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Investors and Patrons, Gatekeepers and Social Capital: Representations and Experiences of Fans' Participation in Fan Funding

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Investors and Patrons, Gatekeepers and Social Capital: Representations and Experiences of Fans' Participation in Fan Funding

Francesco D'Amato

Introduction

The expression 'fan funding' refers to the participation of fans in cultural productions through financial contributions made to a specific project, in response to the request of a creative subject (individual or organization). This practice has grown exponentially since 2006 and was triggered by the participative web, in that the expression is generally used when the request for funds and the actual funding take place on the creative's website or – as happens more often – on web-platforms specialized in offering fan funding services. Drawing on different exploratory studies conducted between 2010 and 2012 and on comparisons with other studies on the same topic, my aim is to provide some insights into how fan participation and relationships between artists and fans are represented in discourses and in value propositions regarding fan funding, how they are concretely articulated within fan funding practices, and how are they experienced by both parties involved. The observation of these aspects calls for the notion of social capital and the studies on web-mediated participative practices.

In the context of fan studies, the expression 'participatory culture' refers mostly to the wide variety of practices through which fans participate actively in the construction and circulation of cultural objects and texts: from support to production, planning and circulation of objects of passion, to the completion and reinterpretation of the outputs of processes activated by others or their reappropriation as inputs – material elements and/or creative ideas – for new performances and productions (Fiske 1992; Jenkins 1992). Through such *expressive* practices, the experiences of the individuals tend to coagulate in *community* forms of reciprocal recognition and interaction with other fans, a second aspect that distinguishes participatory fan culture and the first wave of fan studies (id; Busse and Gray 2011). Some participatory dynamics, pertinent both to the formation of fan cultures and their internal hierarchies, were examined elaborating the notion of cultural capital developed by Bourdieu (1983, 1986). For example, John Fiske (1992: 37–45) and Sarah Thornton (1998: 18–23) called attention to how fan practices produce specific knowledge that helps to distinguish a specific fan culture from the others; this knowledge can then be invested strategically to obtain benefits like integration within a group, recognition and status. As far as I know, the literature on fan studies has demonstrated less interest in the notion of social capital, whether in the Bourdieu's acceptance, regardless of its potential relevance to the study of the construction of distinctions and hierarchies

(Hills 2002: 56–7), or in other formulations that constitute a reference for social capital studies (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001), potentially pertinent to the analyses of the community and collaborative dimension of fan cultures. However, some participative practices mediated by the web call for either greater attention towards this concept and the consideration of a different purpose compared to its rare uses in the studies on participatory fan culture (which I will refer to later on), concerning the relationship between promoters of a cultural production and fans, beyond the relationship between fans.

The reference to the notion of social capital is implied in fan funding logic and is sometimes explicitly formulated by web-services. Fan funding represents a specific version of crowdfunding, one applied to the financing of artistic and cultural projects, the fundamental principles of which can be found in the manifesto published by the Kapipal crowdfunding platform (Kapipal 2009):

1. Your Friends Are Your Capital
2. Your Friends Make Your Dreams Come True
3. Your Capital Depends on the Number of Friends
4. Your Capital Depends on Trust
5. Your Capital Grows by Word Of Mouth.

Simply add the word ‘fans’ and you have the principles of what is sometimes referred to as fan funding. These principles exemplify the core concept of *social capital*: relationships based on trust, norms, shared values or affection that can constitute a resource for people ‘to achieve things they could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty’ (Field 2008: 1). In most discourses about fan funding, the willingness to support artists, mainly by means of financial contributions but also in other ways (that is, the fifth principle of the Kapipal manifesto), is what defines some people as fans – on the grounds of the common assumption concerning the greater productivity and participation that distinguish them from ‘ordinary’ consumers – and fans as social capital. In fact, fans have often been considered privileged interlocutors for artists and producers, not only as a relevant market segment, potentially more interested in merchandizing or in collateral projects and initiatives, but also for the many forms of support they can provide, be they autonomous or solicited: for example, the promptness to provide required inputs and feedbacks, to promote the object of passion amongst those who are not familiar with it and to defend it when criticized, to support its distribution, planning or performance amidst those with the power to stop it or prohibit it and to provide economic support (Lewis 1992; Jenkins 1992; Ranalli 2003). From this viewpoint, fan networks may be considered a resource from which the object of passion may benefit, together with those who contribute to their production: social capital produced foremost by the affective tie generated through fan practices of consumption and reappropriation, which in many cases – especially in the context of affective and participative economics – is often consciously supported and fuelled by artists and producers, through special interactions and initiatives undertaken to cultivate their relations with fans.

