# CHAPTER 9

# INTERLOCKING VALUE CYCLES IN MUSIC ORGANISATIONS: TOWARDS ORGANISATIONAL AND CREATIVE COMPLEMENTARITY

**Arne Herman & Walter van Andel**

For many decades, the symphony orchestra has been struggling with what looks like an existential crisis. An overview of some of the world's leading symphony orchestras sketches a general picture of increasing precariousness (Flanagan, 2012; Ramnarine, 2018), as the field has suffered severe blows from austerity measures. Most prominently, large-scale and small-scale organisations alike are trying to overcome drastic cutbacks in subsidies, reaching an alarming low in the years after the financial crisis of 2008 (Silerova, 2012). Apart from financial sorrows, other factors contribute to the precarious situation for the symphony orchestra as well: audience numbers are decreasing as fast as their average age is increasing, and since the concert house needs to be satisfied with a modest place among various others, often more muscular players in the creative industry, the cultural significance of a seemingly antiquated institution is being put into question. As a result, the limited financial resources, as well as the audiences, have to be divided among the various players, each of whom formulates its own answer to the question as to what place the orchestra should occupy within society and to what extent that society should support them financially. Accordingly, the demand for sustainability in the musical landscape is urgent: how can music organisations survive in the long run without compromising their artistic pertinence? This question exposes the main challenge for arts organisations: the alignment of seemingly conflicting values of aesthetic sustainability and organisational sustainability (Zembylas, 2004) is far from self-evident.

This chapter explores how the current landscape of music production as a whole can be strengthened in its quest for long-term sustainability and legitimacy by the introduction of new organisations to the field that take a different approach in their organisational choices. In particular, this chapter will introduce an analysis on the importance within the landscape of two alternatively structured music organisations that centralise different organisational design principles. These differing organisational design principles revolve around applying modularity and commoning in order to

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unlock room for artistic autonomy. The analysis highlights how such alternative design principles allow the organisations to withdraw from traditional value cycles, while at the same time providing an added value to the orchestra landscape as a whole.

## THE ORCHESTRA CRISIS

The grim picture of the traditionally organised orchestra field that has been sketched above, illustrates that the obvious sore spots are merely derivative of a broader orchestra crisis that primarily revolves around legitimacy (Herman, 2019). In contrast to most American orchestras, the lion's share of European orchestras rely on government funding for the majority of their budgets (Flanagan, 2008). This grants the organisations considerable financial security, allowing them to have musicians and staff on payroll, with fixed labour contracts. Not depending on ticket sales, orchestras are able to organise their concert seasons well in advance and develop a long-term programming policy. At the same time, however, this secure situation results in pressure to legitimise the organisation's huge claim on taxpayers' money.

Research shows that when an organisation's legitimacy is pressurised, a logic of predictability is favoured over uncertainty (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Kremp, 2010; Zembylas, 2004). In the orchestra landscape, the consequences of that rule of thumb manifest themselves in two areas. Firstly, risk aversion results in organisational rigidity and isomorphism (Glynn, 2000; 2002). In terms of organisational structure, more specifically, risk aversion has led orchestras to organising themselves in an increasingly similar manner, as a survival strategy, whereby collective legitimacy is drawn from uniformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Secondly, the credo of certainty over uncertainty manifests itself on the artistic domain. The more the relevance of orchestras is questioned, the more they rally around the same safe core repertoire. This standard repertoire, also called musical canon, consists of those musical works that have survived historical processes of selection, such as the symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Brahms (Weber, 2001; 2008). Studies convincingly show that programming the musical canon generates more audiences, more revenue and therefore, more legitimacy (Durand & Kremp, 2015; Kremp, 2010; Osborne, 1999). Moreover, the aesthetic value of the musical canon is hardly put into question. As this repertoire has been put to the test of generations of aesthetic preferences, it is often regarded as the most representative expression of the art form (Goehr, 2002; Holoman, 2012). This fact, too, generates legitimacy, especially towards political subsidising bodies. In short, the twofold strategy of isomorphism results in a low incentive to innovate, for at least as long as a certain amount of subsidy is granted.

