



What happens when
civic economy meets
protocol economy?

design-charrette

15-17 September 2025, De Ceuvél Amsterdam

Civic Protocol Economies

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Civic Protocol Economies

Design Charrette
Reflective Report
& Outlook

January 2026

Iskander Smit, Martijn de Waal



Executive Summary

Between 15 and 17 September 2025, we hosted a three-day design charrette on **Civic Protocol Economies (CPE)**: the emerging intersection of community-driven civic economies and programmable, protocol-based infrastructures. Building on the 2024 exploratory study supported by the Centre of Economic Transformation, the charrette brought together 27 designers, researchers, technologists, and civic practitioners from 10 countries to test a first conceptual model, learn from grounded cases, and explore what programmable value exchange could mean when the goal is collective wellbeing rather than extraction.

Core Insight: CPE is not primarily a technology agenda—it is a *design agenda about governance, values, and relational life*, with technology as a potential enabler and amplifier.

Acknowledgements

This design charrette was supported by the Creative Innovation Call Zaaigelden 2025 of CoECI. Special thanks to Toon Maassen for hosting at De Ceuvel, to keynote speakers Indy Johar and Venkatesh Rao, to Stacco Troncoso for the DisCO workshop, and to all case holders from Afrikaander Wijkcooperatie, TU Delft, Space&Matter.

Contact

Civic Interaction Design Research Group
Hogeschool van Amsterdam
<https://civicixdproject.com/civicprotocoleconomies/>



Key Findings

Viewing civics through economic-system lenses opens new design space. An opportunity to move from an economy that's based on extraction, efficiency, profit and transactions (and based on methodological individualism) towards one that is

- Environmentally sustainable and includes externalities
- Socially sustainable - sustaining relations rather mere transactions
- Rewards different types of contributions (e.g. Care)
- Just, promoting solidarity
- Provides participants with agency within democratic systems
- Includes non-humans as participants
- Promotes individual and collective thriving/wellbeing rather than profit

The design of such systems should happen at four levels:

1. UX level that facilitates transactions and makes relationality of the system experienceable
2. Mechanics: accounting systems enabling transactions from a value-based perspective
3. Governance protocols to get some agreement on what those values are
4. Institutions (incl legal) that legitimize/ground these systems, including interfaces to interact with existing current economic systems

This is a complex design challenge, including potential value tensions concerning the economization of care relations. Our model connecting mechanics and governance through the interlinkage of three media (currencies, current-sees and rights-based tokens) is a promising direction for further exploration.

It is also a huge mental leap for local communities to grasp such systems. Therefore at this stage, it is first mandatory to do some sandboxing, speculative design to explore the possibilities and limits of such systems, and at the same time building literacy within communities about local economies as a field of design.

There are some vanguard communities already experimenting with some of these systems. Let's work with them to explore further.

Looking Ahead: Three Directions

1. Build literacy about economies and money as a design space: the ways that (local) economies function are not a given, they are systems that can be designed based on (alternative) values.
2. Explore possible directions for this design space through speculative and art interventions.
3. Seek out small scale local sites for first experiments.

As an example, take a neighborhood as starting points for community-building practices, connected to citizens with shared value bases and specific places. Focusing on making existing rituals, structures, and flows more visible and governable, the community is able to add value to these flows. Exploring how technological and natural agents can serve as neutral parties within communities—as connectors and orchestrators creating new forms of symbiosis.

Proposed Follow-Up

Rather than pursuing an independent research program, we see the most effective path forward as **contributing our unique design perspective to existing initiatives** where economic knowledge is already a driving force. Concrete connections are being developed with:

- Economic Space Agency's Economic Media Lab/Commons initiative
- University of Edinburgh's DeCaDE program (Money as Interface research)
- Common City Development initiative for developing a "Communit"
- Speculative intervention programs through Cities of Things and ThingsCon

A compact addendum to the exploratory research—synthesizing these reflections and articulating the specific contribution our design lens can make—would provide the foundation for these collaborations.