On the other hand, the relations constituting social capital may create advantages for certain people at the expense of others (Burt 2005: 4) and function to produce or reproduce inequalities and hierarchies (Field 2008). In the case of fandom, for example, not only may a bigger number of fans and/or their greater spending capacity constitute an advantage for an artist compared to others (for example in winning a talent contest), but such an advantage may derive from a privileged social or economic position. There are also types of circumstances in which the instrumental use of the affective relationship with fans is considered almost as a form of exploitation. An example might be the case of an artist who delegates his/her fan club the promotion – free of charge – for performances that will result in economic profits.

Fandom can be – and it has been – envisaged as social capital from another point of view as well: consider the trust and the mutual solidarity that may emerge among fans who share the same passion, potentially enhanced by specific rituals or by sharing specific physical or media spaces wherein the community recognized itself. As an example, in his research on Kevin Smith fandom, Tom Phillips shows how the communal experience and appeal of Smith fandom are better understood pointing to the greater value placed on the strengthening of social capital rather than the displaying of capital cultural, and in fact the latter is even largely irrelevant for the accumulation of the first (Phillips 2011). On the one hand, interactions with other followers and with their texts – discourses, interpretations, evaluations, products – constitute a validation and a crucial *resource* for the expressive practices of the fans (Jenkins 2008; Busse and Gray 2011). On the other hand, thanks to the sharing of a passion, the social tie and the potential sense of belonging may also become a fundamental motivation and reward for fandom (Fiske 1992; Baym 2008). Nancy Baym states that ‘the supportive exchange of resources [is] often implied when people use the term “community” in digital contexts’ is closely related to social capital, and that ‘online fans and hobbyist group exemplify’ one kind of this social support, namely ‘social integration or network support’ (Baym 2010: 82–3). Again, in this case too, the differences in ‘fan social capital’, intended as ‘the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses, *as well as* their access to media producers and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom’ (Hills 2002: 57) may contribute to the production of fandom hierarchies.

Today the participative architecture of Web 2.0 potentially affords more effectiveness and visibility of fandom practices, supporting their relational, productive and collaborative dimension, fuelling the fans’ self-reflective capacities (Marinelli and Andò 2009: 192) and their negotiating power with institutional players of cultural production (Jenkins 2008; Fabris 2008), who increasingly acknowledge their centrality and encourage their participation within the context of wikinomics and crowdsourcing (Tapscott and Williams 2006; Howe 2008). However, other analyses have revealed how inequalities and hierarchies can also be generated through and within web-mediated participative practices, including ones involving fans, once again due to differences in abilities to both access and mobilize social capital. They may also be generated through the management of technological settings that host and enable participation, promoted by means of the empowerment rhetoric contained in the value propositions of many web-platforms 2.0, in such a way as to gain greater economic benefits from the creative, communicative and emotional output of fans (Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody 2008; Schafer 2011).

These considerations are especially relevant insofar as most fan funding campaigns are conducted through web-services that are dedicated to particular forms of expression or to cultural production in general, like: the SellaBand website for ‘fan funded music’; the ‘fan record label’ MyMajorCompany; the PledgeMusic ‘direct to fan’ web-platform; CinemaShares, the ‘fan-based financing system’ for motion picture projects which ‘allows millions of movie fans to actually have the pride of ownership in major upcoming movies’; ArtistShare, ‘first in fan funding’ and the place ‘where fans make it happen’; Sonic Angel, where ‘fans make the difference!; FilmAngel.TV, where a ‘fan can support his favorite Filmmaker’; SliceThePie, which ‘connects Music Fans with the best new Artists’; FeedTheMuse, ‘a simple and safe way for fans, friends and family to support your creative ideas online’,¹ just to mention a very few.

