

FORUM
IV



**HOW ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS CAN BE PRACTICAL AND FUNNY WHILE
PUZZLING ECONOMISTS: EXCHANGE NETWORKS, PARALLEL CURRENCIES &
FREE BAZAARS IN GREECE**

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ABSTRACT

This is a working paper belonging to a greater ongoing field research project concerning economic activity in Greece performed without the use of any official currency. The schemes studied range from parallel currencies to free bazaars and from specialised exchange networks to businesses accepting used public transport tickets as partial payment by customers. Exchange and bazaars often take place via fairs and parties, some of which have already become famous and attract hundreds of people, although most of the schemes are quite recent and still develop.

The scope of this paper is, therefore:

- a) To present the theoretical, connected to environment, issues, that the project aims to deal with, and
- b) To present the findings of the first, qualitative, stage of field research that might enlighten us on how the environment as an idea and motive leads people to invent new ways of transacting.

Keywords: exchange networks, free bazaars, parallel currencies, environment, grassroots theory.

JEL: E49, P49

ABSTRAIT

Cet article en progrès appartient à un projet de recherche de terrain en cours qui étudie l'activité économique en Grèce, qui se réalise sans l'utilisation d'aucune monnaie officielle. Les systèmes étudiés varient de monnaies parallèles à bazars gratuits et de réseaux d'échange spécialisés à d'entreprises qui acceptent des billets de transports en commun utilisés comme de paiement par leurs clients. Souvent, l'échange et les bazars ont lieu en foires et fêtes, quelques de lesquelles sont déjà devenues fameuses et elles attirent de cents de personnes, malgré que la majorité des systèmes sont assez récents et encore en développement.

La portée de cette communication est, alors, de:

- a) Présenter les questions théoriques, liées à l'environnement, desquelles ce projet-ci a l'intention de traiter, et

b) Présenter les conclusions du premier stage (qualitatif) de la recherche de terrain, lesquelles peut nous éclairer, comment l'environnement comme idée et motivation mènes les personnes à inventer de nouvelles manières de transaction.

Mots-clés: réseaux d'échange, bazars gratuits, monnaies parallèles, environnement, théorie de base.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper belongs to a larger research project titled “Exchange Networks and Parallel Currencies: Theoretical approaches and the case of Greece”, which studies economic activity without the use of any official currency. The project examines parallel currencies, exchange networks and free bazaars, which emerged the very last years in the country and still emerge and develop, especially since 2009 onwards. This paper explores the importance of environmental issues within the schemes in combination with any amusing character this feature might give to the activity undertaken, under the light of the challenges this same activity creates for economic theory.

II. THE INITIATIVES STUDIED: ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS & GOOD LIFE

Most of the initiatives studied in this project do have an explicit environment-friendly character, because this is either their main scope or one of the aims targeted through the scheme activity. Another common characteristic is that most schemes do provide a space for “good life” to their members. This happens through an interconnected pattern of actions: for example, the scheme’s feast is not a chance for people to gather and meet each other in order to be able to transact afterwards; the feast is the transaction, around of which several other activities take place, like children education, or dancing, or common lunch for all, etc. Therefore, the social character of economic activity is accepted and promoted. At the same time, economic activity becomes itself part of people’s quality of life and it is not an action separated from the latter (life and quality), much less is it the “sacrifice” required to obtain quality of/and life.

Of course, one can discern the differences among schemes. Those which are more business-oriented tend to forget the above or at least, they seem not to have “good life” as their immediate concern. The same schemes usually tend to see environmental issues as parallel or connected to their main scope, but not as their principal aim.

II.A. Exchange networks

By the term “exchange networks” we mean structures that facilitate non-monetary exchange for their members and they are either of general nature or specialised in one sector of activity. The biggest and oldest network is Peliti¹ which covers the entire country. It was founded in 2002 and its structure consists of two separate but intertwined networks: the first, is a general network for exchanging goods and services, while the second, is a specialised network which enables its members but also anyone interested, to exchange or just find for free traditional varieties of plants² (either fruit or decorative trees, vegetables, flowers, etc) and to acquire (at the cost of breeding only) several traditional species of domestic animals.

The main idea is that for preserving the traditional plant and domestic animal varieties one should be able to find the species for free and offer them for free to whomever asks for them³. Moreover, the transactions held in the general network do not allow the use of money by the participants – exchange offers and demands are advertised on the website and on the annual Peliti Magazine, so members can easily be informed about them.

Apart from Peliti, there are several (actually at least 7 active) schemes and initiatives for preservation and dissemination of traditional varieties throughout Greece. Most of them cooperate with Peliti but some have opted for acting locally only. Some of them are not even networks, but they use local proximity of their members to create an unofficial group of people who cultivate and exchange traditional seeds. All of them provide the seeds for free and there is only a (loose) obligation of the receiver to cultivate the seeds, renew the variety for next year and provide any other person with seeds for free.

Peliti participates in several fairs related to ecology and nature preservation that are held in Greece throughout the year. However, the most important fair is the annual one, organised by Peliti themselves in spring, the first Saturday after Easter. The fair lasts one day and attracts hundreds of cultivators and volunteers and around a thousand of visitors from all over the country but also from abroad.

