stands as one of Finland’s most successful crowdfunding initiatives in the energy sector (Lumituuli, 2025).

The organization originated as a joint effort between local people of Lumijoki municipality and the Finnish environmental association Dodo. The founding vision was to utilize the high winds of the coastal district while enabling citizens to participate actively in renewable energy production. The company has consistently paid promised dividends, attracting shareholders and bondholders with 5-6% annual interest rates on newly issued bonds (Veress, 2025; Jalas & Makinen, 2018). Through multiple share and bond issues, Lumituuli has raised approximately €3.7 million in crowdfunding (Lumituuli, 2025).

Although the founders envisioned active citizen involvement in governance, after two decades, Lumituuli primarily engages those already well-positioned for energy policy participation. Its operations rely mainly on a small core group of volunteers working without compensation, with only one part-time paid manager. Despite this, the organization maintains political influence by challenging unfair grid connection prices and lobbying against administrative practices that disadvantage small companies (Jalas & Makinen, 2018).

The community-supported nature of Lumituuli offers several advantages for both shareholders and the broader society. This model demonstrates how citizen participation can effectively transform energy production systems, moving from centralized corporate models toward distributed, community-owned renewable energy initiatives, providing democratic control over essential infrastructure (Jalas & Makinen, 2018).



2.6/ **TRANSPORTATION – RIVERSIMPLE**

Riversimple is a UK-based startup whose mission is: “To pursue, systematically, the elimination of the environmental impact of personal transport.” The Riversimple vehicle known as Rasa is an electric car powered by hydrogen. It is primarily designed as an affordable transportation option for two people. The car is lightweight, user-friendly, and operates efficiently (Riversimple, 2025).

The company provides its customers with mobility services in a completely new way (Rana et al, 2017). The business they have created reinterprets economic operations in several aspects in a post-growth perspective (Wells, 2018). Their approach is based on technological innovation and extends to business operations. Sustainability is not only interpreted in a technological innovation, but the entire operation and transportation are designed in a post-growth perspective.

Ecological sustainability is built on full circularity in the use of materials and energy, and long-lasting service-based usage of vehicles. The use of materials already makes sense in the design phase, since both the use of materials in production is placed on local resources, recyclability is considered as a central design element and resource consumption is minimized. The fuel is hydrogen-based, so the energy use also builds on circularity, as it places emphasis on completely avoiding emissions and the use of fossil fuels (Riversimple, 2025).

In business operations, the involvement of stakeholders is essential, and their involvement is also fulfilled in a governance model. Thus, the consideration of social aspects and consumers, as the most important stakeholders, also finds a place in business operations. The interpretation of social inequalities and global colonization takes

shape in the use of materials and the localization of production. Their low-volume manufacturing can potentially reduce the risk of overproduction, enabling the company to establish a presence in the market despite competition from established players. Their business model integrates low-impact technologies for minimalist mobility, alongside innovations in governance and business strategies to create a holistic ‘triple alliance’ structure (Wells, 2018).



2.7/ HEALTH - BUUTZORG INDIA

Buurtzorg, established in the Netherlands in 2006. It introduced a nurse-led approach to holistic care that transformed community healthcare. The model has been adapted in India to address unique cultural contexts where elderly care traditionally occurs within families. Buurtzorg India (BI) provides home healthcare services in a predominantly private healthcare system, often leaving many without access to quality care (Veress, 2025).

Operating with the principle of “humanity over bureaucracy,” BI collaborates with EduGreen to train primarily women from rural areas as caregivers, addressing healthcare access and employment needs. These caregivers learn essential non-invasive tasks covering approximately 80% of nursing needs, including medicine management, body fluid management, eating assistance, wellness upkeep, and psychological support (Veress, 2025).

BI forms teams of 12 members, typically comprising three market-hired nurses and nine EduGreen-trained caregivers. This structure enables a dual impact: empowering rural women through employment while providing accessible healthcare. Through high team autonomy, BI

maintains low management overhead (8% versus an industry standard of 25%). Patient care focuses on well-being over profit, including educating patients and families in self-care and facilitating physician communication. The home-based treatment costs one-tenth of hospital-based care. This approach enables genuine human connections, reflected in low abuse rates and staff turnover (10% versus the industry's 40%) (Buurtzorg India, 2020). Staff receive stable wages and sick leave while gaining respect within patient families and communities (Veress, 2025).