The downsides of that overall strategy have become painfully clear. In terms of organisations, a far-reaching segmentation of the field has occurred. Traditionally organised and subsidised symphony orchestras predominantly focus on the musical canon, while specialised ensembles have claimed those portions of the musical repertoire that do not belong to the standardised musical canon, notably the pre-1800 and post-1950 repertoire. As a result of this segmentation of the field, many organisations have turned into echo-chambers, rendering them unable to break open the stalemate between the experimental and the traditional. In the same vein, this situation has turned artistic development into a risky endeavour. Programming a musical work that takes a creative course deviating from the aesthetic norm embodied by the musical canon, poses a great risk to an orchestra seeking legitimacy (Bergeron & Bohlman, 1992), and the financial consequences that go with creative experimentation can often not be afforded by smaller ensembles. As such, legitimacy pressures have, paradoxically, led to the creative stagnation of the field as a whole. A strategic and pragmatic strategy has influenced and constrained the development and offer of musical repertoires (Herman, 2019).

In and of itself, the business models of the orchestras that follow the logics as described above can work well in the short run. Literature states that for a business model to function well, it needs to form a logical mechanism which enables the organisation to create, deliver and capture value (e.g. Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Zott & Amit, 2010). Moreover, Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010: 199) state that business models of successful organisations "generate virtuous cycles, feedback loops that strengthen some components of the model at every iteration." This means that the deliberate strategic choices made by the organisation lead to consequences, which in turn facilitate and strengthen earlier, as well as future choices. To exemplify how this works in the case of orchestras, Figure 1 shows the simplified virtuous cycle for traditional orchestras, following the methodology of Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010: 199) "where underlined elements are choices and non-underlined elements are consequences."[25] The cycle starts from the premise that these organisations structure the orchestra as a fixed ensemble, with most musicians employed under permanent labour contracts, allowing the orchestras to bind musicians, making it possible to organise the required collective rehearsals, to achieve a high quality of performance, and to develop a long-term artistic policy. An important consequence of this choice, from an organisational point of view, is the high fixed costs involved with running the organisation and as a further consequence, the need for large audiences to recover these costs. This in turn leads to a tendency to avoid large creative risks that might deter mass audiences, leading to an often-taken approach of playing time-tested canonical works, as explained earlier. Besides avoiding deterring mass audiences, the choice of playing canonical works contributes to the orchestra's public profile as a serious and well-engrained orchestra, leading to legitimacy in the field, which makes them eligible for public subsidies, a form of financing these orchestras are usually open for, when given the chance. Consequently, the subsidies allow for stable structuring of the organisation, and stipulate norms on the (artistic)

25 The figure is a simplified and generic representation of the virtuous cycles generated by the business model of traditional orchestras. Different orchestras in different settings will stress different parts of this generic model.

activities the orchestra engages in. Such organisational rigidity, finally, is best served by a fixed group of participants, which further enables the use of permanent contracts, completing one loop of the virtuous logic cycle which grows stronger in every iteration. As the cycle is strengthened only by iteration, an important consequence of this value loop is that it provides very little incentive to innovate.

