

Can the Prosumer Economy be a Posthumanist Economy?

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Abstract

Devastated by the ongoing climate and biodiversity crises, humanity is seeking a way out. For this, the current system where profit maximization, consumption, and human dominance over nature needs to change. In the current anthropocentric economic system, human beings are considered to be the most central and significant entities in the world. Both posthumanism and the prosumer economy reject this idea. The prosumer economy postulates a way to transform the profit-maximizing consumer economy into one that is based on ecological and social justice. This shared critique indicates a relationality between these two movements. We propose an existence where the prosumer economy is the economic system of a posthumanist world. The combination of these two ideas could provide the philosophical depth of the posthumanist perspective into the practice of the prosumer economy and provide an option for posthumanism to be further actionable.

Keywords: Prosumer Economy; Posthumanism; Profit-Maximization; Anthropocentrism; Consumption

Introduction

Given the atrocities caused by the anthropocentric mindset and the current economic system based on consumption and profit-maximization, it can be safely stated that we need a paradigm shift. Change should be towards a posthumanist existence, since the ecological crises we are in prove that human hubris is highly destructive. Bearing this in mind, the posthumanist movement is indispensable for a human existence in symbiosis with nature. A new economic model that emerged in Turkey, the ‘prosumer economy’ (Özesmi, 2019) could also be viewed as a system in the posthumanist mindset and seeks to provide an alternative to the current GDP-led economic system (Raworth, 2017). This paper demonstrates the intersection between the prosumer economy system and posthumanist perspectives. It investigates whether the prosumer economy can become the economy of posthumanist sustainability practices, which are focused not on a linearly imagined future, but rather on the entanglements of beings, the diversity of temporal dimensions of the past, present, and futures, as well as its various scales (Daigle & Cielemecka, 2019). Therefore, the prosumer economy and posthumanism have many overlaps, intersections, and entanglements.

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Prosumer economy

The prosumer economy is an economic system that emerged with the hopes of putting an end to the ecological and social damages caused by the currently hegemonic growth-based consumer economy (Raworth, 2017). As opposed to the consumer economy, the prosumer economy is a:

macro-scale circular economy with minimum negative, or even positive, ecological and social impact, an ecosystem of producers and prosumers, who have synergistic and circular relationships with deepened circular supply chains, networks, where leakage of wealth out of the system is minimized [...] In a prosumer economy there is no waste, no lasting negative impacts on the ecology, and no social exploitation [...] The prosumer economy is like a lake or a forest, an economic ecosystem that is productive, built on synergistic relationships, and supportive to the planet (Özesmi, 2019).

The prosumer economy although successfully implemented, is not the only economic framework which prioritizes social and ecological well-being instead of corporate profits. Degrowth, just like the prosumer economy, comprises a critique of the global capitalist system and its pursuit of growth at all costs, causing human exploitation and environmental destruction. Degrowth entails shrinking rather than growing economies, so that we use less of the world's energy and resources and put wellbeing ahead of profit (D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014; Masterson, 2022). However, the degrowth movement separates from the prosumer economy (and the posthumanist movement) by its centralization of the human. Although recently formed, the degrowth movement still has an anthropocentric foundation. It consequently fails to address philosophical complexity, maintaining an anthropocentric worldview makes economic degrowth impossible unless the humanity, as an intrinsic shaper and a destructive member of the biosphere under a progressivist agenda, is not critiqued deeply (Åsberg & Radomska, 2019). Besides the prosumer economy and degrowth, there are also other models and movements such as the commons movement and solidarity economics that focus on social and ecological well-being.

The commons movement holds the commons to be a crucial part of both the economy and society as well as a valuable lens through which to see resources that need to be shared (Standing, 2019). The commons provide not only a positive vision of a more just and environmentally sustainable society, but also acts as a check on the excesses of the market and governmental sectors. The commons movement is primarily based on the use of humans of shared resources by all. This has been also recognized by Alix, in a coda that tries to bring in the perspective of posthumanism into the commons movement. Alix critiques the commons movement as it focuses on human's use of the commons and how that use, as a collective task, is viewed as a duty, and proposes an alternative, posthumanist take on the commons by 'performing well in these collective care tasks—channelled through reciprocal duties of the “commoners”—has an impact on the existence of certain rights that determine the well-being of the living beings—both human or non-human—that make up the natural-cultural community' (Alix, 2023).