BI innovates digital solutions including online education platforms and specialized IT systems supporting team coordination and knowledge sharing across distributed healthcare teams. In collaboration with EduGreen, BI is developing emergency medical technician protocols specifically designed for India's largely unregulated emergency care environment. These protocols aim to standardize response procedures while maintaining flexibility in diverse rural and urban settings. This technological infrastructure supports BI's decentralized team model while ensuring *consistent quality of care delivery* (Veress, 2025).



2.8/ EDUCATION – SEKEM

Egyptian pharmacologist and social entrepreneur Ibrahim Abouleish founded the organization SEKEM in Cairo in 1977 with the idea of sustainable development in accordance with ecological, ethical principles and giving back to the community in which every human being can unfold his or her individual potential. Inspired by the values of Islam and Anthroposophy, SEKEM's mission is to restore and maintain the vitality

of the soil and food, the biodiversity of nature through sustainable, organic agriculture, and to catalyze social and cultural development in Egypt.

The SEKEM Group is now a producer, processor and marketer of organic and biodynamic groceries, dried food, textiles and natural pharmaceuticals in Egypt and the international market. It consists of several business enterprises together with educational and non-governmental organizations, including SEKEM Development Foundation, Society for Cultural Development in Egypt, the Centre for Organic Agriculture in Egypt and the Egyptian BioDynamic Association. SEKEM's network employs more than 2,000 people, unites efforts of more than 5,800 farmers, over 800 farms in Egypt, Sudan and Uganda, and trading companies to produce and process food, herbal teas and beauty products, medicinal herbs, medicines, organic cotton products. SEKEM operates a medical center, schools, a nursery, a vocational training center, a college, a research center and a university focusing on sustainable development.

SEKEM integrates economic success with promotion of social and cultural development and has a significant impact on the region's agriculture through its decade-long efforts to actively cooperate with, educate and advise thousands of farmers and their families about the transition to and the maintenance of organic and regenerative, biodynamic farming practices. All its social and business organizations follow the policy of ensuring transparency, health and stability in their relationships and combining traditional and innovative educational approach (SEKEM 2025; Zsolnai, 2015).



2.9/ **ART AND REGENERATION** **- ECHIGO-TSUMARI ART FIELD**

Echigo-Tsumari Art Field is a successful attempt in Japan to create a regenerative community and economy by using art-based interventions in villages and rural landscapes (Shrivastava and Cucuzzella, 2017). Echigo-Tsumari Art Field consists of a region of 200 hamlets or villages called “shuraku”. Nearly a quarter of these villages are considered “dying” as more than the half the population is over 65 years old.

The art-led development project was initially directed by Fram Kitawa, the owner of Front Gallery in Tokyo, who is a native of this region. He invited many of his contacts - international artists - with the goal of encouraging people to activate their imagination and bring alternative artistic points of view from the outside. The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale is the most important initiative. Youth volunteers work with the old residents who have spent their entire lives on farming sparsely populated lands. The youth seeking purpose find it meaningful to engage farm work and art in the service of nature (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2022).

The Echigo-Tsumari pursues community building based on artistic engagement. The 760 sq. km. area is covered with over 160 artworks indicating that this space unveils its natural and historical abundance. Each of the artworks is selected to highlight the beauty of the place and its history. The Echigo-Tsumari project has been very successful. The Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale is the second largest in the world (after Venice) attracting more than one million visitors. Moreover, the project has established a self-sustaining financial base (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2022).

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Field project is significant in enlivening the once desolate space. With more than one million visitors per year and over 3.000 volunteers, the socio-cultural enlivenment of the region is substantial. In addition, the art interventions were embedded within the rice paddy fields, the riverbeds, and mountains creating an eco-systemic enlivenment where the artwork seems to emanate right out of the natural habitat.



2.10/ TOURISM – FAIRBNB

Fairbnb.coop originated as a collaborative initiative among various groups from European cities seeking socially sustainable alternatives to problems arising from short-term rentals in the tourism sector. The founding groups included activists from Bologna focused on using platform revenues to fund social projects, an Amsterdam initiative supporting municipalities in regulating short-term rentals, a Barcelona group aiming to create a collectively managed accommodation platform, and a Venice collective intending to keep tourism revenues within the local economy (Foramitti et al., 2020).

By 2018, Fairbnb established an initial workers' cooperative in Italy, owned by the platform's developers and administrators and governed by a board of five elected members. Unlike conventional accommodation platforms that extract wealth from communities, Fairbnb.coop embodies what they call "Community Powered Tourism," where 50% of the platform's commission fees directly fund local social projects chosen by visitors, while the remainder supports the platform's operations (Fairbnb, 2025).