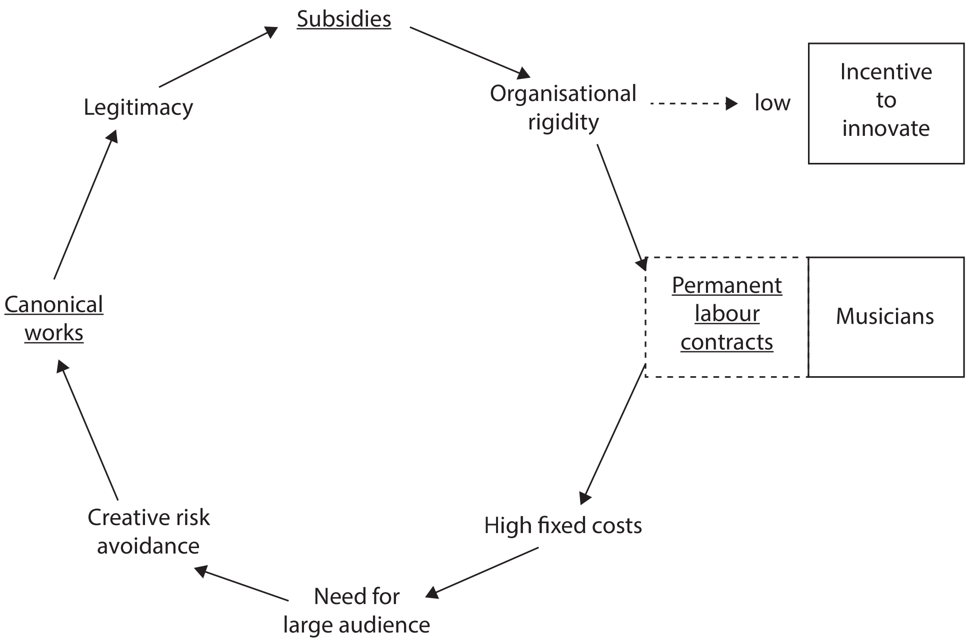


**FIGURE 1** Traditional value cycle of an orchestra

This value cycle illustrates how traditional orchestras have put themselves in an organisationally secure but artistically, rather sterile position. As opportunities for artistic experimentation without harmful financial consequences have become scarce, new organisational models are being explored. This chapter explores two alternative organisations that have nested themselves within the landscape, to fill parts of the innovation void. Both alternatively governed organisations have survived the start-up phase and have attracted international attention from art organisations operating under pressure. As such, they can be argued to successfully challenge the field's dominant logic, in adopting a distinctive and novel approach towards organising and artistic programming.

The model of Splendor Amsterdam is based on an equal division of rights and responsibilities that resonates with commoning practices, while the Belgian orchestra Casco Phil draws on principles of complementarity and modularity to balance artistic urgency and financial feasibility without subsidies. Although the long-term impact on the wider field and overall sustainability of these seminal initiatives remains to be demonstrated, an understanding of their novel approach to music production, programming, management and financing might help, firstly, to determine how these models ideally position themselves within the field and secondly, to understand how seemingly conflicting dynamics of organisational sustainability and artistic autonomy, may yet interlink.

## CASCO PHIL

Since 2008, the Flanders-based orchestra Casco Phil unites freelance musicians in a modular orchestra that operates without subsidies. Casco Phil explicitly prioritises non-canonical repertoire, in order to be a valuable addition to the orchestra landscape in Flanders. To shape this bold artistic formula into an organisational form, Casco Phil made some specific choices regarding its business model. First of all, Casco Phil is a modular orchestra consisting exclusively of freelancers. Due to the fact that there are no fixed salaries and no expectations of musicians towards long-term employment, the orchestra can be booked in different line-ups. This choice has the dual advantage of allowing the programme to be tailored to the available budget, and of allowing a very broad repertoire, from chamber music to full-scale symphonic repertoire. Secondly, Casco Phil does not specifically aim for structural subsidies, although the organisation remains open to it. Anticipating a possible further demise of the subsidy system in Flanders, the orchestra explores alternative income streams. The lack of reporting obligations to the subsidiser also grants considerable freedom in terms of time allocation and no artistic or organisational compromises need to be made to the subsidiser. Finally, the orchestra takes advantage of its flexible structure, as it is able to realise projects at very short notice. The freelance nature of the musicians and management relieves the orchestra of the need to draw up a concert schedule far in advance. That way, unexpected opportunities can be scheduled at short notice, giving Casco Phil a competitive advantage over large orchestras that do rely on long-term programming. Casco Phil's distinctive model is primarily based on the principle of modularity, which allows the organisation to realise core values that deviate from the dominant logic, within a business model that has proven to be sustainable so far.

