

**Value Struggles in the Creative City:
A “People’s Republic of Stokes Croft”?**

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Abstract

In this paper we explore the case of Stokes Croft, Bristol, UK, as a neighbourhood in a city which has appropriated the discourse of the creative industries from the bottom up in order to foster its regeneration against capital’s art of rent. We show how Stokes Croft’s self-branding as a cultural quarter has led to struggles over the creative and cultural commons thus produced, which we conceptualise as value struggles where localised value practices clash with capital’s imposition of value. Our case study including two vignettes points both to the productivity of such value struggles in producing new value practices understood as commoning, as well as the limits of reproducing a common life in the face of existing financial and property regimes. Stokes

Croft therefore serves as a case in point of the tragedy of the urban commons and points to potential ways of overcoming it.

Introduction: A People's Republic of Stokes Croft?

Socialism in one city is not a viable concept. (Harvey, 2012, p. 122)

In this paper we explore the case of Stokes Croft, in the city of Bristol, UK as a neighbourhood taking the lead in its own post-industrial redevelopment. For the last ten years, Stokes Croft established itself as a new and increasingly attractive neighbourhood, mostly through its emergent graffiti and music culture, which turned the dereliction of the area into its key strength via low rents and squatting. In particular, the People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC) appeared as a promoter of the arts and an organisation involved in both establishing the identity of the neighbourhood and branding it as a cultural quarter. More recently, Stokes Croft gained fame and infamy through the Stokes Croft riots, which preceded the urban riots Britain witnessed during the summer of 2011. The riots were a response to the opening of a Tesco store and point to a wider array of political struggles over the conditions of life in Stokes Croft, rather than merely its artistic credentials.

We propose to investigate Stokes Croft as a case study focusing on two particular aspects. The first concerns the way Stokes Croft and in particular the PRSC have appropriated the discourse of the creative industries in order to foster the redevelopment of the area despite a disinterest from the city council and financial investors. We argue that this appropriation has gone hand in hand with the recognition of the creative and cultural labour of the inhabitants of Stokes Croft as the crucial factor

in achieving an increasing worth or wealth of the area. The results of this labour can be understood as creative and cultural commons – commons now being measured up by capital. As house prices and rents are increasing and new businesses open in shop fronts that were until recently deserted, there is a growing unease over negative impacts of gentrification. Following Harvey (2012, pp. 89-112), we suggest that Stokes Croft is at the centre of the dynamics of global capital and its “art of rent” as capital seeks to extract monopoly rent from an urban space made unique and authentic by the commons it produces. The strategy of embracing the discourses of the creative industries has therefore led to Stokes Croft becoming entangled in these attempts by capital to extract value from it.

The second aspect we want to discuss builds on this and concerns the way the antagonisms between capital – represented by property developers amongst others – and inhabitants of Stokes Croft can be understood. Our findings document a struggle of those individuals who have invested their social labour into the area, against those anonymous emanations of capital that surface in increasing house prices and, for example, the opening of Tesco stores. We conceptualise this as value struggles, following De Angelis (2007), wherein the value regime of global capital is confronted with alternative value practices situated at a local level. Where culture produces value for capital (Böhm and Land, 2009), it is also the fertile ground for alternative values. The alternative value practices that emerge out of the struggles we document can be understood as forms of “commoning”, as practices which are not merely concerned with

creativity or culture but constitute attempts at the social reproduction of common life.

The paper is structured into three sections. In the first section, we briefly discuss the discourse of the creative industries, which the PRSC adopts in order to promote Stokes Croft as a cultural quarter. We explore the history of this discourse particularly in its UK context, and discuss its key features, noting that it must be understood primarily as part of a neoliberal economic governance reconfiguring subjects of labour as cultural entrepreneurs. In the urban context, we suggest that where culture is meant to produce value for the economy indirectly (Böhm and Land, 2009), it plays neatly into the “art of rent” of global capital as described by Harvey (2012, pp. 89-112). However, as the PRSC’s appropriation of the discourse will demonstrate, these dynamics also go hand in hand with a recognition of the labour producing commons, and the potential for common struggles beyond precarity not merely concerned with the conditions of production but life more generally.

Pointing to the limits of understanding urban development solely in the context of strategies of capital, as is often the case in uses of Harvey’s (2012) approach, in the second section, we specify the notion of “value struggles” introduced by De Angelis (2007). While the approach of post-capitalist “community economies” (Gibson-Graham, 2006) questions an antagonistic politics in favour of the extending of post-capitalist alternatives, the concept of value struggles point to the importance of antagonism to commoning, and the necessity of alternative value practices to openly position

themselves against capital's imposition of value. This frame highlights the way in which capitalist value expropriates the wealth produced in common in a neighbourhood like Stokes Croft, which motivates its residents to develop alternative value practices, or forms of commoning, which at least attempt to counteract the imposition of capitalist value.