The platform's distinctive governance model places decision-making power with those affected by tourism: hosts, guests, local business owners, and residents. This collective ownership approach ensures profits remain within communities rather than flowing to remote investors. Fairbnb.coop collaborates with local authorities to verify accommodation listings and establish sustainability rules that protect communities from tourism's negative effects, particularly gentrification and housing affordability issues (Fairbnb, 2025).

Unlike Airbnb's extractive model, which funnels profits to shareholders and can drive gentrification in popular destinations, Fairbnb's business model creates a fundamentally different scenario. While hosts earn the same and guests pay comparable rates to conventional platforms, Fairbnb redirects profits back into the communities' travelers visit. This stark contrast with Airbnb's wealth extraction approach allows Fairbnb to actively counteract mass tourism's negative impacts on housing affordability, local cultural identities, and ecosystems. Fairbnb keeps resources within the communities that generate them. Fairbnb demonstrates how accommodation platforms can operate within a Post-Growth Economy framework (Fairbnb, 2025).



2.11/ **BANKING – GRAMEEN BANK**

The Grameen Bank is a microfinance organization and community development bank started in 1983 in Bangladesh. It makes small loans (known as “microcredit”) to the impoverished without requiring collateral (Grameen Bank, 2025).

A group-based credit approach is applied which utilizes the peer-pressure within the group to ensure the borrowers follow through

and use caution in conducting their financial affairs with strict discipline, ensuring repayment eventually and allowing the borrowers to develop good credit standing. The distinctive feature of the bank's credit program is that the overwhelming majority (98%) of its borrowers are women.

Grameen Bank was founded by Muhammad Yunus, an economics professor from the University of Chittagong. The bank and its founder, Muhammad Yunus, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Grameen Bank believes that charity is not an answer to poverty. It only helps poverty to continue as it creates dependency and takes away individuals' initiative to break through the cycle of poverty, whereas loans offer people the opportunity to take initiatives in business or agriculture, providing earnings and enabling them to pay off the debt.

Grameen regards all human beings, including the poorest, as endowed with endless potential, and that unleashing the creativity in each individual should be the answer to poverty. Grameen has offered credit to many poor, women, illiterate and unemployed people. It created access to credit on reasonable terms such as the group lending system and weekly-installment payment with reasonably long term of loans, enabling the poor to build on their existing skill to earn a better income in each cycle of loans. Grameen's objective has been to promote financial independence among the poor. Yunus encourages all borrowers to eventually become savers so that their local capital can be converted into new loans (Zsolnai, 2012).

The bank targets the poorest of the poor, with a particular emphasis on women. Women represent a suitable clientele, because they have an inequitable share of power in household decision making. Lending to women also generates considerable secondary effects, including empowerment of a marginalized segment of society.

Solidarity lending is a cornerstone of the philosophy of Grameen Bank. Each borrower must belong to a five-member group, but the group as a whole is not required to give any guarantee for a loan to its member. Repayment responsibility solely rests on the individual borrowers, while the group and the center oversee that everyone behaves in a responsible way and none gets into a repayment problem (Zsolnai, 2012).

There is no written contract between Grameen Bank and its borrowers: the system works based on trust. To supplement the lending, Grameen Bank also requires the borrowing members to save very small amounts regularly in a number of funds like emergency fund, group fund etc. These savings help serve as an insurance against contingencies. The bank claims a loan recovery rate above 95%.

One unusual feature of the Grameen Bank is that it is owned by the poor borrowers of the bank, most of whom are women. Of the total equity of the bank, the borrowers own 94%, and the remaining 6% is owned by the Government of Bangladesh.



2.12/ TECHNOLOGY – OPENBIONICS

OpenBionics is an open-source initiative representing a transformative approach to prosthetic technology that prioritizes human needs over profit-maximization in healthcare innovation. Access to quality prosthetic limbs remains severely limited in the conventional prosthetics market due to prohibitive costs. For many amputees, particularly those uninsured or underinsured, high costs create insurmountable barriers to acquiring and maintaining prosthetic limbs (Kostakis et al., 2018).

The OpenBionics initiative produces a digital commons of designs, software, and know-how for developing anthropomorphic, modular, adaptive, lightweight, and customizable robot and prosthetic hands of low complexity and cost. These hands can be fabricated with desktop manufacturing technologies such as 3D printing and CNC machines, using off-the-shelf, low-cost materials available worldwide. The resulting prosthetic hands are as functional as commercial solutions but cost only 0.1-1% of their price (Kostakis et al., 2018).