Moreover, the solidarity economy presents a further alternative social framework, placing emphasis on prioritizing the well-being of individuals and the environment over the pursuit of profits and expansion (Satici & Özesmi, 2022). According to Miller, the solidarity economy is a cohesive and all-encompassing economic system that centres around values associated with quality of life instead of solely maximizing profits (Miller, 2004). The solidarity economy is currently gaining political momentum, as it offers a viable alternative to the prevailing reality of profit-driven companies with limited ethical responsibilities. However, in practice the solidarity economy operates within an



unjust context where financial incentives favour investments in limited liability setups, incentivizing investors to easily reap substantial profits. The solidarity economy also encounters difficulties (e.g. gender dynamics, hierarchical management expectations, and scaling) and constraints (e.g. access to finance and credits and bureaucratic regulations) stemming from other economic actors like governments, market players, and societal norms. Additionally, there are internal challenges related to infrastructure, participation, and the preferences of its members. The future of the solidarity economy as an economic model relies on addressing these challenges through the establishment of a robust and suitable legal framework, and the implementation of supportive public policies (Utting, Dijk & Mathei, 2014).

Amongst these movements, the prosumer economy is the closest model to the posthumanist mode of thought since other models and movements either have an anthropocentric view or a political angle and/or agenda. Uniquely, the prosumer economy takes the position of being inspired by nature and thereby creates an economic ecosystem through symbiosis. Let us delve into already existing ecosystems on the planet to exemplify this notion of an economic ecosystem.

Similar to an economic ecosystem, a lake or a forest is defined by physical boundaries, such as geomorphology, altitude, or climate. They are complex and productive, just like a well-functioning economy. They are full of life, containing a myriad of producers and consumers—or, rather, prosumers.

Let us first look at the Baikal Lake ecosystem. Lake Baikal, located in the South Siberian region of Russia, is the world's deepest and largest lake by volume. Lake Baikal is also the oldest lake in the world, with at least 25 million years, and was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 1996). Lake Baikal constitutes 20% of the world's freshwater reserves and is very rich in biodiversity. The lake provides an important source of income for people living around the lake from both commercial and recreational fishing (Matveyev & Samusenok, 2015). This lake ecosystem is home to many endemic species that are not found anywhere else in the world. Lake Baikal has more than 3,700 endemic species, which is about 80% of the biota. The most famous of these endemic species is Baikal nerpa *Pusa sibirica*, the world's only freshwater seal (Szalay, 2017). In addition to more than 50 fish species, Lake Baikal has over 100 species of flatworms, 700 species of arthropods (insects, spiders, and crustaceans), and 170 species of mollusks. All of these invertebrates help purify the water of Lake Baikal. Rich in biodiversity and based on unique cycles, Lake Baikal is a productive ecosystem providing many services to humans and other beings as well as maintaining itself as a system for millions of years (Satıcı & Özçesmi, 2022).

Lake Baikal is no exception, the Amazon Rainforest, the largest rainforest in the world, includes at least 15,000 different tree species and covers 40% of the world's tropical forests' area. Despite being 55 million years old, the Amazon Rainforest has remained as one of the world's richest and most diverse biological reservoirs, inhabited by millions of insects, plants, birds and other creatures (Maslin et al., 2005). Amazon Rainforest is home to about 390 million trees and to about 2.5 million insect species and 2,000 different mammals as well as bird species (Müller, 2020). In addition to being a home to and nurturing exceptionally rich biodiversity, the annual total economic contribution of the Amazon Rainforest's ecosystem service was estimated to be approximately 3.527 billion in the 2007 USD price index (4.620 billion USD in 2021), which is 3.4 times more than the world's 20 most valuable companies' total income of 1.367 billion USD in 2021 (Webster, 2017). This alone would humble any human existence, construct, and economy.

Lake Baikal and the Amazon Rainforest serve as precedents to the economic ecosystem the prosumer economy seeks to be. Both ecosystems sustain economic vitality based on give-and-take interactions and circularity. Just like Lake Baikal or the Amazon Rainforest, the prosumer economy is circular, ecologically just, and creates minimum negative or even positive impact on Earth. This planet can host the prosumer economy just as it hosts our ecosystems, which are symbiotic with the ecosphere, in the most ecologically sustainable way.

Ethical roots of posthumanism and the prosumer economy

Posthuman ethics compels us to embrace the concept of multiplicity within our own subjectivity, recognizing the interconnectedness that links us to various 'others' in a complex and vital network of relationships (Braidotti, 2013). This ethical principle challenges the notion of unity, completeness, and singularity, while also dismantling dominant narratives of fundamental deprivation, immeasurable absence, and irreversible detachment. From this perspective, the ethical nature of the posthuman lies in perceiving humanity as a purpose rather than a mere object. Contrary to seeking validation within the human category, posthuman ethics aims to include everything, disregarding and aiming to free life from the repercussions of constructing, manipulating, and perpetuating the concepts, classifications, and historical development of what it means to be 'human' or part of humanity (MacCormack, 2012).