## SPLENDOR AMSTERDAM

The second example of an alternative business model in the music sector concerns a concert hall in the city centre of Amsterdam. An organisation called Splendor Amsterdam provides 50 professional musicians from all backgrounds with a rehearsal, experimentation and concert space in an old bathhouse that has been transformed into a fully equipped music venue. What makes Splendor special is the fact that the building, as well as its entire governance, is both artistically and organisationally in the hands of the 50 musicians themselves. Since all aspects of the organisation (from acquiring finances to musical programming) are shared among its 50 members, 'commoning' is an integral part of their model. Through their organisational decisions, Splendor is able to fully utilise the twofold character of a common good (De Angelis, 2017): on the one hand, Splendor exemplifies a use value for a plurality (by providing artistic freedom to all connected artists), and on the other hand, it requires a plurality claiming and sustaining the ownership of the common good. Together, these two elements form the core values of the Splendor model: a strive for complete artistic freedom and autonomy, and a collectively shared sense of ownership and responsibility.

In exchange for a start-up fee of €1,000, each musician received a key to the building, which is available to them at all times, schedule permitting. Above all else, Splendor wants to be a safe haven for musicians, where there are no obstacles to creation and no consequences to performance: there is no formal programming policy, and all kinds of repertoires are valued equally.

Through an organic process of trial and error, Splendor's core values have crystallised into specific business model choices. Because they enforce a strict no-programming policy, the Splendor musicians deliberately avoid the Dutch subsidy system which inevitably comes with conditions and responsibilities. Secondly, when new musicians are attracted, the diversity of musical backgrounds is always preserved. Experience taught them that jazz musicians, for example, tend to use the building in a different way than classical musicians, and composers again in a different way than pop musicians. Moreover, this heterogeneity ensures that there is an enormously broad artistic potential available. Creative and cross-over musical projects often emerge when various musicians happen to run into each other in the cafeteria. Finally, Splendor only engages musicians who have a fixed salary elsewhere. That way, Splendor minimises the need for market conformism in programming, thus developing a model in which experimentation remains more important than audience attendance.

## ANALYSING THE ALTERNATIVE ORGANISATIONAL MODELS

Table 9.1 below shows an overview of the different components of the business models of both alternative cases. This table is structured by the dimensions of the business model concept as defined by Al-Debei and Avison (2010). These authors unified multiple viewpoints on the business model concept into four value dimensions which together make up the composition of a business model: 1) the value proposition ("A way that demonstrates the business logic of creating value for customers and/or to each party involved through offering products and services that satisfy the needs of their target segments"), 2) the value architecture ("An architecture for the organisation including its technological architecture and organisational infrastructure that allows the provisioning of products and services in addition to information flows"), 3) the value network ("A way in which an organisation enables transactions through coordination and collaboration among parties and multiple companies"), and 4) value finance ("A way in which organisations manage issues related to costing, pricing, and revenue breakdown to sustain and improve its creation of revenue") (Al-Debei & Avison, 2010: 366).

| | | Casco Phil | Splendor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Value proposition | **Type** | **Orchestra** | **Venue** |
| | Core values | High Quality<br>Artistic Experiment<br>Accessibility | Artistic freedom<br>High Quality<br>Collaborative management |
| | Value proposition | To the **musicians:**<br>– Artistic boundary pushing<br>– Non-binding commitment<br><br>To the **audience**:<br>– Artistic experiments<br>– Accessibility<br><br>To the **organisers**:<br>– On-demand formulas | To the **musicians:**<br>– Complete artistic freedom<br>– Key to the building<br>– Diverse pool of musicians<br><br>To the **audience**:<br>– Artistic experiments<br>– Affordable high-quality concerts<br>– Interaction with musicians |
| Value architecture | Design principle | Modularity | Commons-based |
| | Decision making | Centralised | Decentralised |
| | Programming | Combination of canon + experimental | Open / unmoderated |
| Value finance | Income | 'Stacked financing'<br>– Ticketing<br>– Corporate events | 'Stacked financing'<br>– Audience memberships<br>– Ticketing<br>– Hospitality |
| | Stance on subsidies | Open | Closed |
| Value network | Musicians | Flexible contracts, on-call | Closed group, no labour contract |
| | Audience | – Individual attendants<br>– Corporate clients | – Members<br>– Individual attendants |