OpenBionics follows “design-embedded sustainability” by avoiding planned obsolescence strategies. Instead, it provides robust, modular, reusable, and easily maintainable solutions that facilitate cooperation and replication. For example, the modular structures enable users to repair devices with minimal tools and expertise, eliminating professional maintenance costs (Kostakis et al., 2018).

To support global accessibility, OpenBionics aims to establish a network of makerspaces where designs can be built on demand and users can receive repair assistance. This relocalizes production, minimizing transportation, advertising costs, and environmental impact (Kostakis et al., 2018).

The initiative offers designs under Creative Commons licenses that allow sharing, adaptation, and commercial use. This empowers grassroots innovation—the more people modify and improve the designs, the more efficient and dexterous the hands become. The OpenBionics designs have been acquired by researchers, makers, hobbyists, and professionals in 174 countries and 7,500 cities worldwide, creating a global commons-oriented community focused on prosthetic innovation (Kostakis et al., 2018). **FIGURE 3.2.** shows the key aspects of the functioning of the selected community-based enterprises.

GREEN MONDAY

VALUES

- Vegetarianism

PURPOSE

- Plant-based food ecosystem against food insecurity, natural degradation, animal suffering.

STRATEGY

- Raising consumer awareness, inspiring other businesses, knowledge sharing and value transfer, strengthening sustainable food industry cooperation.

OUTCOMES

- Green Common store chain, OmniFoods innovations, impact investment fund.
- Annually saved: 1.2+ million tons of carbon emission, 390+ million animal lives, 380+ billion liters of fresh water.

WATER TEMPLES OF BALI

VALUES

- Buddhist spirituality

PURPOSE

- Sustaining a centuries-old, complex water governance system.

STRATEGY

- Values based collaboration between Buddhist monks and the local communities.

OUTCOMES

- Preserving 170 rivers and streams, defending the ecology of the land, and assisting the spiritual renewal of communities.

MIETSHÄUSER SYNDIKAT

VALUES

- Solidarity, dignity, and autonomy in housing

PURPOSE

- Providing access to stable and quality housing.

STRATEGY

- Removing housing from the real estate market and ensuring affordability and autonomy for residents.

OUTCOMES

- 167 buildings decommodified, providing housing for thousands of people.

SWAPPIS

VALUES

- Circular economy and sustainable lifestyle

PURPOSE

- Reduce consumption in fashion and clothing, keep circularity, and embed business in the local community.

STRATEGY

- Developing community-based business model for clothing.

OUTCOMES

- Two shops operated in Budapest since 2018 with local members.

LUMITUULI



VALUES

- Self-sustaining energy autonomy



PURPOSE

- Providing renewable wind energy for households



STRATEGY

- Customer-ownership model with crowdfunding through shares and bonds



OUTCOMES

- Successful renewable energy production, consistent dividends to shareholders, political influence on energy policy

RIVERSIMPLE



VALUES

- Sustainable transportation and innovation



PURPOSE

- Elimination of the environmental emissions of personal transport.



STRATEGY

- Whole System Design approach: the design, operation, and people serve the aim of the business.



OUTCOMES

- Technological and business innovation in personal transportation with a post-growth economy approach.

BUURTZORG INDIA

VALUES

- Care and dignity in health provision

PURPOSE

- Providing accessible healthcare services while empowering rural women.

STRATEGY

- Self-organizing teams of nurses and trained caregivers, focus on home-based care.

OUTCOMES

- Provides accessible quality healthcare, and satisfying employment.

SEKEM

VALUES

- Anthroposophy and Islam

PURPOSE

- Fostering sustainable development, respecting ecological, ethical values.
- Giving back to the community.

STRATEGY

- Restoring, maintaining the vitality of the soil and natural biodiversity.
- Organic, regenerative agricultural methods.

OUTCOMES

- Catalyzing social and cultural development.
- Community of social and business organizations, 12,000+ hectares of regenerative farmland
- 20,000+ tons of total CO₂ sequestration.