Posthumanism suggests that we should stop thinking of ourselves as superior to the rest of the planet and accept that we are just another species dwelling on Earth. So, in relationality with the posthumanist perspective, we can consider the human economic ecosystem as just another oikos of this planet. Taking this into account, the companies, social enterprises, charities, civil society organizations, individuals, and so forth can be viewed as various organisms in this economic ecosystem. Economic ecosystems are complex systems where a society's economic activities interact with one another, transforming resources through production, distribution, and consumption processes. Legal entities, referred to as corporations, engage in transactions with other legal entities or individuals, just like a natural ecosystem interacts with all other entities on the planet. However, the difference in the human ecosystem is that it operates linearly and generates waste. The solution lies in achieving circularity within this ecosystem. To better understand this circularity, we can take the example of soap production. The required oil for soap in the human ecosystem is produced from olives squeezed from olive trees, which obtain energy from the sun and grow on agricultural land. Afterward, we use the ashes from burning oakwood as a heat source. The wood is captured energy from the Sun's rays through photosynthesis that produces lignin, a form of carbohydrate. The ashes without turning into waste are used in the production of alkalis from the lye, which is also needed for producing soap. Once the soap is used, the water can be redirected back to the fruit orchard for irrigation and fertilization. Thus, this soap in a water solution and the ashes used as fertilizer become part of the natural cycle without generating waste and establishes circularity.

What the prosumer economy envisions is very similar to this idea, as it aspires to be like a lake or a forest, with its organisms in harmony with each other and nature, existing together and fairly, while creating value. In fact, just like the soap example, the prosumer economy seeks circularity in all forms of production. As a real-life example of the prosumer economy in practice, Good4Trust⁴ which is a microcosm of prosumer economy, operates in the same way. Good4Trust is a non-profit social enterprise where socially and ecologically just small or medium enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprises, cooperatives, civil society organizations, and individuals trade their products and

⁴ For details, see <https://good4trust.org/>



services. They try to deepen their supply networks amongst each other, creating circular pathways. At Good4Trust, as a prosumer economy system, the main focus is to ensure the wellbeing of nature and humans rather than externalizing costs to them to maximize profits. This system could be one of the ways for posthumanism to experiment with possible economies as it also is based on ethical values and also prosumer economy can greatly benefit from such a wide philosophical movement.

The prosumer economy accepts a set of values called the 'golden rule.' The golden rule states that a person or enterprise treats others as they wish to be treated themselves. But who are the 'others' mentioned in the golden rule? From the anthropocentric point of view, the other is assumed to be limited to other human beings. But if we want to exist in peace with the planet, the golden rule must be extended to all other, living and nonliving, beings. Therefore, according to the prosumer economy, the golden rule covers all beings on Earth instead of just humans. In fact, the golden rule is not an innovation that emerged in the 20th century. On the contrary, it dates back thousands of years. As a matter of fact, Confucius advised not to treat others the way you would not like to be treated (Satıcı & Özçesmi 2022). The difference in the prosumer economy's golden rule is what connects this ethical principle with posthumanism: it takes humans out of the centre and broadens the others to all beings (Ferrando, 2019). Thus, the golden rule in the prosumer economy is in relationality with posthumanism.

The need for a philosophical partner

The prosumer economy and posthumanism have similar purposes; nonetheless, there are certain differences between these two ideas. Posthumanism is both influenced by and influences efforts to transform common perceptions of humans and humanity. Rather than a single theory, we see posthumanism as a repository that encompasses a variety of perspectives, scientific frameworks, knowledge systems, and ways of understanding. This includes incorporating traditional and indigenous viewpoints. Essentially, posthumanism comprises a collection of scientific, philosophical, and artistic understandings concerning the posthuman condition (Dedeoğlu & Zampaki, 2023). The humanist tradition considers the human as an independent, unattached, and self-sufficient being, limiting itself to using the world without getting contaminated with it (Ferrando, 2013). According to humanism, 'humans' naturally stand at the centre of things; are entirely distinct from animals, machines, and other nonhuman entities, and are self-aware (Ağın, 2020). Posthumanism, on the other hand, argues that humans and other beings are not different in the realization of change in the universe, which sees human beings as a part of a whole by removing it from the centre. Posthumanism asks us to remember our true place in the world; we are an integral part of nature. Broadly speaking, posthumanism is a philosophical framework that questions the primacy of human beings and the necessity of the human as a category. The posthumanist ontology profoundly relies on the concept of heterogeneity. Posthumanism, which is open to new philosophical ideas, envisions a future that is not racist, more ethical, and more visibly politicized (Sampanikou, 2023). Whereas the prosumer economy lacks the philosophical depth of posthumanist perspective and does not dive deeper into the aforementioned issues. This does not necessarily indicate a tension between the prosumer economy and the posthumanist perspective, rather, it provides a deeper understanding for the prosumer economy to look at the economic ecosystem not divorced from its historical roots and power structures that exist today. This can even be considered a practical advantage for the prosumer economy, and it aligns with the current efforts to look at the practical aspects of posthumanism. The prosumer economy, in itself, is informed and aware of the critique of humanism and anthropocentrism, as it can be seen from its inclusive golden rule. The prosumer economy wishes not to dismiss or reproduce the atrocities of

