

# Social economy or peer production?

## On the relationship of social economy and peer production

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Definitions

Reasons, goals,  
means

Commonalities and  
differences

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Wrap up

# Outline

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# Examples of peer production

- ▶ Free Software
  - ▶ Oldest example
  - ▶ Very visible
- ▶ Wikipedia
  - ▶ More recent
  - ▶ Extremely visible
- ▶ Open Access
  - ▶ I.e. Free Science
  - ▶ Very interesting movement
- ▶ Others...

*A growing movement*

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# Definition: Peer production

- ▶ Focused on production of useful goods
- ▶ Based on openness
  - ▶ Everyone may participate (internal openness)
  - ▶ Everyone may use the product (external openness, commons)
- ▶ Based on Selbstentfaltung
  - ▶ Selbstentfaltung == enjoying task and project
  - ▶ Having fun individually but maintain relation to society
  - ▶ Expression of Selbstentfaltung: Volunteers do useful things for fun
- ▶ No goals beyond a nice project (aka no alienation)
  - ▶ Results in production of *use value*

*Peer production == production + openness +  
Selbstentfaltung*

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- ▶ **Hard to find a good definition**
- ▶ Common topic: Orientation in political goals
  - ▶ Fairness, solidarity, social values
  - ▶ Democracy and ecology
  - ▶ Criticism of neo-liberal concepts

*Addresses political values missing in capitalist economies*

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- ▶ Somewhat easier to find a good definition
- ▶ Common topics
  - ▶ Non-profit
  - ▶ Support for disadvantaged groups
  - ▶ May include volunteers

*Addresses poverty and unprofitable goals*

# Forms of social / solidarity economy

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- ▶ Focus on production
  - ▶ Cooperative companies
  - ▶ State companies under democratic control
  - ▶ Self-governed companies
- ▶ Focus on distribution
  - ▶ Consumer cooperatives
  - ▶ Local Exchange Trade Systems (LETS)
  - ▶ Gratis shops

*Comes in various implementations*

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# ...for social / solidarity economy

- ▶ Reason: Capitalism has shortcomings
  - ▶ Such as: social injustice, rule of money, destruction of nature, alienated labor
  - ▶ Results in political will to overcome the shortcomings
- ▶ Goal: *Repair* shortcomings of capitalism
  - ▶ In this case: By economic activities
  - ▶ Today: Retreat of the (welfare) state creates new gaps every day
- ▶ Means: Cast political will onto capitalist economy
  - ▶ Mostly by non-profit activities
  - ▶ Sometimes supported by the welfare state

*Supplement to capitalism based on political will*

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# ...for peer production

- ▶ Reason
  - ▶ Useful goods are missing
  - ▶ It's fun to create them
- ▶ Goal: Make available useful goods while having fun
  - ▶ "Make available" presupposes producing them
  - ▶ Production *is* Selbstentfaltung / fun
- ▶ Means: *Replace* capitalist production with openness and Selbstentfaltung
  - ▶ Selbstentfaltung is a direct goal
  - ▶ External openness / commons is a direct goal
  - ▶ Internal openness / participation is a precondition for peer production

*New mode of production beyond political will*

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- ▶ Valorization is opposed to openness
  - ▶ Commodities must be scarce == no external openness
  - ▶ Business secrets are to be kept == no internal openness
- ▶ Market is opposed to Selbstentfaltung
  - ▶ Abstract money logic prevents Selbstentfaltung
  - ▶ Relative quality is “good enough”
- ▶ Economic approach fundamentally different from capitalism

*A new mode of production*

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# Commonalities

- ▶ Common goal: Improve life by certain economic activity
  - ▶ Attain goals impossible in capitalism
- ▶ Economic activities
  - ▶ == production, distribution, consumption of goods
- ▶ Beneficiaries inside and outside
- ▶ Embedded in capitalism
- ▶ Non-profit
- ▶ Individuals as predominant actors

*There are similar structures and a common goal*

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# Most important differences 1/2

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<b>Topic</b>	<b>Social / solidarity economy</b>	<b>Peer production</b>
Relevance of production	Secondary	Predominant
Distribution target	Closed groups	Commons
Reason for activity	Political will	Selbstentfaltung

## Most important differences 2/2

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<b>Topic</b>	<b>Social / solidarity economy</b>	<b>Peer production</b>
Political values	Key	None in particular
Mode of production	Basically the same as capitalism	New mode of production
<i>Relationship to capitalism</i>	<i>Repairing as a goal</i>	<i>Replacing as a means</i>

*Some structures are similar but the differences go deep*

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# Fundamentally different approaches 1/2

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<b>Topic</b>	<b>Social / solidarity economy</b>	<b>Peer production</b>
History	Old approach with little effect	New approach based on contemporary options
Actors	Marginal groups	Core groups

# Fundamentally different approaches 2/2

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<b>Topic</b>	<b>Social / solidarity economy</b>	<b>Peer production</b>
Origin	Political will and awareness	Needs of people and ability
Means and goals	<i>Repairing</i> capitalism is a <i>goal</i>	<i>Replacing</i> capitalism is a <i>means</i>
Mode of production	Capitalist framework is kept	Capitalist framework is replaced

*What looks similar on first glance is really very different*

## Fundamentally different approaches 2/2

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# Suggestions for a long-term improvement

- ▶ Question: How does fundamental societal change come about?
- ▶ Answer: By a new mode of production
  - ▶ Historical example: Shift from feudalism to capitalism
- ▶ Social / solidarity economy *is* necessary
  - ▶ Retreat of the welfare state needs action
- ▶ Social / solidarity economy offers *no* perspective
  - ▶ No way to overcome capitalist mode of production
- ▶ Peer production is *the* perspective
  - ▶ Establishes a new mode of production
  - ▶ This is the sustainable way to change society fundamentally

*If you want to be effective support peer production*

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# Summary

- ▶ Some structural commonalities
- ▶ Main difference in relationship to capitalism
  - ▶ *Repairing as a goal*
  - ▶ *Replacing as a means*
- ▶ New mode of production as an effective way to overcome capitalism

Social economy or  
peer production?

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Definitions

Reasons, goals,  
means

Commonalities and  
differences

Overcoming  
capitalism

Wrap up

# Thank you!

- ▶ Thank you for your attention
- ▶ More: <http://www.oekonux.org/>
- ▶ Contact: [smerten@oekonux.de](mailto:smerten@oekonux.de)
- ▶ Extended version of the slides:  
<http://en.wiki.oekonux.org/StefanMerten/Talks/SocialEconomyOrPeerProduction/Slides>
- ▶ Questions? Comments?

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