In the third section, we present empirical findings from the analysis of the value struggles as they have unfolded in Stokes Croft since the riots in 2011. The research presented in this paper is based on ethnographic data we collected in a participatory research approach. After a short introduction to the area, we take a look at the PRSC and its role in the struggles surrounding the urban regeneration of the area in two vignettes. A first vignette concerns the struggle lead by the local No Tesco Campaign and the setting up of a new initiative, the People's Supermarket. A second vignette concerns a local ruin and the various initiatives at redeveloping it. Both vignettes demonstrate how Stokes Croft has become subject to capital's art of rent attempting to extract surplus from the area. But they also show the productivity of the ensuing value struggles, with new value practices as well as limitations to the art of rent emerging as a result.

Overall, our paper extends earlier accounts of critiques and alternatives to the view of culture as merely an extension of capital's art of rent by demonstrating how value practices challenge it on a daily basis. It contributes to critical perspectives on the function of culture in urban regeneration (Pratt, 2009) and builds on earlier studies of

the creative industries that conceive them as cultural labour producing cultural commons (e.g. Shorthose and Strange, 2004; Kanngieser, 2012). It also adds a clearer geographical and spatial dimension to these debates, particularly with regards to the discussion of “counter-enclosures” as discussed by De Angelis (2007). The key question the papers contributes to these debates, drawing on the opening quote and on the insinuations of the PRSC’s name, is whether it is possible to construct a “socialism in one city” – or, rather, a “socialism in one neighbourhood” – on the basis of strategies of commoning, thus avoiding the “tragedy of the urban commons” (Harvey, 2012) and the danger of commons being enclosed as part of neoliberal’s “plan B” (Caffentzis, 2010).

The Valorization of Culture in Urban Regeneration

To understand why and how the People’s Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC) appropriated the discourse of the creative industries, it is necessary to explore and situate it. It has precursors in entrepreneurship with its focus on “creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1976) and in the “culture industries” as a first instantiation of the economization of culture (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002), and can even be seen as a “rebranding” of the latter (Gill and Pratt, 2008). It largely emerged, however, from the 1980s, first in the UK, when culture came to be seen as a potential contributor to economic development in general and urban regeneration in particular. From its early days in the UK of New Labour (e.g. DCMS, 2001) it has subsequently been embraced by policy makers in the

EU (e.g. KEA European Affairs, 2006) and the United Nations (e.g. 2010), and has found international application (Evans, 2009).

Despite the “fuzziness” of the concept of the “creative class” (Markusen, 2006; Florida, 2003), its relentless mobilisation in policy has meant that the discourse of the creative industries is imbricated in a wider shift wherein the economy increasingly comes to be governed in neoliberal terms. Much of recent critical work on the creative industries (e.g. Lovink and Rossiter, 2007; Raunig et al., 2011) highlights its neoliberal tone and effect. von Osten suggests that

it makes sense to think about the discourse of “creative industries” as a technology that aims not so much at the capitalization and mobilization of the cultural sectors in particular as at the restructuring of relations between the subject of labor and processes of valorization, optimization and acceleration. (2011, p. 135)

Through “the vocabulary of creativity and the references to bohemian life and work biographies” this discourse affects our understanding of labour more widely (ibid.). It is not merely a matter, then, of plugging the gap left by the departed industries of yore with new creative or cultural industries situated in the city and thereby contributing to its regeneration. Rather, through the imposition of the creative imperative, all of labour

is reconfigured. This reconfiguration of labour becomes apparent in the figure of the cultural entrepreneur or “culturepreneur”, which is the image governance imposes on cultural and creative labour, reproducing both neoliberal’s ideal of enterprise and competition, as well as a concomitant precariousness (see Loacker, 2013). McRobbie traces what she suggests are three waves of cultural entrepreneurship in the UK: a first wave of ‘self-generated sub-cultural entrepreneurs’ which experimented in ‘creative self-employment’ and refused ‘mundane work’; a second wave marked by ‘the hovering presence of venture capitalists’ and all the features of a deregulated labour market; and a third wave of the Blair years where ‘the winner takes all’ and cultural production is projectified (2011, pp. 120-125). As we will see below, the case of Stokes Croft could be read as an attempt to rewind the history recounted by McRobbie and to reassert the independence and self-valorisation of cultural producers.