1 www.sellaband.com/en/pages/about_us; www.pledgemusic.com/; www.cinemashares.com/film_producers.html; www.artistshare.net/v4/; www.filmangel.tv/docs_filmangel/en/faq; www.sonicangel.com/docs/en/index; www.slicethepie.com/?c=information&insert=ABOUT; www.feedthemuse.net/aboutus.php.

Henceforth in this chapter, fan funding practices mediated by web-services are considered and fan participation is examined in relation to the activities of the other two types of subjects involved: creatives seeking funding and fan funding websites. In this way, possible connections between specific articulations of the artist-fan relations and the way different platforms set up fan funding, through discourses and technology, can be noted. The following section focuses on the value propositions and on the functioning of fan funding platforms, while some results of fan funding participant interviews are brought to attention in the third section. The two sections are based on the analysis of 22 websites dedicated to crowdfunding for cultural projects (both general, and devoted to specific sectors, as music or cinema) and on 46 interviews (25 artists and 21 investors). Several forums and blogs dedicated to crowdfunding have been analysed too.²

Setting and Motivating Fan Participation: the Fan Funding Web-platforms

Fan funding platforms may be categorized according to the proposed funding model, the functioning or the business model. It is possible to distinguish two funding models according to the type of funding: in some cases fan funders acquire the right to receive part of the possible earnings generated by the commercial exploitation of the output in return for their contributions, which in such cases appear as micro-investments rather than simple donations. Most platforms enable only campaigns in the form of micro-patronage or micro-investment. Secondly, services may range from simply providing a meeting place for applicants and potential investors, to the management of financial transactions, up to different levels of professional support for the phases of production, promotion and distribution resulting from a successful campaign. Finally, business models are based on one or more of the following revenue items to varying degrees: fees deducted from funds collected by successful campaigns, microfees on transactions, advertising, shares on profits (mostly for services that support production and marketing).

All web-platforms tend to be presented as services that offer artists tools for finding alternative methods of funding their projects while maintaining copyrights, increasing independence and gaining more economic advantages than would be possible with more traditional forms of financing. The alternative is represented by the interlocutors: digital networks allow the gathering of micro-contributions from anyone who appreciates an artist or his/her project more easily and efficiently than would have been possible in the past. The promise of empowerment that these services offer artists therefore arises from fan participation, which different platforms tend to represent and solicit in very similar ways.

Fans are in turn represented as being empowered by fan funding services that offer them this opportunity to contribute to the decision on what to produce, thereby replacing traditional scouts or gatekeepers, who are usually considered inefficient, due to their own shortcomings or to environmental changes, or more attentive to marketing potential than quality. For example, the fan funded music website SellaBand explains that the idea

came from a love of music and the frustration of hearing the same artists always on the radio, while so many talented artists remain unnoticed by the traditional music industry. ... So we decided to change this situation by leveling the playing field for

² Interviews have been conducted by me and by Michelangelo Strati, Milena Cassella, Federico Camici, Dora De Miguel Rubio and Andrea Miconi.

both artists and fans. SellaBand gives all artists an equal opportunity to pursue a musical career, we are not the filter, it's the music fans who decide. (Van Doorn 2010)

SellaBand invites fans to use the web-platform:

because you are tired of the traditional music industry deciding who can record an album, thereby deciding what you have to listen to. Because you want to discover new talent and help them with the start of their career. Because you want to help established artists to become independent from the record labels. Because you want to be part of the creation of music projects. Because you want to change the way the music industry works.