**TABLE 1** Alternative Organisations Business Models

With regard to the value network, an interesting distinction can be made between both models. Whereas Casco Phil clearly benefits from, and even survives, by grace of a large network of musicians, sponsors and audiences, the Splendor model seems to be necessarily confined to its closed group of 50 partaking musicians. Low pressure for ticket incomes, which is an enormous asset from an artistic point of view, at the same time confines the actual impact of the initiative, keeping it small-scale by necessity. This issue, intrinsic to the commons-based model, strongly resembles Elinor Ostrom's suggestion that commons-based practices indeed require a more or less closed-off community (Ostrom, 1990). In their isolation, both models seem to have their virtues and vices, making their interaction with their respective environments all the more relevant to look into (cf. infra).

Even though both organisations take on a widely different approach, similarities between both cases can also be distilled. To this effect, Figure 2 shows the simplified virtuous cycle for these alternative organisations. In this case, the logic starts from a decision not to hire musicians under permanent labour contracts, but rather remain flexible, leading to relatively low fixed costs. As a consequence, there is no permanent necessity for a large audience. This opens the possibility for artistic experiments that might not attract large crowds. Therefore, a notable option facilitated by this chain of consequences is the ability to play new repertoires. This, as a result, also grants the alternative organisations a form of legitimacy: legitimacy as an innovative organisation where artistic experimentation is possible. To further maximise the possibility for innovation, these organisations typically refrain from applying for subsidies as the stipulations that potentially come with this choice could push the organisations into a context of more institutionalisation, leaving less room for experimentation. As such, the organisations retain their flexibility, which makes the choice for flexible labour contracts even more logical. As is evident, an important consequence of this value loop therefore is that the choices and consequences within this virtuous cycle generate a high incentive to innovate.

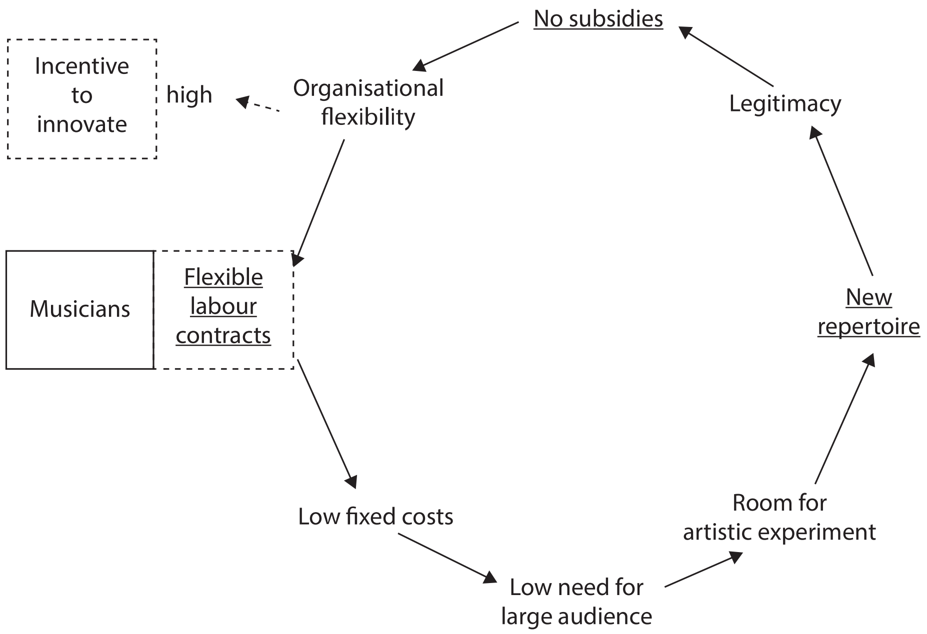


**FIGURE 2** Innovative value cycle

## INTERACTING VALUE LOOPS

As is evident, organisations do not operate in isolation of their surroundings, and inevitably interact with each other. The organisations as such are part of a larger landscape comprising different players, each with their own individual functioning. Often times, the different organisations that make up the landscape are in competition with each other on certain levels, be it for (scarce) resources such as high-level musicians, for audiences and corresponding income streams, for finite subsidies, or for a combination of aspects like these. In those cases, business models are often designed to strengthen one's own virtuous circle, while simultaneously weakening those of competitors. This makes one organisation's chances of long-term survival more robust, while making it more difficult for competitors to feed their own virtuous cycle.