The fair is organised around the exchange of traditional varieties of plants and domestic animals and it includes an entire day with live music, speeches, dance and a common lunch for all. Attending the fair and all the activities is free, including the common lunch. Visitors can take traditional plants seeds for free and without obligation to give anything in return, after, of course, the cultivators have exchanged the varieties among themselves. The fair is being organised on a

¹ www.peliti.gr

² Another term already used for them is “landraces”.

³ Domestic animals, given that their cost of breeding might be high in some cases, can be purchased with official money, but only to cover the breeding costs and not the value of the rarity of the species. This means: if a member of the network overcharges, it will be reported.

volunteer basis, and most volunteers gather some days in advance to help with the arrangement of the place, the preparation of food and the management of the traditional seeds provided by cultivators for the fair. The food is prepared with ingredients offered by the scheme participants, therefore it is traditionally produced¹ as well.

Following the model of the annual Peliti fair, there are organised several fairs throughout Greece, where people gather, have fun and exchange traditional varieties. The fairs are organised by the local groups of traditional farmers, either as special events or as part of the schedule of major events that might last for more than one day.

Another network of general scope is Logo-Timis² (Λόγω Τιμής – by word of honour, in Greek) which started its function on June 4th 2010, based in Athens. Due to its recent establishment, the website is in testing-phase and the offers on the webpage are very few, yet. However, from the announcements of the network which are open to all internet users, we see a prevalence of services.

II.B. The free-exchange bazaars (χαριστικά-ανταλλακτικά παζάρια) and free networks (χαριστικά δίκτυα)

The term free-exchange bazaar (χαριστικό-ανταλλακτικό παζάρι) is the one used by bazaars where people can bring things (clothes, petty machines, shoes, toys, books, CDs, etc) to exchange them or just give them away and take anything they believe it is useful to them. To bring something is not obligatory, but we learn that there is an “unwritten” rule in one-day bazaars that to participate, you should bring at least something. This rule does not hold in permanent bazaars, because a person can bring something one day and take something else after several months. However, in no case is it necessary to equalise the value of what you offer and what you get, which means that, in principle, you are free to take as many or as valuable things as you can carry with you.

The first free-exchange bazaar in Greece has been organised by Sporos Cooperative in downtown Athens since 2003 but now, while still being part of the same cooperative, it has moved to its own place and is named Skoros³ (Σκόρος, moth, in Greek). There are other four permanent free bazaars in major cities of the country (Thessaloniki, Chania, Ioannina and Rhodes) and a regular free-exchange bazaar (named Magic Carpet) in the city of Kilkis. However, most free-

¹ Traditional agriculture is something that is promoted through Peliti in contrast to the idea of “organic farming”. Traditional agriculture does not only include traditional varieties of plants and traditional methods of farming, but it also excludes pesticides and fertilisers of any kind (so, organic pesticides and fertilisers are also excluded and the use of animal dung is under severe debate) and the excessive use of water resources. Of course, the food produced that way is more than delicious.

² www.logo-timis.gr

³ <http://skoros.espiv.net/>

exchange bazaars are organised in several neighbourhoods of Greater Athens area, but also in many other cities of Greece for an afternoon or a day, usually combined with other activities (like kitchen collectives¹, handicraft fairs, etc).

The free networks are online only, the members of which can notify when they want to give something away for free or when they need anything that might be available but not yet announced online, or they get instantly notified when something is disposed by any network member. There are only two free networks in Greece, but both cover the entire country: one is Freecycle² in Greece, which is member of the international Freecycle network started in USA several years ago; the other is Χάρισε-το³ (Charise-To, Give-it-away) network, which is based in Thessaloniki and also organise free bazaars in cooperation with the city municipality.

A special type of free bazaars is swishing parties (πάρτυ ανταλλαγής ρούχων) which emerged in Athens⁴ since 2009 and Thessaloniki⁵ in 2010. Swishing is a term created out of swapping and shopping to describe parties where people bring their clothes, shoes and accessories and can take other clothing stuff for free.

All free bazaars and networks have their own rules (which evolve season after season) to prevent abuse of the initiative or “plundering” of the stuff offered. Therefore, there might be limits in the stuff you may take at once or in the stuff you may offer, and in some cases cash-sale of freely-taken stuff is pointed out and the abusing members are banned from the bazaar or network.

Apart from adopting rules, the free bazaars and networks are seeing their activities as belonging to a general, anti-consumerist mentality, where the “old, used stuff” is not only useful but actually it is the starting point for creation. Skoros bazaar offers free workshops for sewing and altering clothes⁶, but they also organise several fairs to enhance the general thinking where the free bazaar stems from. The last fair was held in late May 2010 and it was dedicated to children: it included, apart from clothes, toys and books⁷, artistic and creative workshops for children, theatre and story-telling performances, face-painting, etc.

This attitude is common to all bazaars, permanent or not, because they are never held separated from other activities, which are productive directly (through creation of things) or indirectly (through educational workshops), or from activities that are not “useful” or “productive”

¹ A kitchen collective (συλλογική κουζίνα) is a gathering where people cook food together and have common lunch or dinner. Some kitchen collectives in Athens are regular (Skoros holds one every Friday evening), but several occasional free bazaars tend to include a kitchen collective as well.

