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## ECONOMIC ACTIVITY WITHOUT OFFICIAL CURRENCY IN GREECE: THE \* HYPOTHESIS

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### ABSTRACT

Historical study has not been within the scope of the research project titled “Exchange networks and parallel currencies: Theoretical approaches and the case of Greece”. However, this proved to be a deficiency of the project and the present paper is an attempt to formulate a hypothesis, with the intention to see at least within such a historical perspective, how scheme members with both their discourse and action challenge our perceptions about important issues in economics. There is no name or title for this hypothesis (yet). We believe that it is too early to name it. It seems that the schemes studied are the surface of an economy or economies which never ceased to exist, as both material spaces and experiences in people’s histories. It is about viewing all this activity as setting a different agenda for economics than what capitalist and anti-capitalist discourse can offer.

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*"...why do people hear the message at a particular moment, so that they can then say they have just learned what has always been known."*

Maria Todorova (2004:4)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Research Project And Its Scope

The entire research project is titled "Exchange Networks and Parallel Currencies: Theoretical approaches and the case of Greece" and studies economic activity without the use of any official currency, which takes place beyond charity or family-friendship circles. The project examines parallel currencies, exchange networks and free bazaars, most of which emerged the last years in Greece and still emerge and develop, especially since 2009 onwards. Moreover, some sui generis initiatives have been included, despite the fact that they cannot be categorised into any of the already mentioned scheme types (Sotiropoulou 2010:1-6, 2011a: 6-29).

By the term "exchange networks" I mean structures which facilitate non-monetary exchange (barter) for their members and they are either of general nature or specialised in one sector of activity. The term free-exchange bazaar (χαριστικό-ανταλλακτικό παζάρι) is the one used for bazaars where people can bring things (clothes, petty machines, shoes, toys, books, CDs, furniture, etc.) to exchange them or just give them away and take anything they believe it is useful for them. The free networks are online only; their members notify when they want to give something away for free or when they need anything that might be available but not yet announced online, and they get instantly notified when something is disposed by any network member.

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. The important feature of parallel currencies is that they have no (positive) interest rate, so loans are without interest payments and currency accumulation is not encouraged.

The project had not been designed to integrate historical research and it is, instead, focusing on the actual economic activity, i.e. the activity taking place since the beginning of the project in February 2009. Moreover, at the beginning of the project it had been chosen that the research findings would not be really placed within a historical perspective. The reason for this decision was that such an attempt would require original historical research which would be beyond the scope and the time-schedule of the project. So, it seemed that it would be better to do the historical research within the framework of another future project.

### 1.2. Methods and Hypotheses

So, the project started in February 2009, with the researcher following qualitative research and/or ethnographic methods: observation, observation by participation, free discussions, text analysis, then open-question interviews with scheme coordinators or members with somewhat global view of the activity (Sotiropoulou 2010: 13-14).

It seemed that this decision of keeping my attention to the present was more or less well-working during the first two years of the research. This does not mean that the research findings did not include hints or evidence about older exchange and barter practices. Research participants themselves often pointed out in several cases that their activity is not something new but something that existed, at least some decades ago. In some cases, even specific non-monetary contract names have been mentioned to me, to educate me that this activity was quite formal at some point in the past, even if the contracts were not acquiring a written-material form. However, I carefully kept all information aside as it seemed "irrelevant" to the scope of the research project.

Therefore, the first hypotheses constructed to be examined within the project were more or less unhistorical (Sotiropoulou 2010: 14-21). This means, that the first three hypotheses used in the project could "nicely" be "placed" within any other economic context and still be negotiable even if we did not discuss anymore Greece since 2009 onwards. This might not be inherently bad and I have not discarded those hypotheses, given that they seemed not to be disproved but to shed light on several important aspects of the activity studied. In fact, the hypotheses were attempts to explain the activity studied in terms that could cover the entire activity to some satisfactory extent. In other words, the researcher avoided the monetary theories that leave completely outside the discussion on non-monetary activity, which was the major part of the subject-matter of the project.

### 1.3. Research Findings Show The Impasse

The impasse of the project itself emerged after the maps of scheme membership have been constructed in late December 2010. The project, between the qualitative (first) and the quantitative (second) phase of the research, included an interlude phase of mapping the schemes with respect to their membership dispersion within Greece. The findings of this mapping were amazing, not only because they showed that this activity is well-dispersed throughout the country (although there are disparities among regions) but mostly because the quantity (many thousands of people) and the dispersion (all over the country) of the schemes was questioning the idea that this activity is completely "new", i.e. a phenomenon emerging since 2009 (Sotiropoulou 2011a).