Where McRobbie observes the centrality of culture to the economy, Böhm and Land in their analysis of policy since 1997 note how “discourses around the value of culture have moved from a focus on the direct economic contributions of the culture industries to their indirect economic benefits” (2009, p. 75). In the creative city, cultural entrepreneurs produce indirect economic benefits by contributing to urban regeneration. As in the case of Stokes Croft, the geographical locus of the creative industries has been the “cultural quarters” of cities (see e.g. Shorthose, 2004). Following Harvey, we can understand how value is extracted from cultural labour in these quarters through what he describes as the “art of rent” (2012). According to Harvey, capital

always relies on the extraction of monopoly rent: capital is based on the monopoly instituted in property and ownership of the means of production, and through process of centralization it also tends towards monopoly (2012, pp. 90ff.). Harvey suggests that where, as part of globalisation, advances in travel and communication have eroded much of the monopoly power associated with space, culture has become one way in which space, especially city space, has been valorised by capital.

Harvey's analysis of the art of rent foreshadows recent debates particularly within what is known as autonomist or post-workerist Marxism regarding rent as a key feature of financial and cognitive capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Marazzi, 2010; Vercellone, 2010). Marazzi, for example, recounts the ways in which the marginalization of wage labour and the valorization of free (i.e. unpaid but still controlled) labour is mirrored by financialization as its "adequate and perverse modality of accumulation" (2010, p. 53, 66). Similarly, Vercellone speaks of the 'becoming-rent of profit' wherein "profit, like rent, increasingly depends on mechanisms of value expropriation that proceed from a position of exteriority in respect of the organization of production" (2010, p. 91). Vercellone also notes that this produces an antagonism between "the institutions of the common" and "the logic of expropriation of cognitive capitalism" that is rent (2010, p. 92). The cultural producers of the creative industries are not accidental to this development, as McRobbie (2011) and von Osten (2011) both make clear; rather, the creative industries is where "some of the broader strategies [are] being developed by capital in order to subsume autonomous, *values-driven production* into its structures of

value production and accumulation”, as Böhm and Land (2009, p. 77) put it.

What could the PRSC gain in engaging this discourse of the creative industries, apart from a repetition of the fate of many other cultural quarters, and the hope for state funding? Our case suggests that PRSC’s strategy, however conscious, does not merely reproduce this discourse but includes subversive if contentious elements, and key to it is the focus on the precariousness not only of cultural production but social life in general. Lorey suggests that the “normalization of cultural producers” leads to a self-precarization wherein the precarity that conditions our lives is seen to be self-afflicted (2009). Yet McRobbie (2011) suggests that with the discourse of the creative industries class struggle does not disappear but is “deflected onto [the] field of precariousness” (2011, p. 130). The struggles around precarity in France, and in particular the slogan “No culture without social rights” (Lazzarato, 2011, p. 46), already provide one example of the way in which the labour involved in cultural production is recognized and its social conditions are challenged. This includes ways in which cultural producers seek to relate their class conflict beyond the confines of the “creative class” (Marcussen, 2006). Lorey further contends that precarization is marked by “the capacity for refusal” and sees it as “a process of recomposing work and life, of sociality, which thus cannot be – not immediately, not so quickly, and perhaps not even at all – economicized” (2010, n.p.). She also suggests that those involved in precarious struggles should explore what they have “in common”: “a desire to make use of the productivity of precarious living and working conditions to change these modes of governing, a means

of working together to refuse and elude them” (2010, n.p.).

Such analyses already point two features we will discover in our case study: the need to deal with precarious life and the generalisation of these kinds of struggles around labour and wealth. Böhm and Land (2009, p. 78) suggest that it is necessary to study the strategies creatives “develop and mobilise in resisting subsumption and developing autonomous counter-strategies of value production”. Before we do so in our case study, we need to further move away from an analysis of the strategies of capital and of neoliberal discourses – analyses which easily overemphasise the power of capital and the state – in order to provide a frame for understanding the antagonisms and forms of resistance discovered in our case.

Value Struggles and Cultural Commons

This focus on the excess of social production, of the extended terrain of struggle around precarity, and the ways in which new forms of commonality may emerge beyond it, already points to some dynamics to be discovered in our case study. Yet comprehending these dynamics, and specifically the economics of a production in common which is potentially beyond expropriation, requires a different vocabulary to that provided by the discourse of the creative industries and the art of rent. Harvey does note that capital’s reliance on locality in the art of rent allows for urban governance “to be directed towards

opposition to the banal cosmopolitanism of multinational globalization” (2012, p. 128), but there is little vocabulary here that allows us to grasp specifically how the labour of cultural producers and their neighbours can be understood to be productive of wealth. Lorey’s turn to “the common” (2010), and Harvey’s focus on the “urban commons” (2012, pp. 67-88) provide first clues to how this production in common may be understood, and we will develop this perspective further in this section.