² http://freecycle.wikispaces.com/freecycle_gr

³ www.xarisetto.gr

⁴ www.swishing.gr

⁵ <http://swishing-thess.blogspot.com/>.

⁶ The “motto” of the activities is well summarised in a Skoros sticker where it is stated that “*Free bazaars and sewing kill “fashion” and they are fun*”.

⁷ At this “children’s weekend”, there have been offered for free new-unused clothes that were stock of a store which closed down.

at first sight: art performances and concerts, movie shows, assemblies for discussing issues, etc. Therefore, the free bazaar is the space or the pretext of the gathering or is just one activity among the rest.

The free networks, given that their space is virtual, have not such a global activity scope, but they nevertheless, do foster gatherings or even free bazaars (f.ex. Charise-to network organises once per year, for a May weekend, a free bazaar in Thessaloniki). Swishing parties, on the other hand, are what their name says: parties where people swap clothes and accessories; soft drinks are offered, while there is music, dance, and several activities and happenings that will amuse the party guests and create a friendly atmosphere while the latter are exchanging.

II.C. Parallel currencies

By “parallel currencies” we mean any currency used by people in transactions, without this being official in any country. A parallel currency might have only a virtual or digital appearance (f.ex. units credited in a computer database) or it might take a physical appearance in notes, issued by the currency users. Below, we describe the schemes which are actually functioning in Greece – however, five more schemes are planned to start running in September 2010 in several Greek cities.

The main point is that the Time Bank differs from the other two parallel currencies which are rather of LETS¹ type, not only in having a clear environmental ideology, but also in having a mentality of creating bonds throughout the scheme, while the other two schemes do praise social relations and human values but they prefer to leave this part on their members’ initiative. However, one would point out that parallel currencies are in any case, well defended in literature² as environmentally friendly.

The oldest parallel currency scheme in Greece is a Time Bank based in Athens and run by the Greek branch of the European Network of Women³. The scheme started working in October 2006 and follows the general structure of time banks: it is a network of individuals who are offering services to each other. In reward, each member gains “time” so that he/she is able to ask for the other members’ services. The value of the services is accounted in time hours and the hours credited and debited for each member are recorded in a computer with software created by a volunteer. The

¹ LETS is the abbreviation for Local Exchange Trading System: this is a network of people using local, user-made currency for their transactions. The currency, virtual or print, is without (positive) interest, but it permits (in most cases), the free setting and fluctuation of prices, so it is much more alike to the conventional currency as we know it.

² See unit III.B.

³ www.enow.gr. The Greek Branch of the European Network of Women is a Non-Governmental Organisation assisting women who have been violence victims. However, the Time Bank is an activity totally separated from the rest NGO activities and anyone can be a Time Bank member.

major emphasis has been given so far to education services, related to languages, PC skills, arts, etc but also to domestic work.

The Time Bank is the only scheme that directly uses a theory and educates trains its members to it: the theory concerns “love economy” as described by Hazel Henderson. The new-member workshops include the presentation of Henderson’s layer cake to describe the economy, as well as the position of the Time Bank activity within this economic framework¹. The Time Bank of Athens understand their activity as a contribution to the “love economy” which is directly connected to the “what nature gives to us”, e.g. the first layer of the economy cake.

Far from Athens, the Local Alternative Unit (Τοπική Εναλλακτική Μονάδα – TEM) was formally planned to be launched on June 15th 2010 in the city of Volos, on the East Central coast of Greece. The Unit is digital only and will be used within the framework of the Exchange and Solidarity Network² which covers the entire county of Magnesia. At the moment, the membership is rather low because they have not proceeded with heavy publicising yet, given that the scheme is on the process of resolving several practical issues.

The project is a very interesting one: it is designed to remain local; the managing team has opted so far to avoid the network taking any official legal form while they are in close coordination with local municipal services; local businesses are also welcome to participate and actually it is a local business that offers the server of the network. On the other hand, the funding of the project is upon its members only.

The LAU of Magnesia has as one of its main aims, to use local resources. However, the environmental issues are not directly mentioned by the scheme as such, although there are members who consider environmental issues as being of great importance.

Finally, including members from all over the country, the Ovolos project started organising in January 2009 and it is based in Patras city (South-West coast of Greece) but also run in Thessaloniki (in the North of Greece)³. The effective launch of Ovolos currency was done finally in late March 2010 and despite the expanding membership⁴, its organisers consider the project to be still in testing-phase. Ovolos is used by several people who do not live or work in Patras and Thessaloniki, but they prefer to transact locally using for their transactions the Ovolos online

¹ Henderson’s picture of economic cake can be found at Henderson, H. (1996), p. 58. Henderson believes that major part of the economy and actually its base layers are nature and non-monetary economy, while monetary economy is the upper layer and the international financial structures are just the cake’s icing. In Athens Time Bank there is also widely used Henderson’s idea of “love economy”, e.g. nonmoney economy; it can also be found in Henderson, H. (1996), p. 183, but actually its full presentation is well dispersed in the entire book.

² www.tem-magnisia.gr

³ See the website www.ovolos.gr. There is also a group with the same name at Facebook, where the members discuss issues about their currency. All texts are so far, in Greek only.