Several questions were raised, which could be summarised as following: is it possible that all this activity is completely new, or that people have shifted suddenly their choices into joining all those schemes in hundreds or thousands? Is it

possible that all this activity, for which no literature exists, be so quickly acquired as knowledge by so many people who can “miraculously” coordinate themselves without really many instructions? Is it possible that all this activity is a random choice or just an activity invented because of the new communication technologies available to most people? Can this be just a fashion or just a temporary shelter against economic crisis and as a fashion or temporary solution it will fade out once mainstream economy will recover?

Even if I wanted to use the first three research hypotheses I had previously adopted in my research project, those could not explain the extent and the dispersion of the phenomena studied. Moreover, There has been a first attempt to evaluate the “crisis argument” by checking scheme participation in comparison to unemployment increase rates the last two years (2008-2010). The first indications acquired out of this attempt have been inconclusive (Sotiropoulou 2011a: 32-33). Then, another explanation was needed, at least to complement the other hypotheses of the research.

One more question was imminent. The existing literature from all over the world is being oriented towards the study of parallel currencies, while exchange networks and free bazaars are almost inexistent for both academic and non-academic authors, as the literature review has shown (Sotiropoulou 2010: 9-13). This peculiarity of literature had already made difficult for the author to comprehend and analyse the vast part of the research subject-matter (exchange networks, free bazaars and networks, sui generis schemes). A very first hypothesis could have been that exchange networks, free bazaars and other non-monetary schemes are just a Greek originality – but this hypothesis did not have any sound reasoning because we have no research publications from other countries to verify whether any similar activity exists there or not. Plus, it seemed too easy to be verifiable or too difficult to be discarded, because the researcher could not extend the research to other countries.

The only information we have till now about non-monetary transactions that take place nowadays is the information published through the video of the research project “Homenatje Catalunya II”<sup>1</sup>, which started in 2010 in Catalunya, Spain, by Joana Conill, Manuel Castells and Alex Ruiz.. Moreover, there is some information about barter fairs and the anonymous markets (mercados anónimos – very similar to free bazaars) of Venezuela<sup>2</sup> and some really vague information about direct barter and countertrade contracts among businesses in Argentina (Sitrin 2011:34). Nevertheless, the question of uniqueness remains and there is no point to discuss whether all this activity is a peculiarity of Venezuelan countryside, Catalunya, Argentina and Greece (although, I admit, this would be a fabulous assumption). There are also some studies on business

countertrade in the Anglo-saxon countries where the phenomenon is studied as coeval and not as “an emergency or haphazard way of conducting business” (Marvasti & Smyth 1998: 1087, Birch & Liesch 1998, Neale & Shipley 1987), but this literature is still rather limited.

So, the burning question in January 2011 had been formed like this: We have possible explanations for personal or collective motives for joining a scheme, for establishing a parallel currency or an exchange network, but we have no explanation how this can be done so quickly, with so numerous membership and so extended geographical dispersion, with little scheme-education for new members, with no real support by public authorities (apart from some rare cases) and with this variety of schemes (it is weird that in Greece we have so many types of schemes and in other countries we have just parallel currencies). If this is not a peculiarity of Greek society, then what is really happening?

#### 1.4. When History Revisits The Research Project

At this point, in January 2011, there (re-)appeared the historical question: what if this activity needs to be placed within a historical perspective? What if all those findings, particularly the findings of the mapping process, show that my choice of “keeping focused on here and now” was a vain attempt not to discuss “here” and “now” and everything that this “here and now” meant for the research subject-matter and for the research participants themselves. It is important to note that research participants definitely do not seem perplexed at all with the activity of their fellow scheme-members nor of the other schemes nor do they seem to feel that their activity is of less importance if it is not mentioned in academic literature. They behave but also comment on their activity as something “normal”, “natural” or “common sense”. Moreover, the choice of leaving the historical framework outside of the research project has been proved not only vain, but also impossible: it seemed that research findings, for reasons we cannot explain yet, “demand” their place in time, actually in time and space altogether, even if the researcher had herself made other options for her project.