Who produces wealth in the first instance? Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 154) suggest that the city – not only its cultural quarter – is “a living dynamic of cultural practices, intellectual circuits, affective networks, and social institutions”, and it is these elements of the common that make the city “a source of the common and the receptacle into which it flows”. The common of Hardt and Negri refer to an anthropological basis of social (re-)production, which for Graeber (2001) challenges the kind of value espoused by capital. A distinction must be made here between value, values, and wealth. Following Harvie and Millburn (2010), value is that which is created by productive human labour and whose measure is money. Wealth in contrast is a much broader category and includes goods like clean air, cultural products, or free time. Other than for value there is no universal measure for wealth. The city is a space where the value of capital cannot impose itself, since social creativity is not subsumed by capital and its primary mode of subsumption, wage-labour – especially not in times of precarity (Lorey, 2010; Ross, 2008).

Of course, even where most people are wage laborers, it's not as if all creativity is on the market. Even in our own market-ridden society there are all sorts of domains – ranging from housework to hobbies, political action, personal projects of any sort – where there is no such homogenizing apparatus. But it is probably no coincidence that it's precisely here where one hears about “values” in the plural sense. (Graeber, 2001, p. 56)

The city, then, is a space in which heterogeneous values flourish and where social wealth is produced in common and shared, not merely through the market and mediated by capital. De Angelis (2007) extends Graeber's analysis of value and values. For him, all social relations can be understood as “value practices”, which he defines as “those actions and processes, as well as correspondent webs of relations, that are both predicated on a given value system and in turn (re)produce it” (De Angelis, 2007, p. 24). De Angelis's value practices are therefore those social practices which reproduce and sustain the values that Graeber refers to, and which stand in contrast to the regime of value imposed by capital.

Gibson-Graham's (2006) work on post-capitalist politics, in a similar vein, emphasizes the role and importance of non-, or post-capitalist practices and commons. They see commons as a “community stock” which requires being “maintained and replenished”, as in the case of the community garden as an example of urban commons (Gibson-Graham, 2006, pp. 92, 97). The commons are here only one coordinate for

developing community economies, and while these involve “creating, enlarging, reclaiming, replenishing and sharing a commons”, Gibson-Graham neglect an account of the antagonism necessary for protecting these commons from capital. In contrast, to do so De Angelis introduces the term “value struggles”, which connotes the way in which the value practices which also prevail in the city clash with capital’s regime of value. He emphasises that value struggles always depend on the creation of what he calls “counter-enclosures”, specific places where alternatives emerge.

The space of alternatives to capital has to go through the opening up of counter-enclosures, of spaces of commons. The *alternatives* to capital pose a *limit* to accumulation by setting up rigidities and liberating spaces. In a word, alternatives, whatever they are, act as “counter-enclosures”. This, of course, opens up the question of capital’s co-optation of alternatives... (De Angelis, 2007, p. 17)

The focus on value struggles highlights the ways in which a conflict runs through the social body, wherein an outside to capital is posed which capital tries to enclose and valorise, on the one hand, and which alternative value practices may seek to protect and nurture, on the other. De Angelis here points to the spatial dynamics of value struggles, which will also become apparent in the case of Stokes Croft. We suggest the frame of value struggles serves well in capturing the antagonisms involved in the struggles we witnessed, which express an antagonism between the people who do and those that (try

to) appropriate (cf. Harvie, 2005). It also allows us to highlight the spatial dimensions of those very struggles, particularly with regards to attempts to appropriate spaces not only via squatting or rent, but by taking common ownership of previously private property. The frame of value struggles also highlights the danger of capitalist enclosure. If the PRSC is building a counter-enclosure, is this counter-enclosure not at danger of being ‘co-opted’ (De Angelis, 2007) and colonised by capital (Harvey, 2012)? Our empirical material points to a complex picture and tends to confirm Caffentzis’ claim that a focus on the commons highlights the question of social reproduction as much as capital’s “ability to terrorise us with our lack of capacity to organise the reproduction of our lives outside of its structures” (2010, p. 25-26).

Stokes Croft: A People’s Republic?

In this section we look at value struggles in the area of Stokes Croft in Bristol. We first briefly describe Stokes Croft’s location within Bristol’s adjacent neighbourhoods, before turning to its social and economic history and its emergence as a neighbourhood in itself. We then briefly discuss our research methods and focus, before turning to our findings. There we first introduce the People’s Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC) as a key actor in branding Stokes Croft as a cultural quarter and framing social, political and economic struggles that ensue. Finally, we turn to two vignettes exploring two specific examples of what we propose can be understood as value struggles (De Angelis, 2007).