⁴ The Ovolos users were already more than 4800 in July 2010, although only a part of them are actually exchanging.

platform. To avoid abuses, the scheme has not permitted double pricing, e.g. the items or services sold are priced and paid in Ovolos only.

II.D. The MoneyBackSystem¹: A hybrid or sui generis scheme in Crete and Dodecanese

The Money Back System is a network combining exchange trade but also monetary elements. The network has been created by a private company, which also owns the intellectual property rights of the system. Bus companies of Crete and Dodecanese cooperate as sponsors of the system while other local companies (super markets, pastries, clothing stores, cafés, furniture stores, cinemas, etc) are by contract commercial partners of the managing company.

According to the project, the used tickets of mass transport means, no matter in which part of the country have been used, can be re-used at the their nominal value to buy goods and services from the participating companies, but of course, they cannot be used again for public transport. Each enterprise announces in public which part of the price can be paid in tickets². The only prerequisite is that the value of the ticket is written on the ticket and it does not matter when the tickets have been issued or used for transportation.

The scheme is distinguished first for its simplicity based on the used tickets circulating as money, second for its B2B2C structure and third for its environmental and economic implications, given that it is supposed to induce people to use mass transportation and do their shopping at local companies.

III. THEORETICAL ISSUES AND EXISTING LITERATURE

III.A. Theoretical issues raised by the initiatives studied

Several questions are raised by the activity described above:

A) What happens with the value of the stuff disposed through free-exchange bazaars and free networks, which is given away through a free-disposal action (χαριστική πράξη) or through exchange?

¹ More information (but in Greek only!) can be found on the website <http://www.moneybacksystem.gr/home.html>.

² The price part to be paid in used tickets varies from 1/4 to 1/20 of the price. The list of the price shares paid in tickets for by each participating company as of July 2010 can be accessed at <http://www.moneybacksystem.gr/epixeiriseis%20July%202010.pdf>.

B) Do the cultivators, by exchanging or giving traditional seeds for free, reduce or increase the seeds' value? Is the value of a traditional seed established, not by the labour it integrates, but by the market it circulates in? Or, by the rules the transaction is taking place¹?

C) The value of the unused tickets within the Money Back System is quite similar to the value they already had². How do those used tickets get this value again? Is this value really same as the previous one?

D) Why do people do transactions without exact measuring of the values transacted?

E) In a time bank, not only the value of one cleaning hour is equal to one medical doctor's treatment hour, but also the value of one fast cleaning hour is equal to one slow cleaning hour. Why do those people accept and actually offer this equalising of their skills? Apparently, the value of labour within the Time Bank is not perceived on the basis of this labour's reproduction value. Then, what is this value based on?

F) About all parallel currencies: why do the users accept the currency of another user? What is the value of those currencies? How is this currency working as a measure of value? The used tickets seem to work as a substitute for euro money. To what extent is this substitution taking place? Do those used tickets work as a measure of value or rather as a store of value?

H) Is each scheme a market? Or is it an economy but not a market? Can we distinguish among economies where no money exist (exchange networks, free-exchange bazaars and free networks) and markets where currency exist (time banks and parallel currencies)?

I) Can we have a market without exact prices? Can we have a market with an equalising measure, like time hours in the time bank? Can we say that reciprocity and the rule of "obligatory payment" exist and work within those schemes in very different ways than the conventional market?

K) How are environmental issues affecting the transactions within the schemes, or the existence and structure of a scheme itself?

L) Nature and/or environment³ are considered within schemes to be the ultimate values, along with human survival. What are the implications for the schemes and their members' activity?

¹ There is at least one case, where a cultivator paid a lot of money to buy a traditional seed and then he disposes it freely to other cultivators!

² There is of course a way of calculating the value toward the closest euro unit, which means, in some cases they might represent a value which is less than the original, depending on the amount of tickets and the euro cent excess of the sum. Which means, for a total amount of used tickets like 3,15 euros, the value of the tickets is 3 euros when used within the system. This has been adopted to make transactions easier and simpler.

³ The parallel use of both terms, "nature" and "environment" is being done here, because not only they are dissimilar, but they also reveal the stance of the user toward the physical world. Environment is usually used in discourse that sees humans separated from nature.

III.B. Existing literature

One might consider the questions silly or naïve, but studying existing literature, especially in economics, proved that the aforementioned questions cannot be easily answered. This led the study to other disciplines. The “journey in literature” is briefly presented below:

Silvio Gesell’s theory about “rusting” money, which would be a medium of exchange only, is used extensively in parallel currency discussions. According to Gesell, money, to maintain its value, should be regularly stamped after the money holder has paid a duty (negative interest) to the issuing body¹. Gesell’s purpose was to help workers face a monetary system which was allocating wealth away from its poor producers.

Gesell’s views have been further elaborated by Margrit Kennedy, who criticises the geometric growth of economy due to the structure of the monetary system and comments on how this affects the lives of people and the environment². Another environmentally aware view is the one by Goerner, Lietaer et al. who attempt to apply the resilience principle found in nature onto the monetary system and support for this the existence of several currency systems running parallel to each other³.

Richard Douthwaite integrates parallel currencies into a theory of sustainability, where they are the financial tools for attaining four sustainability targets: repeatable production cycles, stable economy, simple life and renewable energy resources⁴. Thus, he proposes that the sustainable financial structures will consist of different (parallel) currencies to perform different functions of money and that money should be created by its users only⁵.