Especially in sectors in crisis, like the music industry, fan funding tends to be represented as a solution to the problems afflicting artists and fans alike, as it is based on their empowerment at the expense of traditional players. Thanks to participation enabled by web-services, fans are indicated as the potential protagonists of important changes. SellaBand and other services address and talk about generic fans: not the fans of a specific artist, but music, movie, or literature lovers, driven by a desire to discover something new and exciting; 'a music lover who comes to SellaBand and has found an artist he/she likes and believes in'.

Paul-Rene Albertini, MyMajorCompany PR CEO, likens the role of fan funding fans to that of A&R and considers it an extension of the role played by the fans in TV talent shows (Bylin 2011). According to Jenkins, this format, which is aligned with new marketing concepts in the emotional economy, is in keeping with a widespread desire for empowerment: 'to actively participate in the "consecration" of the new idol' (2008: 43). Just like in talent shows however, the fans' power of choice is limited by the projects that have previously been filtered by the platforms. Usually, the platform selectivity level is correlated with the specific business and fan funding models adopted by the services and justified in the value propositions addressed to fans. The filter of upcoming proposals tends to be stronger among platforms that intervene on the production or communication management of the output whose business plan include a share on profits, as in the cases of MyMajorCompany and SonicAngel (Hemer 2011). Since arguments in favour of micro-investment generally focus on the equality of the model, which allows fan funders to receive part of the profits, the stronger filter is justified by the will to privilege projects that are considered to have more market potential, or in other words, projects that offer a better chance for micro-investors to enjoy returns. Some micro-patronage services filter proposals they consider incapable of reaching their objective, justifying their decision by saying that they prefer not to disperse the users' attention and funds. In both cases, the filter clearly benefits the services' business models, whether they envisage profit shares or they expect a fee on funds collected from projects that reach their goal amount. The filter appears essentially as a way of rationalizing the participation: 'It's not that we don't believe in democracy, but things work better if you don't put ten thousand names on the ballot paper' (Andrew Lewis, Bandstocks founder) (Cardew 2008: online). It should be noted that the data collected by Hemer do not indicate any clear and significant relationship between project success rates and acceptance rates (2001: 22). It will also be explained how attempts of rationalization from the part of the fan funding websites clash with the impact of actual relationship dynamics between artists and fans in determining the success of the campaigns.

Almost all fan funding campaigns solicit fans' participation by appealing to intrinsic motivations and various types of prizes and rewards if the goal should be reached. These incentives proposed by artists during the launch phase are sometimes differentiated according to the amount of the contribution and they are usually solicited by the

platforms themselves, including those for micro-investments, well aware of how difficult it is to guarantee fans significant return on investments. These incentives are considered so important that some creatives and fan funding websites, which often provide the former advice on how to structure the campaigns, are beginning to study the sensitivity of users to different 'prices' (the paid shares) of various 'prizes' (funding incentives) (Benenson 2010). Below is a potential classification:

- *unit of or access to the product*: this represents the minimum level upon which fan funding reciprocity is grounded, it is present in almost every campaign and is even the reason why participants – both artists and fans – often consider fan funding as a *pre-purchase*;
- various forms of *accreditation* of the role of funders/producers;
- *gadgets and exclusive contents or privileges related to the product*, often intended to create a closer or special relationship between artists and fans (for example, videos revealing aspects of the creative process, updates and previews, dedicated contents);
- *participation in the creative process*, through the opportunity or the right to vote for some project decisions or to provide creative cues to be implemented during production;
- *privileges concerning the relationship with the artists*, for example, in the form of exclusive opportunities to interact with them in peculiar ways and to meet them.