1. Context and Goals

The Design Charrette on Civic Protocol Economies was organized as part of the Creative Innovation Call Zaaigelden 2025 of CoECI, building on an initial exploratory study conducted in 2024 with seed funding from the Centre of Economic Transformation. The goal was to translate exploratory insights into concrete action by connecting lecturers, researchers, (future) professionals, and tech developers with initiatives in the community economy.

The central question that framed our inquiry: *What happens when the civic economy meets the protocol economy?* This intersection—community-driven economies meeting programmable, protocol-based infrastructures—represents largely uncharted territory requiring both theoretical development and practical experimentation.



2. The Design Charrette as Instrument

2.1 Program Design

The three-day program was carefully crafted to sequentially focus and zoom out, allowing participants to engage with civic protocol economies at multiple scales and from different angles.

Day One focused on introduction and orientation: setting the theme, sharing research findings, introducing cases from Afrikaander Wijkcooperatie, TU Delft, and Space&Matter, and framing through keynotes by Indy Johar (Dark Matter Labs) and Venkatesh Rao (Summer of Protocols). The day concluded with a shared dinner at Tolhuistuin that proved essential for group bonding.

Day Two dove into mechanics: testing the CPE model developed in exploratory research, and a hands-on session led by Stacco Troncoso (DisCO.coop) applying their seven principles for building cooperatives. This combination of analytical and practical work generated rich insights about governance models and their implementation.

Day Three moved to synthesis: participant-led deep dives into emerging topics, collective capturing of learnings, and identification of follow-up areas. Each participant completed a personal takeaway card, providing both collective and individual closure.

2.2 What We Learned About the Instrument

Several aspects of the charrette design proved particularly effective:

- **Social dimensions are crucial.** The location of De Ceuvel inspired the group, and the dinner on the first evening fostered bonding. Some participants who had planned to stay only one day ended up staying for all three.
- **Diversity of backgrounds enriched discussion.** Participants came from academia and design, with specific focus on new social technology and activism. While not a typical academic or professional gathering, this created fertile ground for identifying opportunities.
- **The topic attracts committed people.** Participants could be characterized as idealistic, technologically enthusiastic, and evangelical about new systems. This shared orientation enabled deep engagement, though it also meant certain perspectives (corporate, mainstream) were less represented.
- **Follow-up emerged organically.** A monthly online gathering emerged from participant initiative, demonstrating the community-building potential of such events.

3. Substantive Insights

3.1 The Landscape of Initiatives

Participants brought an inspiring array of directions, which can be grouped into several categories:

Networks and Agendas: The Commons Economy Roadmap, ReFi Barcelona, Commons Network, and Amsterdam Donut Coalition represent organized efforts to map pathways to regenerative, commons-based systems and embed them in specific urban contexts.

Mechanisms and Experiments: The Economic Space Agency's tools for measuring flows and trust, Material Urban Commons' work on commoning food and construction materials, Mycofi's translation of fungal exchange systems into Web3 design, and LedgerLoops' prototyping of cooperative accounting models show the technical experimentation underway.

Governance Models: Venkatesh Rao's insight that civic economies will always face value-conflicts requiring governance designed to address rather than erase them; Stacco Troncoso's DisCO framework for Distributed Cooperative Organisations; and Julia Barashkov's work adapting DAOs to govern shared physical resources.

Affective Interfaces: Sarah Barns' Storybox project using public spaces to surface the affective dimensions of relational economies—making them visible, tangible, and felt.

3.2 Key Tensions and Insights

Scale and ambition. Indy Johar urged designing civic economies at planetary and bioregional scales, while Grace Rachmany emphasized the need for interconnecting identity systems and shared codes of conduct across initiatives to enable scaling. The tension between narrow, actionable initiatives and system-change ambitions points toward a middle path: local, place-based prototypes that can federate through shared patterns.

Technology's role. A recurring insight: CPE is not primarily a technology agenda. Technology is an enabler and amplifier, but the core challenge is designing governance, encoding values, and nurturing relational life. The “ghosts of modernity” shape our patterns and habits in ways that require careful rewiring for life-affirming protocols.

Current-sees as foundation. The concept of “current-sees”—representations of activities and flows in a community—gained traction as a more fundamental starting point than currencies. Rather than programming new money, we might focus on making existing rituals, structures, and flows visible and governable.