Recent research done by Soder proves that parallel currencies are enhancing environmental sustainability through localisation of economic activity⁶. This feature is well supported by the extensive field research done by Seyfang in several UK parallel currency schemes⁷.

Of course, Greek schemes do not fit the “green dominated image” the Norwegian schemes give to Gran⁸, which might deter many people, not self-named as ecologists, to avoid any participation in the initiatives. One would say that most Greek schemes would find more connections to the views expressed by Dalla Costa, who considers food to be a common and she examines how this principle translates into safeguarding various other fundamental common goods,

¹ Gesell, S. (1906), particularly chapters 1.14, 2.2, 3.1-3.5, 3.9-3.13, 3.15, 4.1-4.4, 5.2-5.5, 5.7

² Kennedy, M. (1995).

³ Goerner et al (2010). Also Goerner et al. (2009).

⁴ Douthwaite (2004), chapters 3 & 4.

⁵ Douthwaite (1999), especially Introduction and chapter 4.

⁶ Soder, N.T. (2008), especially pp. 43, 45-46.

⁷ Seyfang, G. (1996, 2001).

⁸ Gran, E. (1998).

like: biodiversity, freshness, healthiness and quality of food as well as the knowability of the food production cycle¹.

On the other hand, North considers parallel currencies and other non-monetary activity like Freecycle networks, to be alternative economic spaces or at least possible to be so in the future². Henderson considers parallel currencies and “production systems based on elaborate barter, reciprocity and redistributive schemes” as “highly refined technology of software variety”³. She gives long presentations on parallel currencies in history but also in the 1990s⁴ and she finally states states that “These nonmoney and scrip-based economies are leading indicators of transition to a much more diverse socially and ecologically compatible future”⁵.

While studying transaction patterns, Biggart & Delbridge distinguish four different systems of exchange: price system, associative, moral (where parallel currencies belong, according to the authors) and communal systems (where barter and cooperatives belong)⁶. To this view one could add Oh’s view that, under certain conditions, barter exists even in an economy with a generally accepted medium of exchange⁷.

On the other hand, Diquattro⁸ defines moral economy as people’s attempt to prevent market economy from dominating local markets, thus both value and socially necessary labour stem from the competition inherent in market capitalism – while Vlachou seems to agree with this interpretation of value⁹. Moseley¹⁰ however, asserts that Marxist theory still cannot satisfactorily resolve the value problem of pure non-commodity money.

Nature is considered to be the ultimate source of meaning for Consesa-Sevilla¹¹, who states that value cannot be partial but referring to the whole only - exposing the false sense of empowerment consumers and labourers experience because of their (monetary) income. Close to this view, Hornborg uses ideas from thermodynamic physics to explore the contradictions of modern economy and society and how modern ideas about value, labour and nature are constructed in order that industrial production seems more valuable than nature and life itself, and how this same production structure has substituted human needs as the aim of the economy¹².

¹ Dalla Costa, M. (2007).

² North, P. (2007).

³ Henderson, H. (1996), p. 83.

⁴ Henderson, H. (1996), pp. 157-158, 206-218.

⁵ Henderson, H. (1996), p. 286.

⁶ Biggart, N.W. & Delbridge, R. (2004), pp. 36-42.

⁷ Oh, S. (1989), pp. 113, 116.

⁸ Diquattro, A. (2007), pp. 464, 467-468.

⁹ Vlachou, A. (2002), pp. 196-197. She also quotes her personal communication with Anwar Shaikh concerning exactly this issue, e.g. specification of value formation in capitalist markets.

¹⁰ Moseley, F. (2005), pp. 14-15.

¹¹ Consesa-Sevilla, J. (2006), particularly pp. 28, 37-39.

¹² Hornborg, Alf (1992), particularly pp. 10-12, 16.

IV. POSSIBLE THEORETICAL APPROACHES

IV.A. The point where theory and methodology merge, or, conducting research without theory

The main theoretical issue we face is that the schemes studied are choices and activities that cannot be easily explained because there is not any thoroughly elaborated theoretical framework in economics to explain such economic activity.

On the other hand, we do use texts originating in other disciplines with intention to explain the schemes we study, in economic terms. We also use economic theory as stated or narrated by the scheme participants and the schemes as collectives themselves, because we do accept the possibility that both practical and theoretical knowledge might spring from social and/or collective activity, no matter whether this has been mentioned in academic texts so far¹.

On the field, in both the preliminary and the first stages of the project, there have been used qualitative/ethnographic methods: mostly observation, observation by participation and text analysis. The first stage of the project includes several interviews with scheme organisers or members that have a global view of each initiative, conducted by the use of a list of open questions. Before that (but also parallel to that formal-interview stage²) there has been spent more than a year of contacting the schemes and discussing with coordinators and members about the initiatives. Those free discussions were not recorded, but they have been extremely important, along with the entire preliminary stage of the project, in forming some theoretical arguments that could be explored in the first stage of the field research.