the past and seeks to reach a place of sustainability among humankind and nature. And the philosophical depth of posthumanism as a movement would shed light on the prosumer economy's contribution to a more just and harmonious existence.

Secondly, posthumanism is set out to see the possible futures differently. Under the umbrella of posthumanism, human-android relationship is also considered (Sousa, 2022). These discussions on human-android relationship and technological advances are focused on how new technological developments should be in harmony with nature—that is to say, technological development should not be for the sake of maximizing profit but for the well-being of nature and the life-support systems of the planet. But the profit maximization mentioned here is in line with the transhumanist appreciation of the posthuman. The understanding of posthumanism varies depending on whether it is approached from a transhumanist or posthumanist perspective. Consequently, different responses and reactions have arisen in relation to posthumanism. So, it is crucial to recognize the “posthumanist posthuman” from these admirations (Dedeoğlu & Zampaki, 2023). Whereas the prosumer economy focuses mostly on adapting to the planetary support systems and building a just system. Sustainability with the planet and building a just system, rather than having discussions on future technological developments such as the aforementioned topic. It is important to underline that the prosumer economy, by itself, does not intend to be a philosophical or political movement; its purpose is to transform the current economic paradigm into one where humans can exist in symbiosis with nature. This further bolsters the idea that the prosumer economy needs a philosophical partner and follows the same ethical principles as the posthumanist perspective because, instead of focusing on what the posthuman is, posthuman ethics seeks to understand how posthuman theory creates new, imaginative ways of understanding relations between lives (MacCormack, 2012). Moreover, the combination of these ideas would be mutually beneficial—the philosophical depth of the posthumanist movement would enrich the prosumer economy, while putting the posthumanist perspective into practice and establishing an economy based on those values would strengthen the philosophical movement.

Imagined futures in posthumanism and the prosumer economy

The future vision of the prosumer economy is to form a macroscale circular economy with minimum negative or positive ecological and social impact. A future where we have an ecosystem of producers and prosumers who have synergistic circular relationships with deepened supply networks. The food we buy is organic, free of toxins, and healthy; we get it at a fair price. We are sure that the workers behind all modes of production are socially protected, are at a legal age to work, and have enough income to assure a good education for their children. The prosumer economy imagines a future at the global level where we have no more concerns about the extinction of animals or other living beings, as they have rights and a secured habitat. Moreover, posthumanism's sustainability practice is striving for a vision of world where all beings live in harmony without the domination of one from another, including the end of environmental destruction (Daigle & Cielemecka, 2019). If we compare the sustainability practices of these two concepts, we can see that humans as part of nature and the desire to reach a state of symbiosis with Earth and the integrity and well-being of Earth's ecology is essential in both movements.

The climate and biodiversity crises prove that the life support systems for humans and many other living beings will collapse in the near future if we do not dramatically shift our paradigm, create a posthumanist future, and organize a prosumer economy. The prosumer economy is a new economic system that wishes to instigate a paradigm shift from the profit-maximization-oriented consumer



economy into an economic system that is ecologically and socially just. The prosumer economy understands the danger of human hubris and seeks a future where humans can be in symbiosis with nature. In a similar ethical point of view, the posthumanist perspective critiques humanism and states that humans are not at the centre of the world. This shared look at humankind's place on Earth indicates a relationality between these two movements. It is possible to envision a future where the prosumer economy is the economic system of a posthumanist world. In fact, the combination of these ideas would be mutually beneficial—the philosophical depth of the posthumanist movement would enrich the prosumer economy, while putting the posthumanist perspective into practice and establishing an economy based on those values would strengthen the philosophical movement. With the posthumanist movement and the idea of a prosumer economy spreading in the world, more and more people are grasping the gravity of the situation and rethinking their places on Earth. This shift in mindset is crucial and very much needed to instigate change for continued biodiversity, including humans, to thrive and flourish on Earth.

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