The preparation of an essay concerning the views of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on the Eastern Question (Sotiropoulou 2011b) was the crucial point for the researcher to realise that...everything might have been wrong so far with the project. Of course, it was not a disaster but on the other hand, there was no chance within the specific project to do the historical research required to gather all data necessary to evaluate all the findings and have some definite or at least, satisfactorily verified conclusions. However, it is possible to raise questions and construct one more hypothesis, which will have the features needed to direct the examination of the above mentioned questions into some interesting routes.

1 The research team has published a video with information gathered during research, at <http://www.homenatgeacatalunyaii.org/en>.

2 Information on this has been gathered from personal communications with people who work on barter economy in Venezuela. There is also a print leaflet “Manual de Trueke” (Barter Manual) published by the Municipality of Caracas.

## 2. THE HYPOTHESIS THEMES

Further study showed several points that were of major importance concerning this research design mistake. One can discern some major characteristics on scheme members' activity which, at the same time, challenge our perceptions about several major issues in economics. Although those characteristics and the views challenged are inter-linked, I distinguish them for analytical purposes only into a series of "themes challenged and revisited", so that they are easier compared to related literature:

### 2.1. The 'Deficient' Nature of Transactions Without Official Currency

Transactions without official currency are considered to be full of disadvantages (Fayazmanesh 2006: 46-51, 84-88). This holds for both the economies where multiple currencies circulate and for economies where barter or non-monetary mechanisms exist. Multiple currency economies are considered an irregularity and a situation just prior to the final prevalence of one of the currencies. Even Irving Fisher (1933), who promoted the idea of stamp scrip during the Great Depression era, made clear that this solution is only temporary. The idea that barter cannot be but an emergency solution that will fade out once the capitalist economy recovers is also refuted by academics who empirical findings from the ex-Soviet countries where non-monetary or alternative monetary transaction modes show that this activity might be something more than a reaction to market dissolution (Carlin et al. 2000, Aukutsionek 2001).

In addition, barter and non-monetary activity is of much lower status, as they are considered to be "non-economic" and "obviously" inefficient. However, inefficiency of multiple currencies and/or of barter and non-monetary transactions has not been proved. Quite the contrary, there is evidence that they might be much more efficient and efficiency-creating within an economy than the one-currency systems of the mainstream economy. This discussion about inefficiency is a long one and even if one does not want to accept its notion as set by Taussig, who perceives efficiency from the point of view of the majority (poor people), therefore in a political economic way (2010: 83-92) or by Gregory, who questions efficiency as to which person or group it refers to (1997: 125-126), one cannot ignore the theory by Lietaer, Ulanowicz et al. (Goerner, S. et al: 2009a, 2010) where efficiency of a single currency economy might not be under question as such; however, efficiency of a system without resilience is disastrous for the system itself as well as for its components. Therefore, even if one perceives multiple currencies and non-monetary schemes as non-efficient, one should consider whether this variety of transaction modes works towards the resilience of the economy and the stability of the livelihoods of people who participate in it (Lietaer, B. 2010, Goerner et al. 2009a & 2009b, Kocherlakota 1999: 345). Particularly about the theory of economic sustainability by

Lietaer and Goerner et al., although it is about multiple currencies only, it seems easy to be extended to include non-monetary exchange and all various schemes which exist nowadays in Greece. Of course, the question raised is whether this variety is sustainable itself and to what extent.

Moreover, transaction tools (currencies or any other mechanisms) are much easier managed on local and/or community level rather than on vast areas of a country. This happens because problems, like lack of currency velocity and liquidity, are quickly drawing attention on local level and possible solutions might be applied in time, before the aggravation of the problem<sup>3</sup>. One would add that currency users proximity in material and/or virtual space also makes it difficult for the financially strong community members (who have collected the most of income) to keep on their own and deny to participate in the common solutions of their community's transaction mode problems.

Apart from efficiency, there is the general discourse about modernity and how this multiple-currency or non-monetary systems idea is out-of-date, a relic of the past, which even if we do not want to abandon in the modern economy, it will be abandoned as time goes by. This stance had been even adopted by K.Marx (Hodgson 2001:70). The most important element of this view is that it usually avoids to consider this multiple economy as co-existent or coeval to the mainstream economy (Gregory 1997:7-9, 37-38, 304-312). First, barter or multiple transaction tools are considered to be already history or that they existed very far back in the past. Second, when economics faces a modern phenomenon of this type, if it is not possible to attribute it to "primitiveness" or "badly-integrated peasant economies", then the temporary-emergency argument arises: when there is a crisis, such modes of transaction emerge to cover the money market failure and when the latter recovers, they fade out. Last, but not least, economics has pushed multiple transaction modes into limbo, and when it is faced with them, it prefers to leave them for scrutiny by another discipline, usually sociology or anthropology.