Therefore, after having great difficulties in applying either the classical subjective theory of value or the labour theory of value, either liberal or Marxist³, we realised that the questions we face are more simple and much more difficult than we could have imagined: **what are those people doing? Why? Are they doing anything that is “economic” or has any “economic” implications? Can their activity and/or discourse answer any of the questions stated in unit III.A of this paper?**

¹ However, this possibility of knowledge springing from grassroots activity has been mentioned in academic literature. See for the this Biddle, E. et al (2007).

² It is amazing the pace by which new issues come up almost everyday that are not yet elaborated enough to be included in the formal interviews. We expect to examine them thoroughly at a later stage of the project.

³ See for this, Sotiropoulou, I. (2010), p. 13-14.

IV.B. The theoretical arguments

Three theoretical arguments have been constructed to explain the activity studied and to provide with an analytical framework that will (hopefully) permit answering some of the questions raised by the study:

IV.B.1 The crack – Η ρωγή

“The crack is the first sign from which one... can predict an evolution of things. We do not usually pay attention to the crack. What does the crack shows? It shows a conflict of opposite things: whether... they are social propensities, or... big social inequalities, or it is huge arrogance that cannot think of its own destruction, e.g. it is the indication of great contradictions that have not yet been overtly expressed”, Lydia Koniordou¹.

The first theoretical construction is the notion of “crack” or “ρωγή”. This notion emerged from Professor Stathakis’ own discussion and notes over the schemes we study in this project and by “crack”/“ρωγή” we mean that those initiatives consist of breaking points for the capitalist economy, as it has been formed the last decades in Greece. Therefore, this notion can be applied on fundamental dissident views of the schemes and their participants in comparison to the mainstream economy and economic theory: about scarcity and non-scarcity, about whether people have freedom not to starve in any case and to be able to access quality and nutritious food, about what is valuable and whether value cannot be measured, about humans’ connection with nature in covering their needs, etc. Moreover, the fact that in several cases, the economic activity does not only appear well separated from the social one, but it becomes “a” social activity among other, changes the entire idea about the economy as it is perceived in the modern (western) world: in western societies, the economy is the space where people compete with each other over scarce resources and where most people do not have any command on the terms and conditions of their activity, e.g. their work, which they have to perform in order to cover some of their needs. It might be a crack that people in several schemes are searching for ways to turn their activity (no matter how hard work it might consist of), into something that is non-competitive and actually not forced upon them.

Another issue is whether these multiple market structures created by the schemes might prevent the main market from working as it should or as the liberal theory wants it: as a self-

¹ We have not found any literature in social sciences that uses the notion of crack. We turned then to Ms Lydia Koniordou who is a classical theatre actress and theatre director and used the notion of “crack” as the main axis for directing the play of Aeschylus’ Persai in 2006. The definition above has been given within the framework of an interview which Ms Koniordou gave on May 26th 2010 especially for this research project.

regulating and free [from societal control] market. Neale¹ asserts that in a markets-system, whenever some of the markets start to work in a non-self-regulating manner, the entire system ceases to be self-regulating². So, the question might be whether the schemes are the participants' attempt to intervene with conventional markets (which claim or try to be self-regulating) and establish some control over the existing of supply-demand-prices mechanism.

IV.B.2. Simmel's Philosophy of Money³ and Bateson's Ecology of the Mind

Georg Simmel despite his clear views on the specific features of money, has never decided, for good, about his own stance towards it and its role within economy and society. Leyshon and Thrift's view⁴ that Simmel undertakes a schizophrenic⁵ position towards money led us to turn to Gregory Bateson's "Steps to an Ecology of Mind"⁶, which gives Simmel's work a new meaning.

Bateson's theory on schizophrenia consists in the idea that the condition is created after a person is constantly exposed to situations of double bind, which happens when the same person receives by the same sender two contradictory messages about doing or not doing something. The double bind situation leads the message receiver to be "wrong" and "missing" whatever he/she opts to do. If the message receiver cannot for any reason abandon the field of communication⁷ and he/she also discuss the messages with the sender⁸, or even with a third person, the receiver is in danger of having his/her mental integrity broken down by the impossible demands of the double bind situation.

Thus, Simmel, before Bateson, understood the political-ideological-verbal impasse of modern capitalist economy and writes down details about that impasse, following the method of "thick description" anthropologists use: he does not need a theory/position at hand about what he sees, but he writes down everything he sees, so that the author or anybody else can later construct a theory, if needed.

¹ Neale, W.C. (1957).

² Neale, Walter C. (1957), p. 369.

³ Simmel, G. (2004).

⁴ Leyshon A. & Thrift N. (2005), pp. 35-37.

⁵ When I first read this critique, I thought that this notion (schizophrenic, schizophrenia) is being used by the authors to make critique more impressive. Just after a while, political correctness hit me to the point I considered the use of the notion quite unfortunate, insulting people under severe condition. When I finally arrived to study Bateson's writings, I realised that it might be a completely political notion, irrespective of the reasons for which Leyshon and Thrift use it in their book. Bateson proves by ethnographically studying schizophrenia, that there is a social structure which creates it and it is not an illness *stricto sensu*.

⁶ Bateson, G. (1972), particularly chapters 4.4.-4.7.

⁷ F.ex. the receiver is dependent on the relation with the sender for practical, economic or psychological reasons.

⁸ Bateson names this discussion "meta-communication".