Accessibility and framing. Concepts like current-sees simultaneously intrigued and challenged participants, revealing the tension between innovation and comprehensibility. Narrative choices should prioritize outcomes over ideology, helping communities adopt models without requiring ideological commitment.

3.3 Reflections from Society 5.0 Workshop

A subsequent workshop at the Society 5.0 conference tested our charrette findings with a fresh group. With limited time (one hour) and larger groups, we faced challenges in deeply exploring these complex topics. Several insights emerged:

- The concept of community scale resonated strongly, but participants often translated this to smaller communities, suggesting a need for templates that allow starting small while growing into networked communities.
- Introducing AI and sensors into community spaces raised concerns about privacy and data ownership, particularly in home environments—highlighting the need for non-Big Tech solutions.
- Accessibility and understandability are key to adoption; technical elegance means little if communities cannot engage with the concepts.

4. Participant Takeaways

The personal takeaway cards revealed what resonated most deeply with participants. Recurring themes included:

- *“It is all about care”*—the relational and caring dimension as foundation
- Questions of scale: what is the right scale in each context?

- The need to connect new realities to existing systems and the “real world”
- Appreciation for connections, collaborations, and the quality of exchange
- Interest in more fundamental patterns beyond currencies/tokens: “Cosmopolis & habitus as useful frames”
- Recognition that personal development toward “emotional sobriety, relational maturity, intellectual discernment, intergenerational responsibility” may be as important as technical infrastructure
- Urgency: “So much to learn & do”

5. Framing Curiosity Through Emerging Insights

Martijn de Waal’s starting point for the design charrette was a fundamental tension: our current economic systems are very good at rewarding extraction, efficiency, and profit, but largely fail to recognise and reward generative, caring, and civic forms of value creation. Inspired by work on urban commons, feminist and doughnut economics, radical civics, and commons governance, he framed the Civic Protocol Economy as an attempt to imagine economic arrangements that are environmentally sustainable, socially just, relational rather than transactional, and capable of including non-humans and externalities as participants.

At the same time, Martijn introduced a second line of inquiry: what changes when money, accounting, reputation, and rights become programmable? Drawing on examples ranging from loyalty systems and social credit scoring to blockchain-based governance experiments, he showed how protocols increasingly mediate access, recognition, and agency in everyday life. This raised a critical design question for the charrette: *can we deliberately design such protocols to support civic values rather than undermine them?*

5.1 Sharpened Reflections

By the end of day two, several reflections had sharpened this initial curiosity:

CPE cannot be approached as purely technical systems. Any accounting system that aims to reward care, maintenance, or ecological stewardship immediately runs into normative questions: what counts as value, who decides, and how flexible should such systems be? Attempts to formalise informal practices risk paternalism or exclusion, yet leaving everything informal limits scalability and durability.

Working across multiple layers simultaneously is essential. Productive explorations moved back and forth between ontology (how we define actors and relations), practices (what people actually do), and protocols (the rules, metrics, and infrastructures that shape behaviour). Rather than seeking one universal model, teams found value in designing situated, partial, and composable protocols that could federate or interoperate over time.

Designing CPE is less about blueprints and more about stewardship. Prototyping, gaming, modelling, and experimenting in real contexts helped surface value tensions, edge cases, and governance challenges early on. This positioned the charrette not as a step toward immediate implementation, but as a way to identify leverage points, research questions, and design principles for a longer-term research and action agenda.

In that sense, Martijn's initial "why bother?" evolved into a more grounded proposition: **Civic Protocol Economies are not a single alternative system, but a design space**—one that demands careful navigation between values and incentives, informality and formalisation, and speculation and practice.

6. Conclusions Relative to Original Intentions

Our original goal was to create a stronger network and series of experiments that could serve as the basis for a Horizon, NWA, or RAAK application. What we learned:

The topic deserves further exploration, but our role is as contributor rather than leader. While programming "money" to contribute to new ways of fostering societies with collective orientation is both promising and speculative, the economic systems lens remains a new and

remote field for the Civic Interaction Design research group. We can bring significant knowledge and practical experience from a design perspective, but we are better positioned to support initiatives where economic knowledge is the driving force.