### 2.2. The Transactions Without Exact Measuring and Without Linear Perception of Time

Of course, it is not only a theoretical choice that economics deny to study anything but the official currency transactions. It is also a practical one: economics as we know it, is unable to study anything without exact measuring and without using equations (Fayazmanesh 2006: S. 102, 125-126) and the fight over qualitative methods is about their real economic use for research. So, even in cases of multiple currencies, where it is supposed to be easier to "measure" the subject-matter of research, economics have no real tools to evaluate such an economy. There are exceptions to this stance of course (Martin 2006, Goerner, Lietaer & Ulanowicz 2009b), but most economists do not work on such

<sup>3</sup> Based on a comment by Stathis Stasinou.

models, so methodology for a multiple currency economy is not very elaborated or refined.

Things are much more difficult when it comes to the non-monetary transactions, where economists try to measure values (usually in terms of official currency, while the entire transaction might be structured in a quite different way), while people transacting do not care about measuring<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, people care about not being cheated or mostly, about not cheating the other party of the exchange, as research participants have pointed out in their discussions and/or interviews. In other words, what research participants say verifies that they know very well the unequal nature of exchange, as described by Fayazmanesh (2006).

In other words, economics have no tools, not even concepts, to understand how people in real economy can perform economic transactions without exact measuring of values, sometimes not even of volumes of the products or work exchanged.

The other major problem economics have is that their perception of time is linear, while people in schemes have no problem to think of time in a cyclical way or to "count" time with the work or task performed and not vice versa. The time might be social time, well far away from clock time (Taussig 2010: 3-12), and after this "estrangement", economics are unable to understand the world from the viewpoint of the schemes.

We are used to read about not-measuring values in exchange and about non-linear time perception when studying literature on "native" people in countries of Africa, Latin America or Asia. We are not used to accept that people who might transact this way live in the same economy with us. It is not clear whether this denial is unconscious, i.e. it stems from our education in an economic-social system which praises both exact measuring of everything and linear time perception, or whether it is conscious, in the sense that we deny to accept that our perceptions are already questioned in this economy we live in. It might be possible that abstraction of labour works directly towards making time homogeneous so that linearity is the only possible form of it (Holloway 2010: 135-140).

### **2.3. The Disdain Against Rural Communities and Their Economic Structures and the Modern State**

One more feature that most literature reveals is that barter is considered to be an element of a peasant-rural economy and not appropriate for urban economies (apart from emergency moments in history). This appropriateness of a

single official currency for the urban centres has not been constructed with the view, at least, that people in the countryside might have the option to have another or a parallel economic system. Quite the opposite: what is appropriate for the big city is appropriate for all communities, especially for rural communities, which anyway are "backward", "ignorant", "primitive", "late in participating in the capitalist economy, and need to accept the "appropriateness" perceptions as transferred from cities (Schumacher 1974: 160-171).

There is also the view that even in western countries, the construction of the modern state and its economy has been a process of internal colonisation, performed by the centre metropolis at the expense of the regional cultures (Hechter 1974). Greece could not have been exempted from this process and actually it is one more example of the polarisation between "primitive" regions and "progressive" centralised state (Peckham R.S. 2004).

Therefore, to construct a central economy with a centrally-managed currency needed an entire perception of rural communities and their economies as non-important, as keeping economy "behind" and as structures which not only need to be eliminated but also reveal the lower educational, social and economic level of the countryside people. Barter has been associated with poverty, naivety and lack of economic mind.

Of course, those mentalities have been directly connected to the effort to establish a capitalist economy within the framework of a nation-state. To create a national economy, the state could not possibly afford to have several transaction modes, much less to have people who transact without the use of the official currency or without the use of currency at all. To ban multiple currencies might be possible, although it is not easy to chase all those people who would continue to use other currencies parallel to the official one. To ban barter and non-monetary transactions is impossible because of the nature of the latter and actually, it might need such a tremendous mechanism of surveillance that such suppression becomes completely unaffordable. So, disdain and labelling seem to have been preferred to suppress barter or to suppress the explicit manifestation of it.