Both virtuous value cycles that are exemplified above, of both the traditional and the alternative model, are effective in generating the desired effects and as they spin are able to continuously strengthen the components of the model in every iteration. As such, the long-term robustness of the business models seems to be nurtured. However, as Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2009: 5) indicate: "Once virtuous cycles get going, they take on a life of their own, … well-functioning virtuous cycles cannot be brought to a halt." This means that the models will continuously produce their virtues (respectively excellence in performing classical canonical works, and performing new repertoires), but will also continuously reaffirm their vices (respectively, stagnation of creativity and financial instability). Over time, the model's growing vices may overtake its virtues, creating a predominantly vicious cycle: "Vicious cycles are self-propagating complex chains of events with failures or negative consequences at one stage that generate increasingly serious failures or negative consequences at each subsequent stage" (Edgeman et al., 2020: 1,275).

The value cycles of both traditional orchestras and the innovative organisations contain a risk of transitioning from virtuous to vicious. In the case of the traditional orchestras, the virtuous value loop lacks an incentive to innovate, as playing recognised, canonical works reinforces their legitimacy. However, these ritualised practices have progressively alienated potential audiences from the art form and increasingly reinforce the pervasive anxiety that symphonic music has outlived its role. However, while slowly but surely diminishing the potential for artistic renewal within the industry, the virtuous value cycle does bring opportunities for stable employment and income for musicians in the industry. On the other hand, the value cycle of the innovative organisation also has an inherent and potentially more urgent potential for turning into a vice. While incentives to innovate are a predominant purpose of this cycle, a vice associated with it is that it has difficulties in providing long-term and stable employment and income possibilities for musicians, as large-scale commercialisation, as well as potential for being public funded, is limited and possibly unwanted.

Interestingly, the virtuous and vicious value outcomes seem to mirror and counterbalance each other. As such, both value systems are not in competition but rather nurture each other to potentially form a healthy overall ecosystem. Figure 9.3 shows how both value cycles interlock to form a balanced larger music landscape in which the danger of each individual value cycle's vices is obviated.

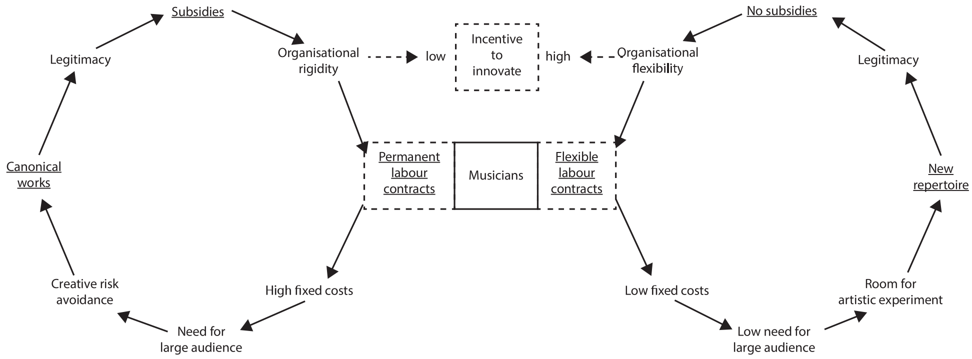


**FIGURE 3** Interlocking value systems

## CONCLUSION

The irony of the symphony orchestra's legitimacy crisis is that the dominant response has resulted in a vicious cycle of reinforcing crises, in the sense that petrification of organisational forms and stagnation of creativity have emerged. Apart from the fact that the artistic uniformity of organisations is an obvious argument for policy makers to support less of them by means of taxpayers' money, this situation has also reaffirmed existing field asymmetries. As separate organisations have each claimed segments of the orchestra's artistic terrain, closed value loops have been created that do not interact.