The emphasis on and the diversification of the incentives definitely direct the fan funding toward a market exchange based on the principles of 'better than free': according to Kevin Kelly (2008a), when the product units in the digital format lose their value because they are endlessly duplicable and accessible, the supply must shift toward intangible values which cannot be copied, such as more direct and personal relations with artists, access to and participation in the creative process. Such logic may be sometimes applied deliberately:

[W]hen I realized that anyone could download music for free, I got thinking: what's the one thing you can't download, the one thing that the artist can hold on to? The answer: the creative process. That's the product I'm offering, the creative process (Brian Camelio, ArtistShare founder). (Kaplan 2004: online)

Therefore, the willingness of fans to support creatives and their projects is often represented as a resource to be drawn upon in order to improve the artists' condition and to solve problems related to the inefficiencies and crisis of cultural industries. At the same time, discourses promoting fan funding clearly highlight the awareness that such a resource needs to be cultivated in new ways in the web era, the willingness to contribute must be incentivized and compensated. The building of social capital is founded on the rhetoric of empowering fans as gatekeepers and as the support infrastructure of artists in difficulty, on the equity of the return to fans as investors and, above all, on the offering of intangible values, such as acknowledgment and reputation, participation and privileged relationships with the artists. While the construction of fans as gatekeepers, as a support infrastructure and as micro-investors, relies mainly on the functioning and the discourses of the platforms, the last aspect entails above all the artists' activities and their direct interaction with fans or, in other words, the concrete practices through which fans experience participation.

Behaviours and Experiences

Fan funders of a project may be divided into two categories: people already acquainted with the artist and appreciative of his/her work prior to the campaign, and people who discover him/her on this occasion. The latter category in turn includes both people invited by other investors to make a contribution and people who already visit the web-platform regularly or discovered the artist or the campaign in other ways.

Two studies conducted on the fan funding website SellaBand revealed that the behaviours of investors – and above all the behaviours of distant rather than local investors – seem to be very responsive to information by aggregating devices (such as a top-5 popularity list), to the level of updates and blogging activity about the projects and to the cumulative level of funding already raised (Ward and Ramachandran 2010; Agrawal, Catalisi, and Goldfarb 2011). The authors of both studies explain this behaviour by saying that music lovers need to orient themselves in the mass of published projects, limiting the cost of searching and learning about them. This adds significance to the participation of friends and fans who already know and appreciate the artist, especially during the initial phases of the campaign, because the aggregation of a considerable quantity of contributions – together with continuous updating by the artists – helps to fuel the visibility of the project and orient the attention of new potential fan investors.

However, it is not necessarily true that this is the only explanation for the ‘peer effect’ resulting from these studies. For example, Massimo, one of our respondents, knew and appreciated the artists he supported before approaching the fan funding website Produzioni dal Basso. Nevertheless, he felt definitely encouraged to donate after he noticed that the campaign had already collected half the funds needed:

Massimo: I don't know to what extent ... in this moment of economic crisis, [people] want to spend even 10 euros for culture or for these projects.

Interviewer: Were you surprised at their success in selling out all the shares?

Massimo: Yes, I was, and I decided to participate precisely because I saw that they were already halfway there. If it had been at the beginning, maybe I would have been a bit discouraged.

These studies fail to clarify what drives people who are not solicited directly by the artist or by his/her friends or fans to invest, what meanings can be attributed to participation or how it contributes to defining relations between the fans and the artists, possibly in different ways according to the fan funding model. To this view, I draw upon the interviews of artists and fans collected between 2010 and 2012, concerning SellaBand users, where the micro-investment model prevails, and those concerning the Italian website Produzioni dal Basso, where campaigns are predominantly supported by patrons. There are also other relevant differences between the two websites. Produzioni dal Basso was created in 2005 by people working in self-production and interested in hacking and copyleft. It has no business model (the site itself is a self-production) and no investment has been made to promote the website, which does not filter proposals and does not manage transactions. Essentially, it works as a place where demand and offer meet and it hosts campaigns for an eclectic mix of cultural projects. SellaBand was founded by Pim Betist and two former Sony/BMG managers and is one of the best-known fan funding websites in the world. It is specialized in the music sector, allows a higher level of interaction and is rich in contents (for example, it allows visitors to listen to musicians' works). It is therefore understandable that SellaBand is visited by