Obviously, we do not know whether such policies have been practically successful. What we know is that their success was definitely one of appearances: people in Greece the last years before 2008 and for sure, before 2000, would not dare to publicise bartering or non-monetary activity, as this would label them as "peasants, poor, uneducated, etc". The appearance of course, has several important practical implications: people do not know

<sup>4</sup> There are historical precedents in other countries during the Middle Ages, where the exact measures approved by the authorities were well neglected by the people who preferred to use "generous measures", i.e. to give more than what they were supposed to (See for this Gemmill & Mayhew 1995: 81-109) or to... mint forged petty coins with more (!) silver than the one the officially minted coins contained (Gullbekk 2005). Both cases are well connected to economies where multiple currencies are used, including commodities for (measuring) payments and where there is vast circulation of black (low value metal) money (Gemmill & Mayhew 1995: 110-142, Gullbekk 2005). However, my lack of expertise in this fascinating field of economic history prevents me from making any effective comparison of those medieval economies to the actual phenomena I study.

about the transactions taking place, so the majority believes that non-monetary transactions are already history. In case they want to learn more, sources are difficult to find. This holds for researchers as well as for the author herself.

Economists however, apart from facing difficulties in acquiring information about the non-monetary economy, they are the first victims and bearers of the mentality which neglects activity without official currency. It is amazing how even the Marxist side of economic analysis has also been neglecting or disdaining the economic structures of the peasants, or in general, of the traditional economies. Particularly, the peasant economy is the cause of all deficiencies of the peasants and of the peasants' inability to participate in the marxist revolutionary project (Hammen 1972: 700, Szporluk 1988: 45, 65, 190, Todorova 1994: 470). In that sense, Marxist texts have not been different in promoting more or less the same attitude, as the mainstream texts, toward the variety of transaction modes and the people who preferred them<sup>5</sup>.

This disdain and a certain perception about barter and multiple currencies go hand in hand with a certain perception about the urban centres and their economy. It seems that urban centres in Greece are not behind at all in multiple-monetary and non-monetary modes of transaction while we know from the economic theory, that there is no need for this to happen, because official currency tends to concentrate in urban centres. Apart from the discussion whether modern official currencies or the currencies of the western-european-anglosaxon world are all international currencies (therefore, they are often drained from cities as well, or at least from smaller cities or from the poorest areas of the cities), there is also the question: what has made economic theory to assume that multiple currencies and non-monetary activity are not expected to exist in urban centres? There is no reason for such a peculiarity, even if one could discuss whether city dwellers join the schemes for same or different reasons than countryside habitants do.

Moreover, this idea of modern cities transacting in official currency is something that stems from the form cities have taken in certain western countries the last 200 years, where capitalism first has been well established. However, we still do not know many things about even those cities and the development of their local economies. Therefore, we cannot even use them as models for the cities in other countries and in other historical contexts. What cities should I compare the Greek ones with to assert whether

economic activity without euros in Greek cities is "peculiar" or "normal" or "based on urban economic structures"?

The perceptions about urban and rural areas and their economies are also linked to the phenomenon of tradition and traditional cultures. While central economic authorities were not really in favour of rural economies and directed urban economies to where it seemed "appropriate", they, at the same time, created a museum version, i.e. an institutionalised perception of traditional cultures, both of rural and of urban centres. This version became the "official" "national" one, at the expense of the variety and plurality which traditional cultures themselves bring with them. It has not only been "dehydrated" and "mummified" but it has also been separated from the entire socio-economic context within which this variety has been created. The way folklore and folkloric studies have been constructed and used by the Greek state to eradicate the local culture and replace it by what centrally was decided to be the "authentic" Greek peasant (Peckham 2004: 49-58) could not but have deep implications for local economies. Therefore, people wear folk costumes in folkloric fairs, but they do not know how they are made, or how the traditional way of clothe making was a miracle of economic structures who needed to find rare materials, economize them, create beauty out of them but also solve practical issues the clothe user would have: for example, to take care of the garment, not to create waste or unnecessary waste during clothe production, etc.

In other words, traditional economy has been under elimination process, while the culture it had been creating was promoted as "traditional civilisation". Is there any traditional civilisation without its economy? Is it possible that any culture created within a certain (socio-)economic setting is reproduced "as it was" in another economic setting than the one which created that same culture?