Making a neighbourhood

Stokes Croft is in one sense merely the name of an A-road leading out of Bristol city centre towards the north.¹ Different neighbourhoods border this road, including to the east the area of St. Pauls, which hosts a large Afro-Caribbean community and was home, for years, of the St. Pauls' carnival. Further north sits the neighbourhood of Montpelier, which houses students, young urban professionals and a liberal, green bourgeois populace. On the west side Stokes Croft is flanked by council housing and the well-to-do Kingsdown, a neighbourhood that gentrified in the 1980s and now boasts some of the most expensive properties in inner Bristol. Montpelier's ward is represented by a Green councillor, St. Pauls' is solid Labour while Kingsdown tends to return Liberal Democrat councillors. As this short description shows, Stokes Croft is more (and less) than a neighbourhood in its own right. Rather, it connects very different neighbourhoods to each other and forms their shared border and to some extent, and increasingly, their shared centre.

Being merely a road with a range of businesses and office buildings, Stokes Croft lost its major employers and businesses in the late 1980s when office buildings fell empty and massage parlours and fast food eateries appeared between more and more boarded-up shop fronts. The 1990s were a period of decay for the area, street drinking became frequent and the street was generally considered unattractive, and by some outright

¹ For a further history of Stokes Croft, see <http://www.bristolinformation.co.uk/streets/stokescroft-00.asp>.

dangerous (Guardian, 2011). Over the last decade only, with the development of a strong graffiti and music culture, Stokes Croft started its slow process of regeneration. In this process, and central for our observation, “Stokes Croft” moved from being merely a street name to becoming an urban area, even a brand. The becoming of “Stokes Croft” has been a process lasting around 10 years. It included the opening of several art galleries, cultural venues and shared studio and office spaces in the area. One example of the latter is Hamilton House, run by the community interest company Coexist². Individual artists and small creative businesses and charities populate Hamilton House, including festival organizers, urban designers and production companies (Portland Works, 2011).

Groups like the PRSC and other community groups have been central in promoting this new “Stokes Croft”. The PRSC was particularly vocal in branding efforts. They created maps (see Figure 1) of the area, but also signs on roads leading into the area reading ‘Welcome to Stoke’s Croft - Cultural Quarter - Conservation Area - Outdoor Gallery’ that designate the boundaries of Stokes Croft (PRSC, 2009).

- insert Figure 1 around here -

While the process of making Stokes Croft has lasted quite some time already, the

² See <http://www.hamiltonhouse.org>.

research presented here focuses on a more recent period, starting in spring 2011. In April 2011 Stokes Croft witnessed the Anti-Tesco riots and subsequently an increasingly vocal discussion about gentrification (PRSC, 2011). We argue that the intensification of struggles warrants a temporal focus on the period from spring 2011 up to now. Methodologically, we operate in a multi-method participatory research frame inspired by forms of collective investigation and theorization (Freire, 1970; Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007). For a period of one year from summer 2011, we rented a studio in Hamilton House. Based in the space, we advertised our research project, held numerous informal conversations and participated in community organization events. Part of our participatory research strategy were seminars we conducted in Hamilton House where we presented our ideas and fed them into current discussions about the changes in Stokes Croft and their evaluation.

In conducting our research we could not avoid considering the important role of the People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC), incorporated as a community interest company in February 2009. Active in the community since 2007, it has been the brainchild of founder and present chairman, Chris Chalkley. The PRSC initially focused on promoting street art in the area and organized gallery spaces and exhibitions. Over the years it has also been actively involved in debates about the character and identity of Stokes Croft. The PRSC played a significant role in creating the brand of "Stokes Croft" as a cultural quarter, making it known as an area in the city by appropriating the discourse of the creative industries. For example, the founding aims of the PSRC from

2009 state:

To realise a Cultural Quarter where creativity in all its forms can flourish, and to facilitate the conditions necessary for an appropriate commercial sector, with creativity at its core, to grow in Stokes Croft. To maintain and improve the visual environment and infrastructure of Stokes Croft, pulling together all members of the community. Initially, to create in Stokes Croft an Outdoor Gallery and thereby make Stokes Croft a vibrant destination. (PRSC, 2009)

The “place-making strategies” (Catungal et al., 2009) or “city-branding” (Eshuis and Edwards, 2012) of the PRSC were combined, from the beginning, with an aggressive rhetoric of antagonism against the state, local council and emanations of global capital, which are accused of having failed the area.

We believe that Stokes Croft has been criminally and deliberately neglected by Government; that local government has treated Stokes Croft as the sink, the sewer of the City. A State that often favours the interests of those who are direct beneficiaries of Financial Institutions, and continues to favour the interests of excessively powerful Corporations over the interests of the Local Community whom they were elected to serve, is necessarily suspect: We must suspect the motives of Government, we must challenge decisions that are visited upon us from afar. (PRSC, 2011, p. 1)

Such vociferous rhetoric also helped the “place-branding”, however not from the council, but “from below”, lending democratic legitimacy to its pursuit (cf. Eshuis and Edwards, 2012). But as we will show in the two vignettes, “place-branding from below” is not where the story ends. In our observations of value struggles as they unfolded around and after the Bristol riots in April 2011, it became obvious that there was an increasing desire to extend antagonistic practices beyond merely “cultural” interventions of place-branding. The PRSC’s Chris Chalkley expressed in an interview just after the riots how companies and capital from the city were realising the increasing success and worth of the area.