enthusiasts who, compared to Produzioni dal Basso users, spend more time on the website. Most SellaBand users interviewed particularly like the opportunity for interaction, especially with artists. The music is important when choosing the projects to be funded, but it is not the only criterion. For all the respondents, other important factors included perceiving the constant presence of artists on the website and interacting with them, their openness and the time they devote to them and to the campaign. For example, they value:

the option to send messages to artists, write comments, the forum. And the listening sessions, when the finished CD was presented to the believers, with a chatroom with the artists. (Th., Netherlands, 41, male)

direct contacts with artist through PM and Wall, Forum, possibility to play music from the site' The artists who impressed me the most are Jennifer Berdetta, Ulrik, and Natalia Safran, not only for the music, but also for their personalities and contacts. (Ja., Netherlands, 44, male)

An investor participating both in SellaBand and the similar Spanish website Apadrina-UnArtista observed:

It is more pleasant spending time on SellaBand ... in my experience, artists on SellaBand are closer, they immediately ask you for your email address, they send you pieces and you can even talk with them. Here, I'm still waiting for someone to simply say 'thank you'. (Ed., Spain, 37, male)

On the one hand, the willingness of the fans is grounded on an expectation of reciprocity, in terms of attention and consideration towards them, expressed through continuous updates and interactions, as well as the development of appropriate incentives:

for multi-part believers, most artists are insufficiently committed. Most artists don't invite their multi-part believers for special gigs (arrangements), do not send special newsletters. (Th.)

Such comments are echoed by musicians:

When I first signed up on SellaBand, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I loved the concept but I didn't have very high expectations. I did not put as much effort as I should have in the beginning, and this made investors stay away, as they probably thought I was not very serious. When I began to show more presence on the site, then people came and invested in my project. I would post new songs regularly, participate in song competitions and interact with believers. (An., musician, Canada, 33, female)

On the other hand, according to artists, the 'necessity' of this 'relations work' makes it personal:

When you make a record this way, you feel as though you have this whole family who's in your court. It puts the pressure on in a kind of scary way, but in another way it's kind of good. Because you don't want to let anybody down, and when you see people preordering and some coming in at a higher level, it's kind of like wind in your sails, and you're like 'come on, I can't let these people down' (interview with Maria Schneider about her fan funding campaign on ArtistShare). (Heckman 2008)

Every time I publish, they always write something, so it is beautiful ... besides the fact that we earn some money, but it spurs you to continue communicating to those who follow you. (Sa., Italy, 28, female)

Such comments are strikingly similar to those of journalists interviewed by Tanja Aitamurto for a study on the impact of crowdfunding on journalism: 'the reporters compare the donors to investors, that cannot be let down', and their donations 'are a significant factor that makes them feel more invested in their work' (2011: 434–5). In our case, fan engagement seems to require more engaged artists, which could mean both more work and more gratification for the latter.

A significant commitment by the artists in promoting their work and in nurturing relationships is what justifies fans offering financial and promotional support, not so much as investors seeking profit but rather as 'talent scouts' interested in rewarding the commitment that may contribute to the artist's success, consequently providing a payoff for the 'fan-scout', or simply as an enthusiast who, in this way, has the opportunity to 'be part of the success':

Earning money is a wrong definition in my opinion. The revenue share serves to be part of the success. To be part of the success with revenue share and to be kept updated about the sales-stats is important for me. ... But to earn money as a purpose, target, is unimportant for me. (Ju., Netherlands, 30, male)

To be able to say to my friends that I earn a penny for every 5000 copies of that album sold is important. To actually earn that penny is not important. (Ne., USA, 40, male)

Unlike SellaBand, many investors interviewed on Produzioni dal Basso were also committed to cultural associations or production (although not professionally and not full time). As a result, financing was often motivated, on one hand, by the creatives-fans' propensity to build and support a community of style (Crane 1997: 154–5). One example is Piero, a jazz musician who financed 'a couple of jazz festival in times of need'. On the other hand, many who participated in the financing were motivated by a sense of solidarity, fuelled by the sharing of similar difficulties; in particular, the difficulty to raise funds for culture, especially in such a period of crisis and investment cuts, in both public and private sectors:

The users of these website belong to a young age group and they are maybe more interested in these situations, helping the production of something because maybe they are involved in something else too. I mean that they help producing the CD because they are going through the same thing to produce a book or the other way round. (Gi., Italy, 26, male)

I understand that the publication of such a work is very difficult for an association; it is quite complicated because a lot of money is needed. And since I have an association too, I said to myself 'how about helping them?' If I found myself in the same situation, I would need a hand, too. (Fr., Italy, 32, male)

In my opinion, there are no other alternatives. Finding a sponsor is very difficult. ... so the only thing to do is get the community to participate in the project. Restoring this sense of participation that we have lost a little. Fan funding, according to me, is the only way. When there is an economic crisis in a country, the first things to fall are cultural projects, at least in Italy ... I have another film-making friend doing a

short subject ... I financed him, he financed me, we helped each other. (MT., Italy, 51, female)

Produzioni dal Basso, because of its history and scope, has attracted above all subjects active in DIY circuits and enthusiasts of niche cultural projects that are alternatives to the mainstream. Compared to fan funders interviewed on SellaBand, those on Produzioni dal Basso developed a greater appreciation of their own role as a support infrastructure alternative to traditional players:

I'm also investing in other projects like this, for example Il lupo in calzoncini corti, a movie about homosexual parenting that, in the country where we live, where even the word 'homosexual' makes half the population suspicious, it is difficult to find space in mainstream television. (To., Italy, 29, male)

I think that it can be an interesting tool for jump starting projects that would otherwise never see the light of day on the usual commercial circuits. (Se., Italy, 48, male)

I like the co-participation ... especially for what might be niche publishing, an independent publisher, to the detriment of all the highly publicized books that you can find in book shops ... feeling responsible for the existence of a book, especially for me, since I work in the world of books, I would say it is a beautiful thing. (Va., Italy, 37, female)

The important point here is not only 'feeling part of a successful project', but feeling part of projects that 'would never see the light of day' without the participation of fan funders. Such aspects have been confirmed by the creatives on Produzioni dal Basso, who often highlighted the fact that being independently committed to creating non-mainstream projects was in and of itself an incentive to make a donation. The interest for 'niche' projects works as the shared value that helps to produce social capital.

Concluding Notes

In fan funding, everyone who economically supports a project is considered a fan. However, differences exist either in the way the various platforms tend to discursively and technically construct fan funding, and therefore the fans who participate in this practice, and in the actual manner of participation and relationships with artists, in which the experience of being a 'fan funder' takes shape.

The exponential growth of fan funding coincides with the shrinkage of private and public investments in various circles of cultural production. For this reason, the fans' financial support is often represented by the sites – and experienced by the artists – as a resource to solve a problem. From this point of view, one could claim that the celebratory rhetoric of the opportunity of empowerment – linked, for the artists, to the mobilization of social capital, for the fan to the engagement of the role of gatekeepers and producers – offers a buffer to the lessening of the commitment made by the public and to the reconfiguration of investments and businesses' models by private entities. On the other hand, attempts to rationalize participation, made to varying degrees by some web-platforms according to their business model (especially those adopting the micro-investment model) clash with the

centrality of the relationship between artists and fans, which is decisive for the success of the campaign on which the benefits for the services also depend.

Most campaign funders consist of friends and fans who already know and appreciate the artist soliciting the funds. Some also engage in the promotion of the campaign, while many limit their support only to that specific campaign, for which have been solicited. This social capital can in fact represent a competitive advantage, favouring the visibility and financial support of some projects rather than others.

However, there are some less frequent cases in which contacts initially solicited for a particular campaign end up being keen on other projects, thereby becoming a resource for other artists as well. Our research has highlighted two subgroups in this category, identified mainly on two platforms, which differ in their history, self-representation, content and functionality.