The distance from institutionalising tradition towards commodifying it is not long (no doubt, the modern "traditional costumes" are made out of massively produced materials and usually they are also massively produced themselves). The economy which has produced the culture is inexistent (at least for central authorities) and the centrally "planned" tradition is produced just like any other stuff in a modern economy: in a capitalist way, to be consumed in a capitalist manner, far from educating people to or from becoming the way/the proposal of life that it was.

At this crucial point there come the schemes studied within the research framework to represent a completely different view (or different views) of peasantry, of countryside civi-

<sup>5</sup> It might seem absurd, but concerning societies like the Greek one, or at least, like the communities of people who lived in the southern Balkan peninsula (which today is the area of the Greek state), both Engels and Marx have expressed a really "bourgeois" and "orientalist" attitude. No matter how they tried to face the bourgeois ideologies and social structures within the societies they themselves lived in; when it came to the people living in the Balkans, they uncritically thought of the latter in the same way as their contemporary bourgeois thinkers did. The idea that the urban-bourgeois western civilisation is anyway superior to the cultures and civilisations of the people who lived in the Balkans was explicitly expressed in their writings. See Engels & Marx 1985: 95-96, 353, 383-384, 387, 439, 448-452, 457, 465, 473. I am grateful to Dr Efthymia Kanner (Dept. of Turkish & Contemporary Asian Studies, Univ. of Athens) as she vastly contributed to this comment by discussing on 21-3-2011 about Marx and Engels' views concerning the Eastern Question.

sation and of urban culture, but also of the economy that those views presuppose as the material expression of this same culture. As a consequence, economics is challenged by scheme members' activity, because at least mainstream economic ideologies and theories are all based on this internal colonisation idea to be necessary for "progress".

#### 2.4. The Idea That 'Small Is Beautiful' But Inefficient

Small production is typical in rural and urban communities and it has been typical in Greece till nowadays. Sole producers and practitioners are or have been the rule for Greek economy, even the last decades, even in big urban centres, which are considered to be the most capitalism-integrated of the entire history of the country. This does not mean that small producers do not face severe competition by big producers, mostly companies; quite the opposite.

However, it seems that once a person has a chance to try the small production mode, that person will try to survive under this choice instead of succumbing immediately to the "big players" of the economy. It is obvious that multiple currencies and non-monetary transactions favour small producers and their produce, as producers can find a "market" where the throat-cut prices of the big companies have no meaning at all. Therefore, by changing the transaction mode, small producers acquire an economic advantage that within a big, "national", economy with a hard-to-find single currency, cannot have (Lietaer 2010: 19). Small production is not favoured by the banking system and it is not either favoured in terms of taxation, lobbying power, etc.

However, small production seems to be much more sustainable than "big" production, not only in economic terms but also in terms of its environmental impact and of better quality of life for poor people. This is not only stated by E.F. Schumacher (1974) but also by Taussig (2010: 41-92, 112-139, 155-159, 214-232), who conducted field research in Latin America for many years and could compare the results for people and for the environment of both capitalist production (large) and traditional production (small) in both agricultural and mineral-extraction sectors.

One would point out that "then, small producers are creating serious problems to the economy, if they avoid competition by the use of transaction mechanisms beyond the official currency". It seems, though, that this argument is not founded on evidence. If the hypothesis that small production is more efficient and/or resilient than the mass production mode (Taussig 2010: 83-92), then one could better wonder whether "big players" play efficient and receive profits at the expense of small producers of their sector. In other words, it is possible that big producers can have profits as long as there are small producers drained from their efficient results throughout a mainstream market unfavourable to the small producers. As long as small producers are economically or financially destroyed and led out of the mainstream market, then big companies might also have serious problems, as at this case, they are "on their own" (Goerner et al. 2009b: 78-80).

Therefore, the entire perception about the deficient or counter-competitive nature of small production is an ideology that assists large companies to demand for assistance in any case, even in times when a crisis proves them to be not efficient at all. In that sense, small production finds shelter in multiple transaction modes, because it is obvious that small producers do not care to fight against big companies but they do care to survive (it is another story if on the other side of the... marketplace, it is big companies or the national-economy idea that they have to negotiate with).