Speculative cultural interventions may be our most effective lever. We see follow-up more as a program of speculative interventions or demonstrations of what is needed—using research-through-design to help communities develop further—rather than building a complete economic system ourselves.

Concrete partnerships are forming. The charrette connected us with programs that are running or in start-up phase, including the Economic Space Agency's Economic Media Lab, the University of Edinburgh's DeCaDE program, and local initiatives at Marineterrein. These offer more promising pathways than independent program development.

7. Proposed Next Steps

7.1 A Three-Step Research Approach

1. **Create a descriptive language:** Develop a system that describes communities and their behaviors through currencies, tokens, and flows. This forms a foundational language for analysis and design.
2. **Map existing communities:** Apply established principles for good community building to analyze existing neighborhoods. Map

what's already happening to understand current dynamics, using research-through-design to generate new knowledge.

3. **Develop strategies and tools:** Identify what's missing and formulate strategies and tools for creating socially engaged communities. Test these in participating cases.

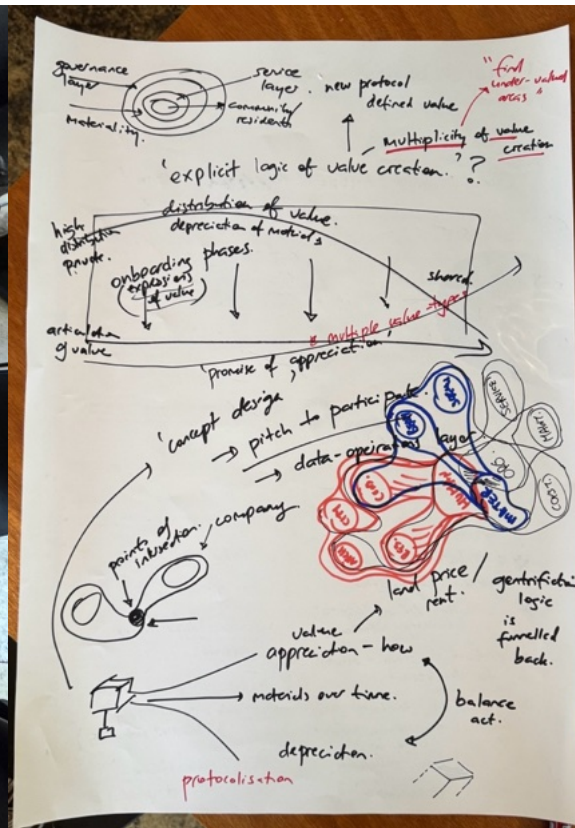
7.2 Concrete Follow-Up Actions

- Maintain monthly online gatherings with charrette participants - Ceuelings have been organized three times now, initially initiated by participants Maarten Lens-FitzGerald and Sarah Barns
- Meetings with Economic Space Agency (ECSA, December 2025) and University of Edinburgh's DeCaDE program (January 2026), scheduled meeting to discuss follow-up with Economic Media Lab (new initiative by ECSA).
- Explore speculative intervention program development through Cities of Things and ThingsCon partnerships, aiming at specific funding like Creative Industry Funding Activity Program (due June 2026) and KIEM MV.
- Prepare compact addendum to exploratory research synthesizing charrette insights and explorative research
- Connecting with existing and new communities via outreach of the program via workshop proposals in existing conferences (SXSW London, re:publica), self organized seminars at HvA, ThingsCon Salon

7.3 The Research Question Going Forward

Can we build communities of human and non-human agents that leverage a system of insights and current-sees to create reference societies that help us achieve collective goals?

This question integrates our learning about the importance of place-based approaches, current-sees as foundation, and the potential role of technological and natural agents as connectors and orchestrators within communities. It positions the Civic Interaction Design group's contribution clearly: bringing design methodology to the challenge of making civic value flows visible and governable.