The corporate forces of the city are marching up the road from Cabot Circus [a big shopping mall at the city centre end of Stokes Croft] at present and Tesco is moving in from the other direction (...) we are fighting a rearguard action here. (Chakley, 2011)

The two vignettes we would now like to introduce highlight that the value struggles extended in diverse ways, involving and transforming a range of actors and in their antagonistic setting, while advancing debates in a range of projects how to best counter gentrification and the art of rent.

Vignette 1: Tesco in Stokes Croft and the People’s Supermarket

The discussions over the Tesco supermarket on Cheltenham Road, in the vicinity of the area of Stokes Croft, started in November 2009, when building works were conducted in a former comedy club. A resident, asking the builders out of curiosity about what they were doing, learned that they were preparing a Tesco store. Almost immediately a local protest group “No Tesco” campaign was formed³. The PSRC played a central role in initiating the alliance, and it soon attracted a broad range of residents and people working in the area including artists. Research conducted by the No Tesco campaign pointed to a broad rejection (98% of 700 surveyed) (No Tesco, 2011). By inquiring with the council, No Tesco found out that Tesco had strategically avoided a public consultation process by asking the original owners of the building to change the licence of the shop to one that allowed operating a supermarket before Tesco actually bought the building (No Tesco Campaign, n.d.).

The local protest group quickly grew in support and urged the council to develop a strategy to legally challenge Tesco’s licence on the grounds that important issues like traffic resulting from the supplies of the store had not been taken into account in the original licence change. The council rejected to embark on a legal challenge of Tesco, citing limited means to pursue such a challenge successfully. The council did however severely limit the shop’s business opportunities through its licensing powers (No Tesco Campaign, n.d.). Yet No Tesco attempted to take matters into their own hands. In early 2010, the building of the prospective supermarket was squatted to prevent construction

³ See <http://notesco.wordpress.com>.

work. The squat raised the profile of the struggle, and when it was evicted hundreds of people attended and protested against Tesco. When Tesco was finally opened in early 2011, the group mobilised for a boycott of the company.

During the riots in April 2011 the Tesco supermarket was looted just a few weeks after it opened. Rather than focusing on the riots as an expression of the value struggles in the neighbourhood, we argue that the more striking development is an initiative for an “alternative supermarket”. The initiative has developed alongside and as a direct result of the No Tesco campaign. The process has brought together a group of 70 people working towards building a co-operative food supply for the area.

Want healthy affordable food? Frustrated that the big supermarkets are taking over Bristol and taking their vast profits to remote shareholders? What if we could keep profits and decision-making within our local community and make healthy, local, fairtrade food available at affordable prices? (Bristol People’s Supermarket, n.d., n.p.)

The initiative can be seen as an attempt to establish alternative value practices around food which embrace and reproduce values such as locality, affordability and health, and which are immediately antagonistic towards capitalist value practices as represented by Tesco. Showing the importance of what De Angelis (2007) has called “counter-enclosures”, the building of alternative communities seems to depend on the

struggle against value in a specific context. Tesco's aggressive move into the neighbourhood created a reason to be against it in common, a struggle that formed the collective consciousness and perhaps sparked the imagination to overcome the limits of imagination imposed by capital. If this is translated into the building of sociality and with it the "autonomisation" of material needs, like in the prospect of a people's supermarket, a new terrain for imagination of alternatives of capital-led recovery is opened. Indeed, it seems that Stokes Croft's creative class started considering where their food is coming from and attempted to reorganise the supply chain against capital. This included artists designed cups as well as Banksy's Bristol Riot Print sold by the PRSC to raise legal funds. Also, numerous hours of volunteering work by many participants went into presenting the supermarket, attracting supporters and discussing its structure.

The people's supermarket did not come into being. In May 2012 the group issued a statement in which they explained the complications they faced in the light of very wide ranging aspirations for better food supplies. But far from accepting defeat in the struggles against capital, the group outlined how the idea of better food supplies had inspired a range of other initiatives in the area.