If this assumption holds, then the schemes we study are an effort of people to avoid the double bind they face within modern economy¹. People, by participating in the schemes exit from the mainstream economy's field of communication and acquire an ability (or chance) of meta-communication; they can again comment and renegotiate the conditions of their economic activity; finally, they avoid the market-imposed double binds by using their creativity, which Bateson considers as an alternative to schizophrenia².

IV.B.3. Collective viewings of value, keeping-while-giving and grassroots transaction mechanisms

The third argument's main point is Annette Weiner's hypothesis³ that people in a specific social and economic setting participate in several types of transactions, not with primary intention to participate in the transactions but aiming to keep out of the transactions what they consider most valuable to them. Weiner links this prioritisation of what can be exchanged, with the (re)construction, questioning and (re)negotiation, even struggle, around social hierarchies that are defined via possessions⁴.

Therefore, our argument is that scheme participants, as individuals and as groups and collectives, attempt to keep out of transaction, or, at least out of obligatory transaction, or, at worst case, out of disposition ruled externally, things or activities that are very important to scheme participants, either individually or collectively: dignity, views about the world/economy/society, environment and nature, survival, good living conditions, household shelter, healthy and tasteful food, etc. – anything that they do consider of value, no matter whether this is valued the same in conventional economy.

We also use David Graeber's anthropological theory of value⁵ as well as his views about capitalist modes of production⁶, where value is linked to human action in a wider context, well beyond the notion of labour. So, production and reproduction of ideas and perceptions are also considered action creating and contributing to the value of some things in comparison to other.

¹ For example, "you need official money to access your food and clothes – I cannot hire you and/or offer you a salary that will provide you with the money to cover your basic needs because I have not official money to pay you", etc. Or, "we want to protect the environment because human survival depends on that – however, if we protect the environment too much, then many people will be unemployed and their survival will be at stake".

² Bateson, G. (1972), p. 203.

³ Weiner, A. (1992).

⁴ It does not matter whether those possessions are of material nature, like a clothe or a crown, or of non-material nature, like a story, a myth, a poem, social status and titles, etc.

⁵ Graeber, David (2001).

⁶ Graeber, David (2006).

Then value is rather running on a continuum between belief and action/non-action formed and continuously renegotiated by people themselves, individually or in groups.

Instead of social hierarchies, Graeber uses the term of freedom defined as “...the freedom to choose what sort of obligations one wishes to enter into, and with whom”¹. To this, one would add Caroline Humphrey’s results from her field research in Nepal². She concludes that barter is not the stage prior to monetary transactions, but rather the stage after a monetary system has started to disintegrate. “Barter is a response to increasing poverty on the part of the people who wish nevertheless to maintain their autonomy”³.

Taking the argument a bit further, one could point out that the scheme participants might have their own theory to explain the economic phenomena they create themselves. Given that knowledge can also be created by non-scholar people and/or by collective groupings, not only by written word and narration, but by action as such⁴, one can also describe the theoretical approach of of the schemes themselves as a collective viewing⁵ of value.

This collective viewing of value, far from the subjective value theory and from the objective/labour value theory, implies that within society and/or economy, people might form collectively their views about value(s), while different groups might consider different things to be valuable or with different value each. Collective viewings of value seem to permit scheme participants to prioritise their “valuables”, decide which of them can enter which transaction and under which rules, and this explains why and how all those people bother to defy mainstream evaluations and invent ways to apply their own:

Especially about money we use Christopher Gregory’s quality theory⁶ which states that the value of money is not founded on the currency quantity, but on the issuing/monetary authority’s power over transacting agents. Thus, the scheme participants who adopt a parallel currency or even participate in a Time Bank, or accept used tickets as payment token, are accepting the currency because they have decided or agreed so. This is not classical fiat money – because here there is not an issuing body well separated from the currency users. We have money and money currency created by the users themselves; they set the rules and decide about the money features and value. Its value, therefore, stems from the group’s power to implement their decisions and agreements.

¹ Graeber, David (2001), p. 221.

² Humphrey, C. (1985).

³ Humphrey, C. (1985), p. 67.

⁴ See for this Biddle, Graeber & Shukaitis (2007).

⁵ We avoid the term “theory”, first because it is not a theory, second because “viewing” implies better the positionality of the viewer(s).

⁶ Gregory, C. (1997).

V. WHAT RESEARCH HAS SHOWN SO FAR

When people permit someone to acquire necessities by parallel currency without the use of official currency, they might keep their euros, or their nutrition, or even their social status (which is maintained by not borrowing official currency for petty purchases) out of the conventional market. Another example: in traditional seeds exchange groups and networks, people do possess material and know-how that is essential in food production and keep it outside conventional market but under specific status or space of transaction: if one wants to trade traditional vegetable seeds, one has the options either to acquire some for free, if available, or to provide other traditional seeds in reward.

The above seem to differentiate the transactions from mainstream market and economy not only in terms of rules and principles, but also in terms of space and time. Particularly about the latter, obligations expand in time following scheme members' ability to offer work or goods whenever they can, or even following nature's seasonal cycles. Even in parallel currency schemes, where one would see a structure closer to mainstream economy, interest payments do not exist¹ and the credit of one member is another member's debt, which means that a) debt is necessary for the scheme to work but also that b) overall debt does not exceed credit.