Appendix A: Charrette Program

Monday 15 September — Introduction & Orientation

10:00 Welcome and introduction to the theme (Martijn de Waal)

10:30 Keynote: Indy Johar (Dark Matter Labs) — Regenerative Design

11:30 Participant introductions - Round 1

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Participant introductions - Round 2

14:30 Findings from exploratory research (Iskander Smit)

15:30 Case introductions: Afrikaander Wijkcooperatie, TU Delft Energy Cooperative, Space&Matter Vlinderhaven

17:00 Keynote (remote): Venkatesh Rao (Summer of Protocols)

18:00 Day recap and reflection

19:00 Shared dinner at Tolhuistuin

Tuesday 16 September — Deep Dive into Mechanics

09:30 Testing the CPE model (facilitated by Iskander Smit)

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 Working session: Applying model to cases

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Workshop: DisCO.coop seven principles (Stacco Troncoso)

15:30 Reflection break

16:00 Group reflections and emerging themes

17:30 Day 2 synthesis (Martijn de Waal)

18:00 Close

Wednesday 17 September — Synthesis & Next Steps

09:30 Participant-led deep dives into emerging topics

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 Capturing learnings: Group session

12:30 Identifying follow-up areas and potential collaborations

13:00 Personal takeaway cards

13:30 Joint lunch and close

Location: De Ceuvel, Amsterdam — a former shipyard transformed into a sustainable urban experiment and creative hub, which served as an inspiring backdrop for discussions about alternative economic models and community-based systems.

Appendix B: Charrette Participants

27 participants from 10 countries attended the three-day charrette. Sixteen traveled from the Netherlands, two from Spain, three from the UK, and one each from Canada, Australia, Finland, Denmark, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. The group included academics, designers, commons advocates, creators in decentralized technologies, and practitioners in future monetary systems.

Name	Organisation	Background
Iskander Smit	Cities of Things, HvA	Cities, MTH - research
Martijn de Waal	HvA Civic Interaction Design	Commons, Cities - research
Viktor Bedö	Loughborough University London	Commons - research
Gijs van Maanen	Tilburg University	Commons - research
Yulia Tikhomirova	HvA Civic Interaction	Commons - research
Grace Rachmany	Sideways.Earth	Commons - tools
Julia Barashkov	TU Delft	Cities - research
Sarah Barns	RMIT	Civics - research
Andrea Farias	NY	Web3 - tech
Giulio Quarta	ReFI	Commons - tools
Anne-Marie George	ICL	More than human
Maarten Lens-FitzGerald	Si Governance Hub	Governance
Michiel de Jong	LedgerLoops	Web3 - tech
Irina Panovich	aio.studio	Community - tech
Dagan Cohen	Amsterdam Donut Coalition	Commons - interest group
Sophie Bloemen	Commons Network	Commons - research

1 - Start & basics

As part of defining the groups, the first activity is to share in the group the interpretation of a case and describe it in your own words. Pay special attention to the civic goals. Define together a first idea of what to address with the case.

1a - group

Please share the team members for reference

1b - your case

Resource-based
An energy community



People who organize around the shared production and consumption of a single (set of) resources, such as energy, and want to do this in a sustainable and fair way. E.g: a energy community, a car sharing community.

Activity-based
A neighborhood coop



The organisation of economic activities in a neighborhood, organised from a perspective of care, relationality, sustainability (regeneration) and fairness, and enabling community members to flourish.

Place-based
A housing/working coop



Living together in a shared building, or group of buildings. The community is bound by shared living space (housing), and the shared resources are part of a set of possible shared actions connected to living.

1b - case basics

Give the case a name for recognizing, and a short description based on the first impressions

optional: inspiration from the presented cases, are there elements of a case that you would take as inspiration/point of departure?

3 - Emerging questions

Based on the discussions from the mapping, formulate the emerging questions related to the case. The questions are opening up possible approaches to design processes, services, captured in protocols.

3a - question

3b - question

3c - question

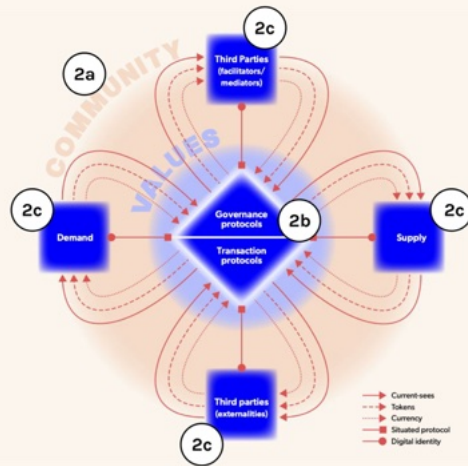
3d - question

3e - question

= briefing

2 - Mapping the case

Based on the case typology, map out the different aspects that are part of model for Civic Protocol Economies.
Please capture insights, learnings, other notable things along the way.