[S]ince we have been in existence many other organisations in the community have joined the movement for making local, good quality food more accessible. (...) These groups have been pursuing the very projects that are needed to have a

form of People's Supermarket in this community. (People's Supermarket, 2012)

Several food related initiatives emerged in Stokes Croft alongside the People's Supermarket, including the New Dawn Traders, aiming to establish sustainable intercontinental food transport by using sailing boats (NewDawnTraders, 2013), or The Community Kitchen, a Hamilton House-based food and catering initiative focused on sustainability and health. For us this points to the productivity of value struggles, the creativity that propels and also arises from the conflict of values and value, a creativity that extends beyond the notion of "creative industries" as a tool of urban regeneration. A new creative class emerges that is not concerned only with producing "culture" but reproducing life and sociality more broadly.

Vignette 2: Westmoreland House

We turn now to a key site in Stokes Croft: Westmoreland House, a ruin that dominates the view of Stokes Croft, and is at the centre of struggles over redevelopment and space in the area.

Westmoreland House dominates local views within and into the Stokes Croft and its current state of dereliction blights the Conservation Area. The building towers over its neighbours, and the overall bulk, materials and design has a negative impact. (BCC, 2007, p. 12)

Westmoreland House's story is illustrative of the value struggles in the area not because its fate has elicited the kind of conflicts we have described with regards to Tesco. However as a property, Westmoreland House is a site where the potential of capital to skim off rent from Stokes Croft's recovery is most vividly exemplified. Since Westmoreland House stopped being used as an office building in the 1980s, it has belonged to a large London property development company, today operating under the name Comer. Comer's strategy and long term plan for the site always focused on the redevelopment of the office building into flats. The initial plan dates from 1989 when planning permission was obtained for a mixed residential and business development. However, no works were undertaken at the time and the planning permission elapsed in 1994. Comer attempted to obtain a new planning permission for a similar project in 1994 but this was rejected. In the period following, the owners left the site derelict. In this period the abandoned and little guarded site increasingly attracted local graffiti artists, who started to use the ruin as a canvas (BBC, 2007).

In 2004 a man died when he fell off the roof of the seven-story building, and in 2007 a graffiti artist was severely injured in a similar accident, while local police rejected to enter the site for occupational health reasons (BBC, 2004; 2007). These incidents led to the intensification of debates about the future of what became increasingly labelled the "eyesore" of Stokes Croft. Under increasing pressure Bristol City Council for the first time considered a compulsory purchase order (CPO). The owners responded with a new planning application which involved building a new 10-storey apartment block with over

150 apartments on the site, including a three-storey car park. The proposal was rejected by the council because of various concerns relating to impact of this mega development on the area. The council subsequently rejected a range of new and revised planning applications.

The council has shown some determination to prevent the development of this large-scale private housing project with its adverse implications for the area. Recently the council has also launched a public consultation, promoted through a “stakeholder” roundtable, the Carriageworks Action Group (CAG) and a survey exercise that elicited 1400 responses from community members. This process has produced a “community vision” for the future of the derelict site (Carriageworks Action Group, 2012). Its aim was to develop a list of requirements that any new developer has to adhere to. This process is highly pertinent from the perspective of value struggles. It indicates that there is quite some willingness by the council to not simply provide space and political support for large-scale developments without consultation of the community. However, likewise there is no willingness in the council to imagine a solution to the development of the site without the capital of property developers.

The PRSC, in alliance with quite a few residents vocal in the open consultation process, would like the property to be bought by the council, and then developed and used commonly by the community.

In view of all this uncertainty, the way forward would be to recognise that the most important thing for the long-term future of Stokes Croft as a Cultural/Arts/Community Centre/Destination would be to secure the freehold of this property for the use of the community. This would then open up the possibility of developing uses for the whole of this property in a way that could be both sustainable and in line with the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole. Funding could be appropriated over the longer term, partners chosen according to community needs and desires, rather than on the basis of “financial necessity”. (PRSC, 2008, p. 3)

The approach here is to take the ownership of the land and the building out of private hands and make it common. In this way capital’s ability to extract the wealth produced in the area through rising property prices in the art of rent would arguably be severely limited. However, the on-going consultation does not allow for such an approach to be considered. The route the council has decided to take is to involve a developer. The community is considered a “third party”, coming in to consult the council and developer, but is not supposed to take an active role in developing the site beyond consultation. The council justifies this with limited resources. It hopes to reclaim some of the money spent to purchase the site from the current owner. It also claims that there are no resources for a council-led development of the site, nor to support a community-led process (CAG Meeting, 19th April 2012). Limited council resources however are not natural. Rather they express a lack of political imagination that results from the sustained attacks of

neo-liberals on the public sector, and capital's success in making us believe that we cannot reproduce our own collectively live materially without it (Caffentzis, 2010: 25-26).