On the other hand, when scheme participants mention that the environment is important and they want to protect it by re-using the items the free-network members do not need anymore, instead of selling them for euro currency, they do keep environment out of transaction. Re-cycling in a factory would not do this; in fact it is possible that re-cycling in a factory might be as harmful as using natural resources for first time. Instead, scheme members participate in the network to transact on items they would not be economically active about, in "normal" terms.

Weiner's position explains, too, activity that makes the "valuable" to enter transaction, but not in market terms, or in market terms that are totally different from free market terms. In other words, people prioritise things and activities in ways that are different from those used for prioritisation in conventional market(s). Or, even if they make this priority same as in conventional market², they do set a different way of transacting rules when it comes to the same, highly-valued items.

Therefore, all those scheme participants use different techniques and actually they do combine several techniques in order to achieve their umbrella aim³ and the aims under it:

¹ To be specific, nominal interest rate is zero. Whether there is difference between nominal and actual interest rate and whether this can happen, is a question to be answered.

² Traditional wheat and corn seeds are again a good example: both conventional market and exchange networks perceive the seeds to be of great value.

³ The aim might be: to keep the most valuable out of transaction, or create another economic space more consistent than the conventional one, or do something beyond what is imposed on them by free-market rules.

1) They decide that some things are out of transaction at all and those things are tagged as “priceless”. Environment/nature and human survival (right to food) are considered to be priceless.

2) They decide to give for free things¹ which are the most valuable (human time, traditional plant seeds) or the least valuable (used clothes, shoes, etc). So, the price in this case is zero while value attributed to transacted things might vary!

3) They create several types of markets along or outside or in contradiction with the main market type: they create rules for transacting on one item only (like traditional seeds exchange networks and groups); or, they set another measure of value/equivalence (like Time Banks); or, they set new rules for transacting, like exchange with no measure unit (like free exchange); or, they set new rules for transacting with measure units and even money, creating the latter as they wish (like parallel currencies or the MoneyBackSystem²).

4) They seem to create economies in parallel with the conventional one. Those economies comprise more than the transaction itself: it is cultivation, experimentation³, creation of new household production and nutritional customs, education of adults and children, etc.

5) They seem to attempt a re-definition of the context within economic activity is taking place. Peliti network, for example, enables people from all over the country to exchange traditional varieties at the mailing cost only, which means that in “economic” terms, it is not “efficient” for cultivators but also for any other person to travel to the other side of the country to attend a fair or to volunteer work for the network. Nevertheless, the Peliti annual fair as well as all other fairs have hundreds of visitors, cultivators and volunteers (who all spend hundreds of euros to cover their travel expenses). The work that each fair requires is of enormous volume but everyone can work or rest, eat or dance, wander around or talk with friends, as they like. So, the exchange of traditional seeds seems reversed as a transaction: it is officially the scope and the pretext of the gathering, but actually it arrives to be the result of it: the exchange is not done because this is the most “efficient” way, but because this is the best way to be done. The criteria for the “best” might depend on the people who are involved, on the social interaction among friends and strangers as well as on what the people involved want to experience in this space: they seek the realisation of values that do not exist in conventional economy, or a living example, even for just a day, of how it would be when many people can survive together without conventional economic constraints.

¹ This one is quite opposite to the previous technique, but it is quite interesting how both techniques might lead to same result!

² MoneyBackSystem is a real puzzle: typically, the companies participating in the scheme have an incentive for this, because they are supposed to maintain or increase their market share in times of economic crisis. However, one would ask why they just do not offer some general discounts to their clients, but they prefer to reward with discounts the clients who are using mass transportation.

³ One thing cultivators in Peliti network do, is to see which varieties will survive and flourish in areas where they have not been traditional so far, without compromising the already existing local landraces.

However, as a research participant has told me (and he had already assured me of his anti-capitalist ideology), it is not possible to be completely unconnected to the mainstream economy. I have not either any impression that the scheme participants' aim is to disconnect with the main economy or to create closed circles of transactions beyond the mainstream. Schemes are not conflictual at all and they usually avoid claiming so. Nevertheless, the dissidence takes place de facto, which integrates the notion of “crack” – it is not fight nor struggle at all, but it works towards challenging the conventional economic structures.

That a market may exist without prices or without price fluctuation but with set and fixed prices or even without the conventional supply-demand-price mechanism as we know it is not a path-breaking option. In other times and places (in Greece, too), markets were structured in several ways. This reminds us that self-regulating/free market is one type of market only among many¹.

VI. INSTEAD OF CONCLUDING REMARKS: ISSUES TO BE FURTHER RESEARCHED

Given that the first stage of research has not been concluded yet and new schemes will start running in September 2010 all over the country, the first stage of the project will continue. We need to check out quantitative issues, like the volume of transaction in the schemes, as well as their connection with environmental questions, like the consistency of cultivations with the traditional methods the seeds are meant to be used for. We need to see whether parallel currency users tend to produce and consume (create and use) in a way that is more environment- or nature-friendly. Finally, we need to see whether the gatherings and the spaces created by the schemes do make people to turn their economic activity towards more sustainable patterns.

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¹ See Neale, Walter C. (1957).

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