Recently, however, an increasing number of alternative models are taking shape that turn these dynamics around, to the benefit of the orchestral landscape as a whole. The cases of Casco Phil and Splendor Amsterdam exemplify, firstly, that diverging manners exist to achieve similar goals. While many traditional orchestras seem to adhere to (variations of) a 'dominant industry recipe' (Spender, 1989), the alternative organisations under study have shown how multiple organisational configurations can be equally effective in achieving 'success' (in this case: artistic experimentation), as captured in the concept of equifinality (Fiss, 2007).

Secondly, the analysis has shown that the overall sustainability of a single organisation depends to a great extent on the way the field is organised as a whole. For example, Casco Phil constantly speculates on the needs that the bigger orchestras cannot provide. Similarly, the Splendor system only works because the 50 musicians do not have to rely on the financial potential of the model, as they have stable jobs in bigger and financially more secure organisations. If Casco Phil or Splendor were to navigate among various likewise structured orchestras, their models would be likely to collapse. Only in the vicinity of different models can Casco Phil and Splendor make use of their competitive advantage. As the analysis in this chapter focusses on the importance of interaction between different value systems for the survival of the landscape as a whole, we follow De Angelis' (2017) suggestion not to study alternatively organised systems (such as commons-based ones) as independent endogenous systems. Rather, the power embedded in such endeavours is dependent on and influenced by external, exogenous social forces that will affect it, and thus highlighting the importance of the interaction between state, market, and alternative systems.

Indeed, these cases illustrate that distinct value logics of separate types of organisations can interlink on a larger plane, providing added value to the field as a whole. Striving for complementarity in diverse approaches, Casco Phil and Splendor have managed to link organisational sustainability and creative autonomy. As such, it is important to highlight that the unique value creation through the complementary systems – as illustrated by the interlocking value systems – can only work through the human flow between both value systems. In that sense, this system of interlocking value cycles seems to bypass the potential degradation of locality into localism mentioned in the introductory essay by Lijster, Volont and Gielen: while the commons-based Splendor model seems to be a closed-off (local) organisation confined by its 50 partaking musicians, the model indirectly generates a much wider impact (thereby transcending the local): the same Splendor musicians are indeed also part of established institutions that are often unable to foster creative autonomy on account of their own organisational model. In the same way, Casco Phil musicians are active in organisations that lack organisational modularity and creative autonomy. While these alternative organisations, in their isolation, seem closed, their individual vices are compensated by the fact that they interact with other organisations, creating an open system supported by interacting value loops. In this way, the 'closed systems' do not 'enclose' the value creation and appropriation only within their own community but rather distribute it throughout the whole landscape.

In short, Casco Phil and Splendor may serve as examples of how symbiotic relationships between various organisations (with co-dependency, equifinality and complementarity as key properties) lead to a field in which experimentation is possible without severe financial consequences. The interlocking value cycles of these organisations illustrate that solutions to problems often arise in the intersection of seemingly conflicting interests. Small-scale and innovative organisations based on alternative organisational designs, such as principled by modularity and flexibility, or on principles of the commons, serve as a creative engine, from which the innovations, under optimal conditions, flow into the major institutions. Because these new and small-scale initiative are not burdened by the same organisational field dynamics and audience expectations as big institutions, they can surprisingly afford to be a creative safe haven even though their financial situation is fragile. It is indeed this fragility that urges them to be inventive and look for the creative blind spots that keep the art form alive. These innovations are indirectly powered by major institutions, as they serve as a protective umbrella for the small-scale organisations. It is this symbiotic relation between organisations that serves as a precondition for macro-level sustainability, as it enables a transition from a segmented and sterile climate to a complementary and vibrant one where creativity can thrive[26].

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