#### 2.5. The 'Dark Otherness' of Peasant Economies and the 'Freedom That Money Gives'

One more idea which is very common in economic literature, is how our monetary system is a system of freedom for all, given that money gives freedom of choice to anyone who holds it and wants to spend it. The contrast is made with peasant economies, which are stigmatised as feudal or semi-feudal or, even if a community has no feudal structure, with all problems an economy might have: inequality, exploitation, women's suppression, superstition, enmity towards new ideas, prevention of a person to get rich out of his/her own inventions, etc. This idea is deeply connected with the disdain toward the traditional-old ways of transactions and the people who performed them. It is not a coincidence that a vast part of Simmel's Philosophy of Money is dedicated to this view (Simmel 1978-2009: 283-428).

Therefore, economic structures that are, at least theoretically, associated with peasant economies, like barter or the multiplicity of transaction mechanisms, are considered to be tools of all this unfairness and injustice. Of course, no-one has ever said - and I am far from believing - that a peasant economy might be an ideal one or that barter might be itself the path to fairness and justice. However, I am also far from accepting the assumption that one mode of transaction is completely "bad" and another mode of transaction is inherently "good". Quite the opposite: money following certain rules and within certain social setting might be a tool for redistribution in favour of the lower income groups or it might be redistributing income from the poor to the rich. The same holds for non-monetary structures: they might embed in economy several hierarchical and exploitative practices or they might deliver to their users, especially those with lower incomes, chances for improving their living conditions in both economic and social terms.

Therefore, our inability to see multiple currency systems and non-monetary transactions as possible positive political-economic tools, stems from our idea that a monetary economy with one currency only is the best social option, especially compared to other economies where a variety of exchange mechanisms exists. However, even if a monetary economy with one currency only has been under certain circumstances the best social option, this might change through time and space and according to the change of circumstances - which means that if nowadays

this social option is not the best anymore, we need to re-consider it as such.

## 2.6. The possibility that we see what we are ready to see

One would say, after the above, that it might be possible that all this activity in Greece without official currency has emerged because it became visible due to the new information and communication technologies. Schemes use new technologies to announce their gatherings and their activity (due to easiness and zero-cost of publicity) but also to make members communicate among themselves, discuss issues, make decisions, disseminate news, manage accounting, etc, without much effort and in a very open, public manner. Therefore, technology might be a reason for “making known-making material” these transaction modes.

However, the research has shown that there are groups in Greece which do not use internet or social media software that much. Or, even if they use new communication technologies, this use is rather limited; which raises again the question, whether technology just facilitates and does not create the economic activity we see through it (the technology). Therefore, material conditions which permit diffusion of information and facilitation of transactions might be important a feature but not the decisive one for the ability of the schemes to be visible but also for the ability of the observer or the researcher to “see” them.

Another possible explanation would be that material conditions (both economic and social) might be to... blame for this and not information-communication technology only. It might be that people in the society of Greece (or perhaps in other societies as well), are adapting rapidly to an all-changing economy. This rapid change is not a new thing. Mark Mazower (2002: 65-98, 214-218, 221-227) mentions this for the peasant communities of the Balkan peninsula who were facing monetisation and capitalisation of the economy in late 19th - early 20th century. However, he also mentions how rapid change in peasant economies coincided with rapid change in capitalist economy and how the former change was perceived as inexistent while the latter change was perceived as the real change at the same time, concerning economy and society.

Therefore, it is possible that nowadays, economic-social changes are making people, either scheme participants or non-participants, either academics or the (student) researcher herself “see” transaction modes which some years ago were believed to be inexistent. In other words, we “see” this economy of variety because we asked “does it exist?” instead of saying “it does not exist”, or because we thought “let’s re-examine our perceptions in economics” instead of “we have clarified our perceptions in economics”. Lietaer (2010) shows how discussion between the neo-liberal and marxist schools left beyond scrutiny the idea of monopoly of national currency.

The research does not cover but transaction modes; nevertheless, transaction modes cannot be separated from production modes. It is impossible to know details at this stage and within this research project about the production modes which are supporting-using-intertwining-with the transaction modes we study. There is, however, one main characteristic which can not be neglected: it seems that those transaction modes favour small production, as it has already been mentioned.

It is usual in economics to talk about small property production mode, meaning production methods chosen by people who own a small lot of land. Actually, small production seems very connected to the owning of small lots and to the agricultural production of small scale. However, research shows that small production does not exist only in this setting: transaction modes reveal that small scale agricultural production is just one aspect of production supported and undertaken through the schemes. There are people who live in cities and might own just the apartment they live in or they might have neither land nor real estate property rights at all. However, they still produce within the networks and might be also quite active in economic terms (although their skills and produce might not receive such warm reception within the mainstream economy).