2a - community

Description: participants, shared goals, reason to exist, history, location, etc.

Values: civic goals, individually gains, societal embedding, etc.

2b - resources

Example: energy, labor time, access to spaces, etc.

2c - agents (human and non-human)

Agent in the transaction, those who needs/want something (**demand**)

External **facilitators** or mediators to the transaction

Agent in the transaction, those who have a offer, can contribute (**supply**)

Externalities: affected by transaction, suffer or benefit from its **externalities**



2d - signature transaction

Choose a signature description

2e - value flows

Currencies for this transaction; storage of value, indicator or expression of value, medium for exchange

Tokens for the agents in the transaction; for regulation rights, privileges. For voting, gaining priority to make the transaction happen.

Current-sees: register status of an agent or resource, compared to thresholds. Via sensors or input from agents, or analysis of previous data.

4 - Protocol design

Choose one question to address with a protocol within the community economy.
If it addresses multiple questions that is possible too.
Fill in the different elements sequentially.
Capture insights and learnings along the way.

4a - protocol goal



4c - protocol mechanics



4b - involved actors (2 or more)



4d - indicators of progress



Cheat sheet concepts

Model Civic Protocol Economy

Core Principles

- **Purpose:** Serves a community of human and non-human actors
- **System Interaction:** Engages with external actors/communities (market, state)
- **Foundation:** Built on base values, rules & rights defined by the community
- **Operation:** Automated protocols manage exchange and incentivize behavior
- **Governance:** Operates automatically until thresholds trigger new decision-making
- **Representation:** Actors use multiple digital identities

System Operation

- **Starting Point:** Protocol based on community values
- **Execution:** Rules & rights operationalized through tokens
- **Value Exchange:** Represented through currencies
- **Feedback Loop:** Activities update insights
- **Status Updates:** Translated into current-sees
- **Evolution:** System adapts based on activity and governance

Key Components

1. Communities & Members

- Pre-existing or emergent communities
- Open or closed membership
- Human and non-human actors
- Multiple digital identities per member
- Joining protocols established by initiators

2. Agents (Roles)

- **Supply Agents:** Offer resources/services
- **Demand Agents:** Need/want resources
- **External Parties:**
 - Affected by externalities
 - Facilitators/mediators (e.g., experts, officials)
- Participants can take various roles at different times

3. Transaction Protocols

- Define exchange rules within the system
- Set conditions for transactions
- May include:
 - Identity requirements
 - Environmental conditions
 - Priority mechanisms
 - Reward structures
- Can incorporate intelligence and system data
- Allow for individual preference settings

4. Governance Protocols

- Manage decision-making when conditions exceed parameters
- Voting mechanisms (various forms)
- Distribution of voting rights
- Community-based adjustments to system operation

5. Values

- Community-defined values embedded in protocols
- Focus on collective welfare
- Distinguishes civic protocol economy from standard protocol economy

6. Currencies

- Storage of value
- Expression of value (pricing)
- Medium of exchange
- Possibly multiple currencies with varying convertibility

7. Rights Tokens

- Represent specific rights/privileges:
 - Voting rights
 - Priority access
 - Resource usage
- Can be distributed equally, earned, or traded
- Required for specific transactions

8. Current-sees

- Register agent/resource status
- Compare to thresholds/ideal levels
- Informed by:
 - Sensor data
 - Agent input
 - Behavioral analysis
- Operate as steering data for decisions/incentives
- Can include predictive capabilities

Takeaways and follow-up research

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Thanks for being participating the Design Charrette. We think we will explore future research questions. We are wondering what your personal takeaways were, and if and if so, in what way you would like to participate and contribute to a follow-up.

Your personal takeaway(s)?

Would you like to contribute, and how?

How can we reach you?

Name and contact details.