In this case, then, the value struggle takes a slightly different form. While the council invites consultation and concedes that private developers must recognise the views of the community, a truly communal, politically controlled development of the site is deemed unrealistic. This indicates that the consultation process is not truly open, a well observed limit to public consultation in more general terms (Atkinson, 1999). In the consultation process some community activists came to the same conclusion, branding the consultation process to be a “stitch-up” (CAG Meeting, 19th April 2012). Despite those criticisms, the process continued as council and some residents repeated their emphasis that Westmoreland House in its current state is an “eyesore” and something needed to be done about it “urgently”. In December 2013 Bristol City Council declared Knightstone Housing Group Limited its preferred development partner for the redevelopment of the site. Knightstone is a non-for-profit housing association with some history providing social and low-cost housing in Bristol. The choice of this particular developer responds to the concerns of residents about rent extraction and might be considered – from the perspective of value struggles – a small victory, even though full community control over redevelopment has not been achieved.

Like in the first vignette, the value struggles over Westmoreland House were also productive in inspiring other initiatives. Faced with the end of its lease in 2012, the Stokes Croft community

cinema “The Cube” embarked on a fundraising campaign to buy its location. £200.000 could be raised in the community with match funding from the Arts Council, enabling the communalisation of the property⁴.

Discussion

The case of Stokes Croft, in our view, demonstrates a number of complexities concerning economic development and urban regeneration, as well as the vibrancy of value struggles around culture and space in the city. Firstly, it provides an unusual example of the way in which the discourse of the creative industries can be appropriated. On the one hand, the way the PRSC sought to brand the area as a cultural quarter plays into the hands of the art of rent, as witnessed by the interest of property developers and retail corporations – even if this interest was still somewhat limited, with especially property developers waiting for gentrification to further increase property values before investing in redevelopment. On the other hand, the case also at least insinuates that the residents of Stokes Croft subsequently did not merely conform to the figure of the culturepreneur (cf. Loacker, 2013), and instead developed alternative value practices. The terms “creative industries” and “creative class” are here shown to be incapable of grasping the common struggles around work and living space as well as social reproduction, e.g. when filmmakers or puppeteers get involved in setting up a local supermarket, occurring in the creative city. These struggles are incomprehensible within a frame that understands cultural quarters to be merely about the production of

⁴ See <http://www.cubecinema.com/freehold/>.

culture or the promotion of creativity (cf. Böhm and Land, 2009).

The case also, secondly, points to the productivity of value struggles. Certain initiatives like the PRSC may start off in branding exercises aiming at promoting artist production, but faced with the unfolding of the art of rent they start political campaigns over planning decisions and supermarkets, extending value struggles to include all of social life. The net effect of these value struggles witnessed in Stokes Croft is the creation of the place of Stokes Croft itself – a place defined through its rejection of and resistance to a capitalist value practice. Even where single initiatives fail, as in the case of the People’s Supermarket, the value struggles remain productive, which is evidenced in the emergence of New Dawn Traders, and new food initiatives like the Community Kitchen. This is also the case with Westmoreland House, where value struggles have not thus far succeeded in securing a fully community controlled development, but have placed certain limits on capital’s ability to extract monopoly rent none the less. Moreover value struggles have inspired “The Cube” to communalise its location.

Finally, the case of Stokes Croft points both to the primacy of urban and cultural commons to the neoliberal economy, and to their contested nature. While we argued that in particular the efforts of the PRSC involved an attempt to create a counter-enclosure (De Angelis, 2007) in which Stokes Croft’s commons could be protected and reproduced in common, Caffentzis (2010) warns of the danger of commons being appropriated by capital. The people of Stokes Croft seem to be aware of

these dangers, and their strategies already regularly raise this concern. Moreover they actively engage in limiting capital's grip on the commons, by engaging in value struggles. They thereby also respond to a political context in the UK in which new policy initiatives like the "Localism Bill" and the "Big Society" target the kinds of cultural and urban commons produced in Stokes Croft. We also need to consider the increasing role commons play in capital's plans for recovery. This is precisely why we point to the importance of antagonism as expressed in the concept of value struggles. Without an antagonistic set up "diverse economies" may not be very post-capitalist (Gibson-Graham, 2006) but rather in danger of confirming and maintaining the hegemony of capitalist value production, leaving unprofitable social reproduction to well-meaning neighbourhood initiatives.

In this light then it seems difficult to imagine "socialism in one city" in the People's Republic of Stokes Croft. However, we suggest that the struggles that we tried to discuss here are formative and transformative experiences for the people involved in them, while – in some way – the limits of their own ability to produce "socialism in one city" may feed into a political subjectivity that allows to start imagining how the production of wealth can supersede and overcome its appropriation through value on a much more general level. The challenge here is one of avoiding the "tragedy of the urban commons" wherein those "who create an interesting and stimulating everyday neighbourhood life lose it to predatory practices of the real estate entrepreneurs, the financiers and upper class consumers bereft of any social imagination" (Harvey, 2012, p. 78).

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