SellaBand's characteristics favour the presence of subjects that – like the cyclic fan described by Matt Hills (2005) – explore the site to discover new fan texts. In addition to the *preliminary* importance of signposting represented by the campaign's popularity at a certain moment, fans' choices are oriented not only by musical tastes, and perhaps even less so by the prospect of profit, but by the credit that the artist acquires thanks to his/her communicative and relational work.

Despite the fact that the establishment of the online relationship between applicants and funders moves from instrumentality to an economical objective of the former, the necessary investment in more constant and personalized relationships may lead to an enrichment of the content inherent to the relationship between the artist and his/her fans. This may be true for fans and artists alike. Paraphrasing the a sentence about social capital by John Field, although people are able to make use of their connections to obtain funds, 'being connected is in itself a resource, insofar as socializing with others is a rewarding experience in its own right' (2008: 69).

At the same time, being in the position to respond to a request for help and taking advantage of the level of disintermediation and interactivity of the site, fans have the possibility to negotiate the relationship with artists in new ways, in ways perceived as rewarding regardless of the possibility of economic return.

On Produzioni dal Basso, a site with less appeal and less interaction, where campaigns are characterized by an orientation that is markedly not mainstream and are structured according to a patronage model, the fans' gratification consists less in the direct relationship with artists or in thinking of contributing to their success, as much as in a different interpretation of the role of gatekeepers, intended almost as a 'mission' aimed at supporting those projects that otherwise would have little chance of seeing the light of day. The history and characteristics of Produzioni dal Basso seem to have influenced its appropriation by subjects interested in cultural niche projects or involved in self-production, motivated by a strong sense of solidarity further fed by the weakening of more conventional modalities to support, in line with some observations on the factors that stimulate the production of social capital (Coleman 1988; Fukuyama 1995).

Therefore, in addition to the distinction between those who already followed and appreciated an artist and those who discovered the artist during the campaign, in fan funding we find a more significant difference between two forms of fandom, which overlap only minimally: on the one hand the desire and satisfaction of supporting a particular creative subject (artist or organization) and, on the other hand, the desire to undertake a supportive role for various artists. In the second case, such a role can be interpreted in different ways, as the bond and the sense of reciprocity that activates social capital can be founded on various aspects: supporting people who share the same kind of interests and values, the same

kind of activity (and relative difficulties), or supporting people who show an appreciable commitment to their own jobs and attention and openness to their own public.

While the partial disintermediation enabled by Web 2.0 affords several possible reconfigurations of the relationship between fans and promoters of cultural productions, the technical and discursive features of specific web-services appear to be relevant – note determinant – to their actual configuration. ‘Social capital’ is only one of the concepts potentially useful in analysing such relationships, more so when levels of interactions and disintermediation are greater and ties are explicitly called upon. While the concept seems especially appropriate for the practices generally known as fan funding, future research could test its applicability to web-mediated support practices of fans for cultural production in a more systematic and articulate way. For example, in this chapter the distinctions between different types of ties – strong, weak (Granovetter 1983), latent (Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe 2007) – and social capital – bonding, bridging, linking (Woolcock 2001), maintained (Ellison, Steinfeld, Lampe 2007) – have not been taken explicitly into consideration, although the overall body of research allows us to draw some insights concerning these aspects. We have seen, for example, how strong ties (family and friends) can work as bridging capital, both indirectly (the ‘peer effect’ found in the two researches on SellaBand) and directly (informing people unknown to the artist about the campaign), while the collocation of the projects on the discursively constructed axis mainstream/niche and the capacity of platforms to encourage navigation could affect the odds of activating latent ties, that may eventually result, depending on other factors, in forms of bonding or bridging capital. Future research may focus more systematically on the connections between the type of support offered by fans and the type of fandom, between these two aspects and the ways of structuring the participatory dynamics by project promoters and platforms, the use of cultural capital in the construction and deployment of social capital, as well as the limits of applicability of the concept to different types of fan practices.

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