Moreover<sup>6</sup>, the chance the scheme members have to share or give-away things among each other reduces the need for mass production of goods that can be easily shared within a network. It is possible that for most non-consumable goods (like clothes, particularly children clothes), people do not need to keep them all the time in their closets, cupboards and warehouses. Tools and small machines are circulating within the schemes just like books and clothes. In that sense, small production is enough for the scheme members, and on the other hand, small consumption is also enough for them, as they can cover their household needs through interchanges without needing hard-to-find extra income in official currency. In addition, one would assume that this support to small production would help heavily the environmental cause, already mentioned by most of the schemes, particularly the free networks and the groups who organize free bazaars.

Therefore, one more possibility exists: the phenomena studied might be not only one more adaptation of small property production modes (which of course is possible to be happening) but also an overall adaptation of small production modes in general, to new economic conditions. The urban setting, or the no-land-property setting proves to be a factor that does not prevent small production as such. It probably directs small production not only to small city agriculture or gardening, but also to a variety of sectors which economics had not paid attention to so far.

## 3. THE \* HYPOTHESIS

There is no name or title for this hypothesis (yet). It might seem absurd to write this, after the previous pages of stat-

<sup>6</sup> This idea and observation point is based on a comment by Stathis Stasinou.



ing one hypothesis after another, but it is impossible to gather them and represent them in just one phrase. I believe that it is too early to name it, given that it seems that our way of perceiving all the phenomena mentioned above but also the notions which concern them and we have been taught so far, do not permit us to construct a wording that would not limit us to the traps we try to escape from. Even this distinction between rural and urban centres or the categorisation of all countryside communities as rural and of all city communities as urban is a false one<sup>7</sup>, well stemming from the same mentalities and ideologies this paper tries to question. Let alone, that to give a name to this hypothesis right now would lead the researcher to make the same mistake as the one probably done by those who do not “see” transactions if the latter do not look like the ones described in books.

It seems that the schemes studied are the surface of an economy or economies which never ceased to exist, as both material spaces and experiences in people’s histories. They were, however, dismissed, disdained and even disreputed and the first texts that easily accepted this “I do not see for I do not want to see” attitude have been the academic ones, even if we would expect exactly the opposite from them. Particularly about economics, which claims to be the most “scientific” among social science disciplines, the inability to “see” was much more intense than in other disciplines (like anthropology or sociology) which, however, could not substitute economics, but only criticise its stance.

Finally, the entire discussion is not about naming the schemes studied as modern or old, pre-capitalistic or post-capitalistic, parallel or resisting to capitalist economy. It seems that if one gets into such type of discussion, then one is obliged to use the same analytical tools that prevented us from “discovering” this type of economy till the last years. Labelling is handy under certain conditions, but it is not useful if one searches to answer questions like the ones stated in this paper.

Therefore, we might need to view all this activity as coeval to the so-called capitalist (Hodgson 2001: 71-78) or monetary or conventional economy and as raising a different agenda for economics than what capitalist and anti-capitalist discourse can offer. This does not mean that I dismiss any conflictual feature or conflict element that this activity might have, not only toward the mainstream economy, but also among the people who participate in this activity. Using another transaction mode does not change the economic and social power of the scheme participants. It just gives them one more option to use that power within another setting.

It is not possible at this stage to know what this power might be and how this economic option turns people’s stance toward economy and their fellow members of the economy, both those who participate and those who do not participate in the schemes. It becomes evident, however, that the schemes enable their members, while transacting

without official currency, to challenge economics here and now, or... once more, if we accept the idea that this challenge has never ceased to exist, even if we have not much information about it.

## INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

It is probable that if I started my PhD programme today, I would design it to be completely different. Obviously, I would insist more on gathering findings concerning the “history” of the subject-matter. I mean with “history” the whole meaning of the word: research-knowledge-narration (Dimitrakos, D. 1936: 3478). It seems that transactions without official currency might have never stopped being part of the economic history of Greek society, no matter whether academic research has been done on them or not. To learn about this, it may be worthy of a future project on its own right.

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<sup>7</sup> This questioning of “rural” and “urban” is based on a comment by Prof. Dina Vaiou (National Technical University of Athens).

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