ECHIGO-TSUMARI ART FIELD

 VALUES

- Japanese philosophy of art and nature

 PURPOSE

- Creating a regenerative community and economy through art-based interventions in villages and rural landscapes

 STRATEGY

- Organizing the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and other art projects involving international artists and large scale of volunteer work

 OUTCOMES

- More than one million visitors per year, successful socio-economic and ecological enlivenment of the region

FAIRBNB

 VALUES

- Sustainability and autonomy

 PURPOSE

- Creating a sustainable alternative to profit-maximizing accommodation platforms

 STRATEGY

- Collective platform ownership, redistributing 50% of commission fees to local projects, collaboration with local authorities

 OUTCOMES

- Sustainable tourism development, community empowerment, local wealth circulation, funding of social and ecological projects

GRAMEEN BANK



VALUES

- Solidarity with the poor, mutual help within small communities



PURPOSE

- To empower impoverished people (mostly women) to get out of poverty



STRATEGY

- Providing micro-loans for people in groups to start their own small businesses and to create their financial independence



OUTCOMES

- Millions of Bangladeshi risen out of acute poverty and numerous positive impacts on the rampant rural areas of Bangladesh.

OPENBIONICS



VALUES

- Care and dignity



PURPOSE

- Creating accessible, affordable prosthetic technology through open designs



STRATEGY

- Establishing a global network of makers and sharing designs under Creative Commons licenses



OUTCOMES

- High quality prosthetic hands at fraction of commercial cost, available to those in need worldwide

Source: Authors' own construction

Figure 3.2. Key aspects of the functioning of the selected community-based enterprises

03/ THE VIRTUOUS CIRCLE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The presented community-based organizations demonstrate a self-reinforcing virtuous circle. **FIGURE 3.3.**

The key features of community-based enterprises include the following:

- 1/ Strengthening relationships with communities**
builds trust and understanding
- 2/ Prosocial and pro-environmental purpose and functioning**
align business activities with community values
- 3/ Developing community support**
creates backing for the organization's mission
- 4/ Joint, collaborative actions with communities**
produce tangible benefits that further strengthen relationships.

In a Post-Growth Economy, the goal and value system is supportive to prioritize securing basic needs, to provide dignity, and contribute to ecological preservation and regeneration. These features could be significantly supported by arrangements that provide people time, capabilities and ideas to act as citizens, to maintain a civil economy (Bruni and Zamagni, 2007).

In the working models of community-based enterprises, the primary guiding question is “how can we contribute to socially and ecologically positive outcomes?” instead of “how can we exploit profit opportunities?”.

The presented organizations demonstrate how enterprises can thrive while prioritizing the fulfilment of human needs rather than pursuing growth or profit-maximization as their primary objective. The community-based character of these organizations helps to prevent mission

drift over time. By remaining accountable to and partially governed by their consumer-citizens, these enterprises maintain their original purpose and values.



Figure 3.3. The Virtuous Circle of Community-Based Enterprises

04/ **HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES**

Involving communities in their functioning provides major benefits for business and social enterprises. First of all, it can create commitment and trust of the people involved in the organization. People are ready to identify themselves with noble goals of organizations if those are executed in fair ways and bring some desirable results for them. In this case, business and social enterprises can get “deep support” from their customer-citizen stakeholders. Also, community engagement can be a source of innovation and make community-based enterprises more transparent, democratic, and accountable.

Today’s mainstream businesses have an extractive working model and their functioning is largely destructive. They produce considerable values for society as they satisfy customers’ wants, provide jobs, and drive technological innovation. However, in many cases, mainstream businesses are “free riders” on society and nature as they appropriate values from common natural and societal resources without paying the price for it, and externalize most of the costs of their functioning upon society, nature, and future generations (Sethi 2013, Marquis 2024).

The key problem is the nature, form and scale of mainstream business operations. Mainstream business models vary but none of them are compatible with the flourishing life on Earth (including human, non-human and future life). To achieve meaningful change in the humanity-nature nexus we have to reinvent the way business functions. How can business become ecologically conscious agent which operates within limits, that is, uses only its “fair earth share” and contributes to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth? (Shrivastava and Zsolnai, 2023).

Community engagement can help the required transformation of business in various ways. By entering into dialogue with consumers-citizens and other communities' businesses can get inspiration and even force to rethink their working model and to transform their functioning toward a planet positive mode.

People are social beings who live in and by relationships. The functioning of business and other organizations should reflect this basic fact of the "human condition". However, socialness is not just a predicament but also a huge opportunity for organizations. As the relational view of the firm (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2013) and relational ethics (Keiser, 1996) suggest, organizations can thrive if they are embedded and fit in the social and environmental context in which they are functioning.



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